

The Fate of Nationalism in the New States: Southeast Asia in Comparative Historical Perspective

JOHN T. SIDEL

London School of Economics

In two landmark essays published in 1973, the eminent anthropologist Clifford Geertz offered an early assessment of what he termed “The Fate of Nationalism in the New States,” referring to the newly independent nation-states of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.¹ Ranging with characteristic ease and flair across Burma, India, Indonesia, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, and Nigeria, Geertz argued that an “Integrative Revolution” was under way, but one complicated and compromised by the inherent tension between “essentialism” and “epochalism,” between “Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States.” Geertz argued:

The peoples of the new states are simultaneously animated by two powerful, thoroughly interdependent, yet distinct and often actually opposed motives—the desire to be recognized as responsible agents whose wishes, acts, hopes, and opinions “matter,” and the desire to build an efficient, dynamic modern state. The one aim is to be noticed: it is a search for identity, and a demand that the identity be publicly acknowledged as having import, a social assertion of the self as “being somebody in the world.” The other aim is practical: it is a demand for progress, for a rising standard of living, more effective political order, greater social justice, and beyond that of “playing a part in the larger arena of world politics,” of “exercising influence among the nations.”²

“It is, in fact,” Geertz concluded, “the tension between them that is one of the central driving forces in the national evolution of the new states; as it is, at the

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¹ Clifford Geertz, “After the Revolution: The Fate of Nationalism in the New States,” and “The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States,” both in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 234–54, 255–310.

² Geertz, “Integrative Revolution,” 258.

same time, one of the greatest obstacles to such evolution.”³ This tension, he argued, was especially acute in the “new states” of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East because of the ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity of their societies. These new states varied widely in their responses to this tension: “a withdrawal into don’t-touch-me isolationism, as in Burma; a surge of neo-traditionalism, as in Algeria; a turn toward regional imperialism as in precoup Indonesia; an obsession with a neighboring enemy, as in Pakistan; a collapse into ethnic civil war, as in Nigeria; or, in the majority of the cases where the conflict is for the moment less severe, an underdeveloped version of muddling-through, which contains a little of all these plus a certain amount of whistling in the dark.”⁴ To explain this kaleidoscopic pattern of variation, Geertz emphasized “concrete patterns of primordial diversity and different modes of political response to those patterns.”⁵ The varying fate of nationalism in the new states, he suggested, depended on the nature and extent of societal diversity, on one hand, and the success of state leaders in managing such diversity, on the other.

Nearly forty years after Geertz published this essay, a distinctly Geertzian approach still dominates the study of post-independence nationalism in Southeast Asia today. Leading historians have reasserted the importance of ethnicity in the making of modern nation-states in the region.⁶ Anthropologists have focused attention on interactions between national state policies and ethnic minorities across Southeast Asia, whether the small but disproportionately wealthy immigrant “Chinese” communities or the poor upland populations of the region.⁷ Meanwhile, political scientists have devoted considerable energy to the study of separatist struggles and ethnic conflicts in countries like Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, while emphasizing the difficulties of managing ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity within these nation-states.⁸

But with the benefit of almost forty years of hindsight, accumulated scholarship, and continuing political change in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, it is possible to look back on the fate of nationalism in the new states through a somewhat different—and clearer—lens from that supplied by Geertz in 1973. Focusing on post-independence Southeast Asia, this essay offers a comparative

³ Ibid.

⁴ Geertz, “After the Revolution,” 237–38.

⁵ Geertz, “Integrative Revolution,” 278.

⁶ See, for example, Anthony Reid, *Imperial Alchemy: Nationalism and Political Identity in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁷ Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Christopher R. Duncan, ed., *Civilizing the Margins: Southeast Asian Government Policies for the Development of Minorities* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

⁸ Jacques Bertrand, *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Jacques Bertrand and André Laliberté, eds., *Multination States in Asia: Accommodation or Resistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

analysis of “the fate of nationalism in the new states.” It examines and explains the diversity of trajectories across the region in ways that move beyond what Geertz described as “a series of snapshot pictures of the ‘integrative revolution’ as it seems to be proceeding in several selected new states.”⁹ In what follows, all ten countries of Southeast Asia save tiny Brunei—that is, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, and Thailand—are examined, albeit briefly and schematically, in an effort to analyze the whole of the region as well as the sum of its constituent parts.

AXES OF COMPARISON: COLONIAL STATE FORMATION AND COLD WAR INTEGRATION

Among the newly independent nation-states of Southeast Asia, the fate of nationalism, I will argue, hinged less on management of internal ethnic diversity than on problems of reintegrating former colonial economies and state structures within the world capitalist economy and the Cold War global political order on the basis of national independence. Here it is useful to recall the tortured maneuvers and tragic fates of figures like Burma’s U Nu, Cambodia’s Prince Norodom Sihanouk, and Indonesia’s Soekarno as they struggled to carve out a modicum of economic autonomy and political neutrality in the 1950s and 1960s in the context of continuing economic linkages to old colonial metropolises and intensifying American intervention in the region. Between the “neo-colonial” option of continuing openness to Western capital and facilities for U.S. and British military forces exemplified by Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Thailand, and the “anti-imperialist” option of state-socialist nationalization of economies and incorporation within the Soviet Bloc eventually exercised by Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, the choices were limited and costly, including the putative choice of “neutrality.” Viewed in this light, the first and most important axis of variation across Southeast Asia is not Geertz’s “integrative revolution” within variously configured multiethnic constellations, but rather the mode of post-independence reintegration into the world capitalist economy and the global political order, whether through “passive revolution,” socialist revolution, or counter-revolution of some kind.

Along a secondary axis of variation, moreover, the trajectories of nationalism in Southeast Asia since independence are also aligned with a clear pattern of divergence between peninsular and archipelagic areas of the region, in terms of what has constituted “nationalism” in the first place. In Mainland Southeast Asia—Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam—nationalism is, in Geertz’s terms, strikingly “essentialist” and “primordial,” with existing nation-states and even those aspired to by separatist movements overwhelmingly

⁹ Geertz, “Integrative Revolution,” 278.

understood to represent the timeless existence and time-tested endurance of core ethnies, whether Burmese, Khmer, Lao, Thai, or Vietnamese, or even Karen, Mon, Chin, or Shan. Mainland Southeast Asians, it appears, are “perennialists,” fully paid-up subscribers to Anthony Smith’s account of *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*.¹⁰ Thailand is especially emblematic of this pattern: “In Thailand today there is a widespread assumption that there is such a thing as common Thai nature or identity: *khwampenthai* (Thainess). It is believed to have existed for a long time, and all Thai are supposed to be well aware of its virtue. The essence of Thainess has been well preserved up to the present time despite the fact that Siam has been transformed greatly toward modernization in the past hundred years.”¹¹

A very different situation has developed in Island Southeast Asia (i.e., Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore), where nationalism has been notably “epochalist” in nature, with existing nation-states and even those aspired to by separatist movements predominantly perceived as aspirational, constructed creations of political struggle, whether “bottom-up” through revolution or “top-down” through social engineering. Island Southeast Asians, it seems, are “modernists” and adherents to Benedict Anderson’s constructivist account of the origins and spread of nationalism in *Imagined Communities*.¹² If the underlying premise of nationalism in Mainland Southeast Asia is one of continuity and conservation of identities found in conditions of inherent fullness, in Island Southeast Asia it is one of invention and aspiration with regard to identities seen as incomplete and still very much in the making.

This sharply dichotomous difference in conceptions of nationalism in Southeast Asia can be attributed to diverging patterns of state formation, from the early modern period up through the colonial era. In Mainland Southeast Asia, it has been argued, the half-millennium stretching from 1350 through 1850 witnessed a process of European-style war-making and state-making that reduced the more than twenty independent but small and loosely structured realms found in the mid-fourteenth century to a handful of large, consolidated, absolutizing kingdoms along the Chaophraya, Irrawaddy, Mekong, and Red rivers, in whose increasingly powerful orbit were found a diminishing set of smaller, weaker, tribute-paying principalities. As inland agrarian states of Mainland Southeast Asia developed increasingly coherent and centralized military, fiscal, and administrative structures to defend themselves against their neighbors, this cycle of war-making and state-making encouraged not only monetization and commercialization, land settlement and reclamation, but

¹⁰ Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

¹¹ Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of the Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 3.

¹² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

also increasing homogenization of language, culture, and religion in expanding central zones of state power, prefiguring “Burmese,” “Thai,” and “Vietnamese” ethnic cores of nations-to-be.¹³ However embryonic or advanced this process of early modern state formation might have been by the mid-nineteenth century, in the eyes of today’s historians, it clearly made possible, if not inevitable, colonial-era state policies in which the timeless existence and time-tested endurance of “Burmese,” “Khmers,” “Thais,” “Vietnamese,” and “Laos” were established as potential bases for the construction of national identities and boundaries.

Indeed, this pattern of state formation in the early modern era set the stage for the crystallization of a distinctly essentialist form of nationalism across Mainland Southeast Asia in the colonial era. It was with “Burmese,” “Khmers,” “Laos,” “Thais,” and “Vietnamese” in mind that languages were standardized, histories written, and borders mapped over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁴ As scholars have shown, these very same processes also unfolded in the nominally independent realm known as Siam under the Chakkri dynasty in Bangkok, with British and French pressures, indirect colonialism, self-conscious efforts at emulation, and absolutist rule producing a decidedly Thai-ified Thailand by the 1930s.¹⁵

Island Southeast Asia was different: there, the early modern era brought neither a war-making/state-making cycle along peninsular lines, nor a corresponding process of ethnic, linguistic, and religious homogenization in the direction of increasing “coherence,” but rather an imposed disjuncture between the formation of states and that of collective identities. From the mid-sixteenth century, archipelagic Southeast Asia was increasingly subordinated to European imperial control, with early Spanish rule in the Philippines, gradual consolidation of Dutch control over Java and other islands of the Indonesian archipelago, and belated British colonization of the Malay Peninsula, Penang, and Singapore, and the northern shelf of Borneo. In contrast to the centralizing trends in Mainland Southeast Asia, colonial rule in Island Southeast Asia remained markedly fragmented, with indirect rule in the Netherlands East Indies and British Malaya persisting into the twentieth century, even as

¹³ Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830: Volume 1: Integration on the Mainland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁴ See: Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860–1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007); Christopher E. Goscha, “Annam and Vietnam in the New Indochinese Space, 1887–1945,” in Hans Antlöv and Stein Tønnesson, eds., *Asian Forms of the Nation* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 1996), 93–130; Søren Ivarsson, *Creating Laos: The Making of a Lao Space between Indochina and Siam, 1860–1945* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2008); Robert H. Taylor, *The State in Burma* (London: C. Hurst, 1987).

¹⁵ See Winichakul, *Siam Mapped*; David Streckfuss, “The Mixed Colonial Legacy in Siam: Origins of Thai Racialist Thought, 1890–1910,” in Laurie J. Sears, ed., *Autonomous Histories, Particular Truths: Essays in Honor of John R. W. Smail* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), 123–53; and the various fine essays in Rachel V. Harrison and Peter A. Jackson, eds., *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Colonial in Thailand* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 2010).

American colonial rule in the Philippines saw rapid Filipinization of the bureaucracy and its subordination to locally elected Filipino mayors, governors, and congressmen. This pattern of more decentralized, fragmented, and proto-federal state structures spelled much greater ambiguity and uncertainty—if not always openness and flexibility—with regard to the meaning of Indonesian, Malaysian, and Philippine national identities. As we shall see, in the absence of a credible correspondence between coherent “ethnic core” and nation-state, nationalism in the new states of Island Southeast Asia was destined to revolve around *becoming* Indonesians, Malaysians, and Filipinos, rather than, as in the Mainland nation-states, *being* Burmese, Cambodian, Lao, Thai, or Vietnamese. This abiding difference between Mainland and Island Southeast Asia decisively shaped the diverging fates of nationalism in the new states in the formative period of transition to independence in the global context of the Cold War.

In short, the varying “fate of nationalism” in the new states of Southeast Asia has not followed from “different modes of political response” to “concrete patterns of primordial diversity,” as suggested by Geertz and commonly understood to this day. Instead, I assert, the trajectories of Southeast Asian nationalism were prefigured by diverging modes of post-independence (re)integration into the world economy and the geo-political order of the Cold War period, and by different structures of national identity inherited from early modern and colonial eras of state formation. The remainder of this essay provides a comparative analysis of these diverging trajectories, using three paired comparisons to illuminate the explanatory power of these arguments.

Following Geertz, this essay provides not an ethnography, but rather a comparative historical sociology of nationalism in Southeast Asia. Constraints of space preclude a more serious and sustained engagement with the rich ethnographic literature on nationalism in the region. Furthermore, the very structure of the argument favors a wide-angle perspective “from above” at the expense of a more subtle and nuanced appreciation of ambiguities and ambivalences, indifference and resistance, to be found “below” in the lived experiences of ordinary people. Therefore, by “nationalism” what is meant here is not based on any assumptions as to the depth or breadth of “national identity” or “nationalist consciousness” among the broad mass of the population. Following Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, I move “beyond identity,”¹⁶ and, emulating Srirupa Roy’s work on India, “beyond belief,” that is, “beyond discussions of national identity as an internalized belief, and of effective nationalizing practices as those that engender unisonant sentiments of love, loyalty, and belonging.”¹⁷ Instead, nationalism is

¹⁶ Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” *Theory and Society* 29, 1 (Feb. 2000): 1–47.

¹⁷ Srirupa Roy, *Beyond Belief: India and the Politics of Postcolonial Nationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 15.

understood here in terms of a discursive and material field within which political action is structured, in such ways as to reaffirm and reproduce representation and recognition of the nation-*state*.¹⁸ With independence in the aftermath of World War II, the bases of nationalism throughout Southeast Asia shifted from nationalist movements to nation-states. But these new states varied considerably in terms of the nature and extent of their success in the making and remaking of nations in the post-independence era, according to a pattern suggested above and which I will now spell out, country by country, in a series of paired comparisons.

SIAM AND ITS TWIN?: THAILAND AND THE PHILIPPINES

The fate of nationalism in Thailand and the Philippines over the past sixty years was destined to be less politically problematic and contentious than elsewhere in the region. The two countries entered the Cold War era without the tumultuous patterns of mass mobilization and tortuous processes of transition to independence seen in other parts of Southeast Asia. Thailand remained the only major territory in the region to escape direct colonization by the Western powers, and was likewise spared Japanese invasion during World War II. The Philippines, while colonized thrice over—by the Spanish, the Americans, and the Japanese—and devastated by war in 1942–1945, was awarded independence not as a result of sustained nationalist struggle but as part of a planned Filipinization and phasing-out of American colonial rule that predated the Pacific War. In both countries national identity was associated not with disruptive early postwar mass mobilization, but rather with the restoration of the *status quo ante bellum*.

Against this backdrop, national sovereignty in Thailand and the Philippines did not stand in the way of compromisingly close ties with the new imperial power, the United States, and incorporation into its geopolitical orbit during the Cold War. Close linkages were established between the Thai and Philippine military establishments and the Pentagon, and the Central Intelligence Agency was actively involved in “internal security” through domestic counterinsurgency programs. Both countries received considerable military assistance and security guarantees against external threats. Both also hosted important U.S. military installations—the single largest overseas U.S. naval base was at Subic Bay in the Philippines, and Thailand served as a vast “aircraft carrier” for U.S. bombing missions in Indochina and a base for tens of thousands of American troops in Vietnam from the mid-1960s into the early 1970s.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1–31.

¹⁹ W. Scott Thompson, *Unequal Partners: Philippine and Thai Relations with the United States, 1965–1975* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1975); Stephen R. Shalom, *The United States and the Philippines: A Study of Neo-Colonialism* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1981); and Daniel Fineman, *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947–1958* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).

The early and virtually uninterrupted integration of Thailand and the Philippines into the world economy from the mid-nineteenth century prefigured parallel limitations on early postwar “economic nationalism.” Colonial-era state policies promoting assimilation and integration of Chinese immigrants had produced Sino-Thai and Chinese-*mestizo* business classes in Thailand and the Philippines, which limited the appeal of early postwar schemes promoting “national capital” against “foreign” Chinese competition and control through state and affirmative interventions, which enjoyed far greater popularity elsewhere in the region.²⁰ In both countries, openness to foreign trade, investment, and ownership remained largely unimpeded by the sorts of restrictions imposed by more “nationalist” governments. Early postwar experiments with import-substitution gave way to export-oriented industrialization by the 1970s and 1980s, with foreign-owned manufacturing firms promoted as the key engines of economic growth. Overall, in both political and economic terms, nationalism in Thailand and the Philippines remained quite conservative in the sense of its compatibility with continuing external—“imperialist”—intervention in the political realm and foreign control in the economy. This differed sharply from patterns observed elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

Alongside these similarities in Thai and Philippine nationalism there were important differences between them. In Thailand, new efforts to promote Thai national identity began to crystallize by the late 1950s and persisted under centralized military rule until into the early 1970s. The pattern of state formation under the absolutist Chakkri dynasty facilitated top-down imposition of coherent conservative notions of Thai nationhood under authoritarian auspices during the early Cold War era. As schools steadily expanded and extended into mass university education during this period, and as national newspapers and radio and television stations gained an increasingly broad audience, government ministries in Bangkok worked to bring coherence to the meaning of the Thai nation. The Central Thai dialect was promoted as *the* standardized form of “Thai” at the expense of other linguistic forms; the map of a timeless Thailand was established as the basis for the geo-body of the Thai nation.²¹ A conspicuously state-centered account of Thai history was instilled in schoolchildren across the country, which lionized the Chakkri Dynasty for its putative defense of the Thai realm against foreign encroachment, preservation of Thai culture, and modernization of the country, even as “the Thai people” remained inert and

²⁰ G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957); Edgar Wickberg, *The Chinese in Philippine Life, 1850–1898* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965); Frank H. Golay, ed., *Underdevelopment and Economic Nationalism in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969).

²¹ Anthony Diller, “What Makes Central Thai a National Language?” in Craig Reynolds, ed., *National Identity and Its Defenders: Thailand, 1939–1989* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash Papers on Southeast Asia, 1991), 87–132; Winichakul, *Siam Mapped*, 128–74.

invisible in the making of Thailand.²² The same early postwar decades also saw a broader public restoration of the monarchy to a central role in national identity. The young king Bhumibol Adulyadej was positioned by successive military rulers as the embodiment of the Thai nation through an ever-widening range of official duties and state rituals, his long service as head of state and titular chief of the armed forces, and his role as patron of rural development programs and diverse philanthropic activities.²³ Over successive decades, in these capacities and in his episodic interventions in Thai politics, the king came to occupy an authoritative—indeed, authoritarian—position in the hierarchical and conservative “imagining” of the Thai nation:

The image of the King is ubiquitous in Thailand. His portraits adorn the shacks of the rural poor and the air-conditioned offices of the multinationals, austere Buddhist temples and back-alley brothels, the huge billboards that line the congested city streets, the banknotes and coins in everyone’s pockets. Identical newsreels showing the latest public functions of the King and Royal Family are broadcast at 8 p.m. every evening on the six free TV channels....

The King has methodically stamped his imprint on the life-course of virtually every member of the country’s elites. For over forty years, every university graduate has formally received his or her degree from the hand of the King; every military or police general has been personally ‘knighted’ by him in a solemn ceremony. By tradition that glorious moment is given pride of place in every office or living room. The omnipresent benign, fatherly images look innocuous enough until one realizes that what they represent is indeed the totalizing embodiment of Thai statehood and public morality; then one begins to have a peculiar feeling of being watched everywhere, all the time.²⁴

Over successive decades, however, economic growth, industrialization, and urbanization began to produce new popular challenges to the hegemony of royalist official Thai nationalism. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a new generation of university students in Bangkok, agitated by U.S. intervention in neighboring Indochina, began to mobilize in new ways in the name of “the Thai people.” In 1973 a student-led democracy movement triumphed over the long-entrenched military dictatorship, and the following years brought the country’s first genuinely free and competitive elections and its most liberal constitution to date. The widening of political space began to allow for an expanded notion of “the Thai people,” a decidedly anti-imperialist understanding of Thai nationalism, and an implicitly republican understanding of national sovereignty. A conservative reaction soon set in, encouraged and assisted by the monarchy, especially after the fall of Phnom Penh, Saigon,

²² Benedict Anderson, “Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies,” in Eliezer B. Ayal, ed., *The Study of Thailand: Analyses of Knowledge, Approaches, and Prospects in Anthropology, Art History, Economics, History, and Political Science* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1978), 193–233.

²³ Paul M. Handley, *The King Never Smiles: A Biography of Thailand’s Bhumibol Adulyadej* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 139–79; Thak Chaloemtiarana, *The Politics of Despotism Paternalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 2007).

²⁴ Kasian Tejapira, “Toppling Thaksin,” *New Left Review* 39 (May/June 2006): 17–18.

and Vientiane to Communist forces in 1975.²⁵ Already by the late 1960s the king had begun to allude more and more explicitly to the threat of communism in Thailand and in neighboring Indochina as a “foreign” menace to the unity of nation, religion, and king. By the mid-1970s, the royal family had emerged as official sources of inspiration and patronage for U.S.-backed counterinsurgency campaigns up-country, while backing anti-communist groups in Bangkok.²⁶ When conservative forces massacred student activists accused of insulting the monarchy and engineered a military coup in 1976 the king defended them and described the events as “a manifestation of what the people clearly wanted.”²⁷

With violent crackdown on popular nationalism in Bangkok and effective elimination of the Communist Party of Thailand insurgency up-country, by the early 1980s royalist official nationalism had regained its hegemonic position, at times enforced by stringent *lèse-majesté* legislation. As democratization developed over subsequent decades, the king largely succeeded in repositioning himself as a neutral arbiter with the nation’s best interests at heart. He publicly protected the Prem administration through much of the 1980s, blessed a military coup against a notoriously corrupt elected government in 1991, ostensibly encouraged restoration of civilian, democratic rule after mass protests in mid-1992, and championed “reform” and recovery in the wake of the Asian economic crisis of 1997–1998, even as his minions continued to exercise a powerful influence in Thai politics behind the scenes.²⁸

By the turn of the new millennium, however, the monarchy’s position as idealized embodiment of “Thainess” had become increasingly problematic. With the landslide victory of the Thai Rak Thai (“Thais Love Thai”) Party in the 2001 elections and the elevation of Sino-Thai business tycoon Thaksin Shinawatra as prime minister, the country’s previously fragmented parliament and coalition-based cabinet was replaced by a much more centralized, almost presidential form of elected civilian rule. Unlike his predecessors, Thaksin had won election on his own, through populist appeals to rural and urban poor voters and the construction of a centralized political machine of unprecedented reach and resources. He could therefore claim to represent the Thai people *directly*, something previously reserved for King Bhumibol.²⁹ As Thaksin aggregated power and asserted, indeed abused, his authority as prime minister

²⁵ Ben Anderson, “Withdrawal Symptoms: Social and Cultural Aspects of the October 6 Coup,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 9, 3 (July–Sept. 1977), 13–30.

²⁶ Katherine Bowie, *Rituals of National Loyalty: An Anthropology of the State and the Village Scout Movement in Thailand* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

²⁷ Handley, *The King Never Smiles*, 260.

²⁸ Duncan McCargo, “Network Monarchy and Legitimacy Crises in Thailand,” *Pacific Review* 18, 4 (Dec. 2005), 499–519.

²⁹ Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2004); Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2004).

beyond what any of his civilian predecessors had attempted, he eventually ran up against rising protests from the liberal, urban middle-class intelligentsia in Bangkok, and increasing opposition from the palace and its allies. In 2006, after months of protests, Thaksin was overthrown by a palace-backed military coup and forced into exile to avoid prosecution for corruption and abuse of office.³⁰ Then, when elections in 2007 produced a victory for pro-Thaksin forces, protests and prosecutorial efforts resumed, championed by the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) but also strongly backed by the palace. By 2008, the prime minister had been forced to resign and Thaksin had fled once again into exile; a wave of PAD-led, palace-backed protests forced the new prime minister, Thaksin's brother-in-law, to give way to a fragile new coalition government, which itself soon confronted sporadic, large-scale Thaksin-backed protests. Elections in 2011 produced a landslide victory for a pro-Thaksin party and the elevation of his sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, to the premiership.

The protracted stalemate in Bangkok has revealed both the clear partisanship of the king and the limits of his effectiveness in manipulating Thai politics from the sidelines. As the aging king enters the twilight of his reign, the future of royalist official nationalism in Thailand remains in grave doubt, and the possibilities for popular, republican forms of nationalism loom large on the horizon. The long-term trends are clear: a broadening and loosening of what it means to be Thai, and what Thai nationalism might mean for future generations.³¹

In stark contrast with the centralized, consolidated, and conservative form of official nationalism found in Thailand, nationalism in the Philippines has been since independence in 1946 much less tied to the institutions and symbols of state power and more available for popular forms of appropriation, representation, and mobilization. With its decentralized, American-style presidential democracy, the Philippines always lacked an Archimedean point from which an avowedly neutral, institutionalized embodiment of the national interest could be articulated and asserted. Instead of a strongly state-centered national identity imposed top-down from the national capital, as in Thailand, something much less defined and didactic, and much more diffuse and demotic, began to emerge "from below" through popular representations and struggles styled as "Filipino." The first signs of this nascent popular nationalism appeared in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the growth of a lively student movement in the universities that protested, *inter alia*, the ongoing use of U.S. military bases in the Philippines in the war in Indochina and the

³⁰ Thongchai Winichakul, "Toppling Democracy," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, 1 (Feb. 2008): 11–37.

³¹ See: Michael K. Connors, "Article of Faith: The Failure of Royal Liberalism in Thailand," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, 1 (Feb. 2008): 143–65.

“parity rights” enjoyed by U.S. companies in the exploitation of the archipelago’s natural resources.³²

When then-president Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in 1972, the Philippines experienced its version of Thailand’s 1976, except that Marcos failed to impose a hegemonic, state-based official nationalism. Student activists, forced underground and further radicalized by martial law rule, revived the moribund Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and built up the New People’s Army (NPA) in the 1970s. By the 1980s, closely affiliated groups had mobilized hundreds of thousands if not millions of peasants, workers, and urban poor folk against a common nationalist target: the so-called “U.S.-Marcos Dictatorship.”³³ By the mid-1980s, through strikes, street demonstrations, semi-clandestine meetings, and protest literature, this movement had swelled in tandem with the growth of the New People’s Army in many provinces, creating a nation-wide, popular nationalist, counter-hegemonic language and culture of protest. The New Nationalist Alliance (Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, or BAYAN) was the leading leftist umbrella group, and the folk singer Freddie Aguilar’s ballad “Bayan Ko” (My Country) became the theme song of the campaign that finally toppled the Marcos regime in 1986.³⁴ This sustained, popular nationalist mobilization was unparalleled in breadth, depth, and duration elsewhere in Southeast Asia during this period.

While popular mobilization in the Philippines peaked and subsided in the mid-1980s, notions of Filipino national identity have continued to circulate and cohere in distinctively popular form. Already by the 1970s, the expanding circuitries of the national media industry had, through Tagalog movies and television shows, succeeded in connecting millions of Filipinos to a common “imagined community” in Tagalog—or “Pilipino”—reinforced by analogous trends in the production and distribution of consumer goods for a truly *national* market.³⁵ Concurrently, the increasing international circulation of Filipino laborers has worked to enhance and define the representation and celebration of the Filipino experience. The growing numbers of Filipino overseas contract workers (OCWs)—working as construction laborers, domestic servants, merchant seamen, nurses, and in a variety of other occupations in Asia, Australia, Europe, the Middle East, and North America—have helped promote a new kind of “long-distance nationalism” that stretches far beyond the Philippines. With

³² José F. Lacaba, *Days of Disquiet, Nights of Rage: The First Quarter Storm and Related Events* (Manila: Asphodel Books, 1986).

³³ Gregg R. Jones, *Red Revolution: Inside the Philippine Guerrilla Movement* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989); Benjamin Pimentel, Jr., *Edjop: The Unusual Journey of Edgar Jopson* (Quezon City: KEN, 1989).

³⁴ Aurora Javate-de Dios, Petronilo Bn. Dary, and Lorna Kalaw-Tirol, eds., *Dictatorship and Revolution: Roots of People Power* (Manila: Conspectus, 1988).

³⁵ Eva-Lotta E. Hedman, “The Spectre of Populism in Philippine Politics and Society: *Artista, Masa, Eruption!*” *South East Asia Research* 9, 1 (Mar. 2001): 5–44.

millions of OCWs clustering in *Filipino* labor niches and enclaves and sending billions of pesos home to their loved ones each year, it could hardly be otherwise.³⁶

Indeed, the shared hardships of OCWs from the Philippines have generated new solidarities and forms of consciousness among Filipinos. On construction sites in Saudi Arabia or Japan, at housemaids' day-off meeting places in Abu Dhabi, Hong Kong, Rome, and Singapore, in the basements of hotels and hospitals in London and New York, and on the lower decks of ocean-going freighters, Filipinos regularly congregate, eat together, swap stories, and share news from the Philippines. In such venues, and increasingly among friends and relatives back home, the lived experience of Filipino OCWs is understood as that of subalterns, as overworked and underpaid, as exploited and ill-treated *Filipinos*.³⁷ In recent years, abuses suffered by Filipino OCWs—murders in Tokyo, executions in Singapore, imprisonments in Abu Dhabi—have led to widespread *nationalist* outrage, as seen in countless newspaper articles, television shows, and demonstrations outside foreign embassies in Manila.³⁸

What we find in the Philippines, then, is not the conservative, hierarchical, monarchical, official nationalism still entrenched—if under challenge—in Thailand, but rather a distinctively popular form of nationalism. This popular nationalism owes much to the experience of anti-Marcos struggle in the 1970s and 1980s, to the consumption of Philippine movies, television, and pop music, and to the everyday struggles of OCWs. It is rooted firmly in the lived experience of millions of ordinary Filipinos, and has been stimulated and sustained not by “official nationalism” but rather by the creative energies of Filipinos laboring outside—and often against—the Philippine state. The contrast between this kind of nationalism and that found in Thailand could not be sharper.

BURMA AND INDONESIA

If these differences between Thailand and the Philippines can be attributed to enduring legacies of state formation, the different trajectories of nationalism in Burma and Indonesia demand alternative bases of explanation given the strikingly similar paths to independence taken by these two new nation-states. Both British Burma and the Netherlands East Indies, after all, combined increasingly direct colonial rule over core zones of intensive commercialized agriculture (i.e., the Irrawaddy Delta, Java) with more attenuated and indirect

³⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Long-Distance Nationalism: World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics* (Amsterdam: Centre for Asian Studies Amsterdam, 1992).

³⁷ See, for example, Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Filipina Workers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

³⁸ Vicente Rafael, “Your Grief Is Our Gossip: Overseas Filipinos and other Spectral Presences,” *Public Culture* 9, 2 (Winter 1997): 267–91.

rule through “traditional rulers” in peripheral areas (e.g., the Shan States, the Outer Islands) where natural resource extraction predominated. Both, moreover, were “plural societies” in which the emerging market economies of the core zones were strictly segmented along ethnic lines, with segregated and stigmatized immigrant minority groups—Chettiar “Indians” and largely Hokkien-speaking “Chinese”—serving as “pariah capitalist” merchants, moneylenders, and middlemen between Western firms and the indigenous peasantry.³⁹

Against this shared backdrop, a common pattern of nationalist mobilization and nation-state formation was observable in Burma and the Indonesian archipelago over the twentieth century. In both British Burma and the Netherlands East Indies, nationalist movements emerged during the interwar era among urban educated youth on the fringes of the state in the core, commercialized zones of colonial rule.⁴⁰ In both Burma and the Indies, these movements were enlisted and in some measure empowered by the Japanese occupying forces during World War II. Their leaders were given symbolic positions of authority and unprecedented opportunities to communicate with the population at large, even as tens of thousands of nationalist youth were mobilized in military or paramilitary units in advance of anticipated Allied attacks.⁴¹ In both countries, attempts to restore colonial rule after the war ran aground when they encountered mounting popular mobilization, which soon forced the British and Dutch governments to cede independence to nationalist leaders.

Nationalism in Burma and Indonesia, then, shared a common point of departure at independence. Unlike Thailand and the Philippines, nationalism entailed large-scale popular mobilization and involved dislocation and destruction of state institutions. Anti-colonial struggles, moreover, combined with the problematically “foreign” identities attributed to immigrant mercantile minorities under colonial rule to prefigure strong support for economic nationalism and for state intervention to redistribute wealth, promote social welfare, and prevent the “free hand” of the market from perpetuating control by “foreign” (i.e., Indian, Chinese, and European) capital. Finally, the combination of direct and indirect colonial rule in British Burma and the Netherlands East Indies, the dislocations and difficulties of World War II, and the struggle for independence left the processes of state formation and national integration incomplete.

The first decades following independence saw notable parallels in the fates of nationalism in Burma and Indonesia. In both countries, the

³⁹ John S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948).

⁴⁰ Daw Khin Yi, *The Dobama Movement in Burma (1930–1938)* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1988); George McT. Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 2003).

⁴¹ Dorothy Hess Guyot, “The Political Impact of the Japanese Occupation of Burma” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1966); Benedict Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution: Occupation and Resistance, 1944–1946* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972).

inauguration of parliamentary democracy helped to absorb forces and energies mobilized in World War II and the independence struggle, with demobilization achieved largely through incorporation into the rapidly expanding agencies of the two states. In both, the reconstitution of state authority along national lines was enabled by expansion of the state's role in the economy to promote economic nationalism and to meet the hopes for social redistribution raised by popular participation in the independence struggle. However, state expansion, absorptiveness, and inclusiveness was soon tempered by a trend towards the centralization and insulation of state power. This tendency was already evident in the first years of independence in the undermining of federal state structures that outgoing colonial governments had imposed on Burmese and Indonesian nationalist leaders.⁴²

Such reversals helped to stimulate armed mobilization by forces claiming to represent minorities disenfranchised and disadvantaged by the centralization of power in Rangoon and Jakarta, with ethnic insurgencies in Burma soon fairly matched by regional rebellions in Indonesia.⁴³ These challenges, alongside those mounted by armed guerrilla forces—Communist in Burma, Islamist in Indonesia—whose ranks had mobilized in the independence struggle but were later marginalized by nationalist leaders, represented a menace to the fragile authority of the new nation-states. The Cold War also brought new forms of foreign intervention that compromised national sovereignty: in Burma, the U.S.-backed flight and encampment of Kuomintang forces fleeing Communist rule in China in 1949–1951, and in Indonesia, U.S. covert and military support for the regional rebellions in 1957–1959.⁴⁴

In this shared context, the 1950s and the early to mid-1960s saw parallel processes of deepening militarization, as in both Burma and Indonesia embryonic national armed forces engaged in violent “pacification” and internal colonization to preserve and enhance national sovereignty and state power. By the late 1950s, experiments with martial law and expansion of military powers in outlying regions of conflict had vastly increased army prerogatives in Rangoon and Jakarta. The early-mid 1960s brought the onset of full-blown military rule in both countries, precipitated by a coup in Rangoon in 1962 and a

⁴² Robert H. Taylor, *The State in Burma* (London: C. Hurst, 1987), 217–90; Benedict Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 99–109.

⁴³ Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); Martin T. Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (London: Zed Books, 1999); Barbara S. Harvey, *Permesta: Half a Rebellion* (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1977); Cornelis van Dijk, *Rebellion under the Banner of Islam: The Darul Islam in Indonesia* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981).

⁴⁴ Robert H. Taylor, *Foreign and Domestic Consequences of the KMT Intervention in Burma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1973); Audrey R. Kahin and George McT. Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy: The Secret Eisenhower and Dulles Debacle in Indonesia* (New York: New Press, 1995).

coup and counter-coup in Jakarta in late 1965. By the mid-late 1960s, the fate of nationalism was no longer dispersed among the highly mobilized, fractious Burmese and Indonesian people, but rather concentrated in the hands of increasingly insulated and narrowly centralized authoritarian regimes.

Despite these prominent similarities in their early post-independence trajectories, by the mid-late 1960s Burmese and Indonesian nationalisms were already showing signs of divergence, which continued to widen over succeeding decades. In Burma, the army's 1962 coup was not accompanied by a rightward shift in economic policy or geopolitical orientation, as seen in so many U.S.-backed military regimes during the Cold War. Instead, the military rulers committed themselves to promote the "Burmese Road to Socialism," enforcing economic autarchy while maintaining neutrality if not indifference in the face of deepening U.S. intervention in Indochina and the abiding pressures of the Cold War.

This distinctively "isolationist" approach to national sovereignty and economic independence can be understood in terms of Burma's historical experience of "foreign" penetration and its vulnerable location in the regional context. Burma had been part of British India until 1937, and its small minority of immigrant Indian merchants, moneylenders, and middleman had dominated the colonial capital of Rangoon, occupied key niches in colonial state employment and urban wage labor, and controlled the commanding heights of the densely commercialized core zone of wet-rice cultivation, the Irrawaddy Delta, through landownership and control over credit, commercial networks, and rice milling. Indian immigrants maintained close connections to their neighboring homeland, leaving Burma a petty dependency within the vast expanse of diasporic mercantile activity across the Indian Ocean.⁴⁵

Indian immigrants were destined to be viewed as obstacles in the path of Burmese nationalism, as seen in communal violence that accompanied nationalist mobilizing efforts in the late 1930s, and the goal of independence inevitably meant independence from Indians as much as from British rule. When the Japanese invaded in early 1942, tens of thousands of Indian immigrants, including many colonial civil servants, army troops, and policemen, fled to India, and those who remained or returned in the early aftermath of the war found themselves unwelcome in newly independent Burma. Government "nationalization" and land redistribution policies largely eliminated their privileged position in the economy, and citizenship restrictions rendered their continuing presence in the country problematic. By 1962, the commitment to an economic nationalism that excluded Indian immigrant capital was established and difficult to reverse. The years after the coup saw further emigration of Burma's residual

⁴⁵ Michael Adas, *The Burma Delta: Economic Development and Social Change on an Asian Rice Frontier, 1825–1941* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974).

Indian population as the regime tightened restrictions on private economic activity and citizenship.⁴⁶

Deepening pursuit of economic nationalism through autarchy and anti-immigrant policies combined with ethnic exclusiveness to constrain nation-building in Burma under military rule from the early 1960s onwards.⁴⁷ The Burmese nationalist movement of the 1930s had been narrowly Burman; its members were drawn from the commercialized rice-bowl areas of directly-ruled British Ministerial Burma, and its identity and orientation largely excluded various minorities populating indirectly-ruled areas of British Burma and in Ministerial Burma itself. With Japanese invasion and occupation during World War II, moreover, the narrowly ethnic-Burman complexion of Burmese nationalism had only deepened, as the Japanese armed and empowered ethnic-Burman nationalist leaders to fight the British colonial army with its overwhelmingly Indian, Chin, Kachin, Karen, and otherwise non-Burman regiments. Even as nationalists belatedly betrayed their Japanese sponsors toward the end of the war and founded the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), they continued to draw on the narrowly ethnic-Burman organizational resources and identities established under Japanese tutelage, and to regard representatives of Burma's minorities as stooges for the restoration of British rule.⁴⁸ Thus when early postwar anti-colonial mobilization championed by nationalist leaders spurred the British government to grant independence in early 1948, the non-Burman minorities were weakly represented in the newly founded Union of Burma government. Federal provisions for minority representation and autonomy were ill-defined and increasingly ignored, and the years following independence saw the appearance and expansion of separatist movements demanding independent homelands for the Chin, Karen, Kachin, Mon, and Shan minorities.⁴⁹

Under military rule from 1962, this situation combined with the abiding ethnic narrowness and international vulnerability of the regime to constrain the possibilities for effective national integration. Given the regime's economic autarchy and political isolationism, its efforts to impose military rule over the entirety of Burma soon foundered, with armed separatist insurgencies taking effective control over large swathes of minority-populated regions. Rangoon's weak fiscal base severely limited its ability to defeat the insurgencies or to

⁴⁶ Nalini Ranjan Chakravarti, *The Indian Minority in Burma: The Rise and Decline of an Immigrant Community* (London: Oxford University Press for the Institute of Race Relations, 1971).

⁴⁷ Robert H. Taylor, "Perceptions of Ethnicity in the Politics of Burma," *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 10, 1 (1982): 7–22.

⁴⁸ Andrew Selth, "Race and Resistance in Burma, 1942–1945," *Modern Asian Studies* 20, 3 (1986): 483–507.

⁴⁹ Mikael Gravers, "The Karen Making of a Nation," in Stein Tønnesson and Hans Antlöv, eds., *Asian Forms of the Nation* (Richmond: Curzon, 1996), 237–69; Ashley South, *Mon Nationalism and Civil War in Burma: The Golden Sheldrake* (London: Routledge, 2003).

construct a serious communications, education, and transportation infrastructure for national integration.⁵⁰ In addition, as was already evident with the Kuomintang invasion in the early 1950s, Burma's location and the porosity of its borders rendered effective enforcement of national sovereignty especially difficult. With China sponsoring the Burmese Communist Party's armed insurgency until the late 1980s and Thailand abetting Karen and Shan independence struggles, and with the international narcotics trade in the "Golden Triangle" providing additional fiscal bases for effective autonomy if not independence from Rangoon, stalemate persisted for decades. The military regime in the late 1980s regained some effective sovereignty over its territory with Rangoon's rapprochement with both Beijing and Bangkok and the consequent disappearance of foreign support for various separatist insurgencies. But even today, instead of effective national integration in Burma there persists a patchwork form of sovereignty based on a complex welter of ceasefire agreements and live-and-let-live arrangements outside the core ethnic-Burman areas.⁵¹

Whereas Burma developed a decidedly Mainland Southeast Asian pattern of "essentialist" nationalism, in Indonesia a distinctly "Island" Southeast Asian pattern of "epochalist" nation-building has unfolded since the onset of military rule. Unlike in Burma, the strengthening of military rule under Suharto was accompanied by a sharp reduction in economic nationalism, the opening of the economy to foreign direct investment, and a shift to heavy reliance on loans from foreign governments and international financial institutions. Thanks to these flows of foreign capital and large oil and natural gas reserves, the 1970s and 1980s were a period of sustained import-substitution industrialization, followed in the mid-1980s by a decisive shift into export-oriented industrialization, with foreign companies dominating the export sector.⁵²

The diminution of economic nationalism in Indonesia in the mid-late 1960s was accompanied by a commensurate abandonment of anti-imperialist nationalism in the political realm. In 1965 and 1966, Suharto engineered the de-escalation of *Konfrontasi* with neighboring Malaysia (derided by Soekarno as a British-controlled "neo-colony"), and in 1967 he helped to create the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), establishing Indonesia's newly found eagerness to strengthen relations with neighboring Malaysia, Singapore (with its British military bases), and the Philippines and Thailand, both deeply involved in the American war effort in Indochina. In the meantime, even as Suharto's lieutenants were orchestrating large-scale anti-communist

⁵⁰ Josef Silverstein, *Burma: Military Rule and the Politics of Stagnation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).

⁵¹ Ashley South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma: States of Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁵² Jeffrey A. Winters, *Power in Motion: Capital Mobility and the Indonesian State* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

pogroms in late 1965 and early 1966, he was forging a close Cold War alliance with the United States.⁵³ Thus, in contrast with Burma, the fate of nationalism in Indonesia from the mid-1960s was one in which hopes of achieving greater independence from foreign economic control and efforts to confront and oppose imperialist meddling in Indonesia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia were essentially abandoned in favor of integration into the world capitalist economy and the global political order dominated by the United States.

The advantages accruing to the national government in Jakarta from its opening to foreign investment and finance, its embrace of the United States, and its access to oil and natural gas reserves, together with the formative history of Indonesian nationalism, allowed far easier, more extensive, and more fully internalized national integration across the sprawling archipelago after the late 1960s than occurred in autarchic, “isolationist” Burma during the same period. After all, Indonesian nationalism had from the outset been much more open and inclusive, with a dialect of Malay—rather than Javanese—adopted and adapted as the national language (Bahasa Indonesia), Communist and Islamic organizations, ideologies, and idioms incorporated into the national struggle, and prominent figures from beyond Java included in the leadership of the nationalist struggle. During the *Revolusi* of 1945–1949, armed guerrilla-style struggle by the fledgling Republik Indonesia against Dutch efforts to restore colonial rule was highly localized and diverse in its recruitment, leadership, and command structure. The Republican leadership signaled its commitment to a broadly conceived “Indonesia” by jettisoning of provisions for Islamic law in the Indonesian Constitution in favor of more ambiguously worded references to religious faith, and by adopting the celebrated multicultural slogan *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*—Unity in Diversity. Even the major “regional rebellions” of the 1950s—Darul Islam Indonesia, and Pemerintah Revolusioner Republik Indonesia—were framed in terms of aspirations for a different kind of *Indonesia*, rather than for new nation-states per se.⁵⁴

Such inclusive nationalism, along with the advantages that accompanied Indonesia’s mid-1960s re-incorporation into the world capitalist economy and the Cold War geo-political order, promoted a discernible intensification of national integration across the archipelago. Oil revenue and foreign capital fuelled expansion of a national market, bureaucracy, educational system, and media, in the national language, Bahasa Indonesia. Under Suharto’s highly insulated and repressive rule, Jakarta wielded centralized control over the provinces for three decades, managing manifold national state enterprises,

⁵³ John Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder: The September 30th Movement and Suharto’s Coup d’état in Indonesia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); Bradley R. Simpson, *Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and U.S.-Indonesian Relations, 1960–1968* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

⁵⁴ Anderson, *Language and Power*, 123–51; and *Imagined Communities*, 120–22.

implementing diverse national programs, and rotating civilian and military officials across the sprawling archipelago with ease. These achievements had lasting effects on Indonesians' sense of connectedness and shared experience with their fellow countrymen.⁵⁵

Given the regime's close alliance with the United States, Jakarta was able to consolidate and extend Indonesian national sovereignty without the complications and compromises suffered by Rangoon. By the late 1960s, the United Nations' transitional stewardship in West Papua gave way to incorporation of "Irian Jaya" into Indonesia through a dubious "viva voce" referendum accepted in Washington, D.C. and at UN headquarters in New York.⁵⁶ When in late 1975 the national liberation movement Fretilin (Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente) declared independence in the former Portuguese colony of East Timor, Indonesia invaded and forcibly occupied the country, imposing harsh direct military rule until 1999. Here too, despite egregious human rights abuses and sustained violation of international law, Indonesia enjoyed effective U.S. support against the threat of the left-wing Fretilin. As in West Papua and Aceh (where a separatist movement developed in the late 1970s), popular armed struggle for independence was confronted by a highly militarized Indonesian state whose oil wealth, sustained industrial growth, and foreign support made it much stronger than its Burmese counterpart.⁵⁷

As in Burma, then, the early post-independence era witnessed the inexorable reconstitution and reassertion of state power in national terms and the "fossilization" and forced encapsulation of the diverse energies and social forces mobilized in the *Revolusi*, but these processes were followed by three decades of sustained industrialization and accompanying social and political transformations that led a different fate for Indonesian nationalism by the end of the century.⁵⁸ Under Suharto, Indonesians of Chinese ancestry suffered stigmatization, discrimination in state employment and education, extortion, harassment, and occasional attacks.⁵⁹ Yet unlike Indians in Burma, ethnic-Chinese Indonesians had contributed to the nationalist struggle, and instead of expropriation and expulsion, they were afforded greater opportunities for

⁵⁵ Richard Robison, *Indonesia: The Rise of Capital* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986); Daniel Dhakidae, "The State, the Rise of Capital, and the Fall of Political Journalism: Political Economy of Indonesian News Industry" (PhD diss., Cornell University, 1991); Michael S. Malley, "Resource Distribution, State Coherence, and Political Centralization in Indonesia, 1950–1997" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1999).

⁵⁶ John Saltford, *The United Nations and the Indonesian Takeover of West Papua, 1962–1969: The Anatomy of a Betrayal* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002).

⁵⁷ Benedict Anderson, ed., *Violence and the State in Suharto's Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 2001).

⁵⁸ Benedict Anderson, "Bung Karno and the Fossilization of Soekarno's Thought," *Indonesia* 74 (Oct. 2002): 1–19.

⁵⁹ Mély G. Tan, "The Social and Cultural Dimensions of the Role of the Ethnic Chinese in Indonesian Society," *Indonesia* 51 (Apr. 1991): 113–25.

citizenship and roles as “pariah entrepreneurs” in the rapidly industrializing and expanding economy.⁶⁰

Under Suharto, avowedly authentic “indigenous” mechanisms of authoritarian control were woven out of the rich cultural and ethnic tapestry of the archipelago. The state was restyled as protector of diverse cultures and traditions, and as embodying notions of authority deeply rooted in traditional culture.⁶¹ The largely appointed supra-parliamentary body that “(re)elected” Suharto to the presidency every five years was called the People’s Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat), with *musyawarah*—consultation, consensus—celebrated as having a genuine legitimacy among Indonesians that competition between rival candidates, parties, ideologies, and social forces could not claim. By the 1990s, the regime also began a concerted effort to celebrate and appropriate the majority faith of the archipelago, Islam.⁶² Overall, the Indonesian state was repositioned as both authentic embodiment of the Indonesian nation and as sole guarantor of national integrity in the midst of potentially fractious cultural, ethnic, regional, and religious diversity.

Yet unlike nationalism in the context of economic stagnation and social stasis in Burma, in Indonesia the dramatic social transformations accompanying three decades of rapid, sustained industrialization and economic growth generated new possibilities for “reimagining” the nation. By the 1990s, a vibrant, increasingly urbanized society was rapidly outgrowing the centralized authoritarian state. When, in mid-1998, Suharto was forced to resign amidst economic crisis and popular protests, there was a rapid and decisive reconfiguration of the nation-state, colored by contestation and violent conflict.⁶³

As the shift from centralized authoritarian rule to competitive elections and decentralization began to take place, Indonesia’s tremendous diversity seemed to threaten violent disintegration of the nation-state. Large-scale riots in Jakarta targeted Indonesia’s ethnic-Chinese minority in 1998, inter-ethnic violence in Kalimantan and inter-religious conflict in Maluku and Sulawesi caused large-scale hardship and displacement in 1999–2001, and paramilitary mobilization and terrorist bombings raised the specter of Islamist *jihād*. A United Nations-supervised referendum in East Timor in August 1999 led to a vote overwhelmingly in favor of independence and, despite violent military-led resistance, forced termination of Indonesia’s long occupation. These events in East Timor and ongoing democratization across the archipelago encouraged

⁶⁰ Dédé Oetomo, “The Chinese of Indonesia and the Development of the Indonesian Language,” *Indonesia* 51 (Apr. 1991): 53–66; Yoon Hwan Shin, “The Role of Elites in Creating Capitalist Hegemony in Post-Oil Boom Indonesia,” *Indonesia* 51 (Apr. 1991): 127–43.

⁶¹ John Pemberton, *On the Subject of “Java”* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

⁶² Robert W. Hefner, “Islam, State, and Civil Society: ICMI and the Struggle for the Indonesian Middle Class,” *Indonesia* 56 (Oct. 1993): 1–35.

⁶³ John T. Sidel, “*Macet Total*: Logics of Circulation and Accumulation in the Demise of Indonesia’s New Order,” *Indonesia* 66 (Oct. 1998): 159–85.

renewed mobilizations for independence in Aceh and West Papua.⁶⁴ Indonesia, it appeared, was destined to go the way of Yugoslavia, as Suharto's army generals—like their Burmese counterparts—had been warning of for years.

This alarmist scenario proved decidedly false. The “anti-Chinese” riots of May 1998, after all, had been orchestrated by the generals themselves, and with Suharto's departure violence against the ethnic-Chinese effectively ceased. In subsequent years, ethnic-Chinese Indonesians saw a dramatic easing of restrictions on their cultural, political, and religious freedoms, and a reduction of impediments to naturalization for those lacking Indonesian citizenship. Inter-ethnic and inter-religious violence faded away, and Islamist terrorism remained highly limited in scope.⁶⁵

The putative threat of territorial dismemberment diminished dramatically following the much-exaggerated panic of 1999. East Timor had never been part of the Netherlands East Indies territories that Soekarno and his fellow colonial-era nationalists had envisaged as an independent Indonesia. Furthermore, the Indonesian occupation had always been illegal under international law, and the territory remained a fiefdom of the Indonesian military establishment, even after its formal incorporation as a province of the country.⁶⁶ Much to the disappointment of activists in Aceh and West Papua, independence for East Timor did not establish a precedent for further breakaway new nations, given the weaker basis of mobilization on the ground and more limited foreign sympathy for their causes. Instead, as Indonesia had embarked on comprehensive decentralization in 1999, with locally elected parliaments and local executives enjoying unprecedented powers over state agencies, “special autonomy” packages were extended to West Papua and Aceh, and, in the latter case this proved sufficiently attractive to spur the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, or GAM) to abandon armed struggle in favor of parliamentary politics.⁶⁷ Overall, then, Indonesia did not suffer the unresolved problems of national integration as did authoritarian Burma, and instead the first decade of this century saw nationalism reemerge not only intact but arguably more inclusive and elastic, under conditions of democratization and decentralization.

⁶⁴ Jacques Bertrand, *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁶⁵ John T. Sidel, *Indonesia: Migrants, Migrant Workers, Refugees, and the New Citizenship Law* (Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2007); and *Riots, Pogroms, Jihad: Religious Violence in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

⁶⁶ Benedict Anderson, “Gravel in Jakarta's Shoes,” in *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (London: Verso, 1998), 131–38.

⁶⁷ Edward Aspinall, *The Helsinki Agreement: A More Promising Basis for Peace in Aceh?* (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center Washington, 2005); Timo Kivimäki, *Initiating a Peace Process in Papua: Actors, Issues, Process, and the Role of the International Community* (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center Washington, 2006).

COLD WAR FEDERALISMS FORCED, FAILED, AND FUDGED:
INDOCHINA AND MALAYSIA

We have seen that legacies of colonial-era state formation combined with pressures of the Cold War international context to prefigure dramatic divergences in the fate of nationalism between Thailand and the Philippines, and between Burma and Indonesia. Their impacts on the making of the three new nation-states of Indochina—Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam—and Malaysia in the post-independence era, were likewise decisive. There, the differences between “Mainland” and “Island” forms of nation-state formation in Southeast Asia and between alternative niches for national reintegration into the Cold War-era geopolitical order were especially notable and significant. The division of Indochina into Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam and the formation of the Federation of Malaysia provide a final, illuminating paired comparison for close consideration.

As Christopher Goscha has demonstrated, French colonial rule created—however imperfectly, incompletely, and unevenly—the possibilities for the imagining of an “Indochine” across the territories of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. French officials and “native” Annamese and Tonkinese clerks circulated for decades across the full extent of colonial Indochine; speakers of Khmer, Lao, and Vietnamese were, in small numbers, classmates in French schools, most notably the Université de l’Indochine. The colonial economy drew Tonkinese and Annamese laborers onto Cambodian rubber plantations, and trade along the Mekong tightened connections between Saigon and thousands of Lao- and Khmer-speaking rice farmers in the hinterlands. Small wonder that Ho Chi Minh and his fellow revolutionaries had founded the *Indochinese* Communist Party in 1930, and that as late as 1945 there was still much debate over alternative—Indochinese versus Vietnamese—understandings of the ultimate goals of the independence struggle.⁶⁸

However, hopes and dreams for an independent, unified Indochine began to run aground by the 1950s, constrained by both colonial legacies of state formation and Cold War exigencies in the region. Petty clerks, plantation workers, small-scale rice traders, and other émigrés from Annam and Tonkin had headed west into Cambodia and Laos under colonial rule, but flows eastwards consisted largely of rice and other agricultural commodities rather than Khmer and Lao speakers. Therefore, the imagination and allure of a unified Indochine was limited largely to the Vietnamese-speaking circuitries of the colonial state and economy. In this same period the French, to shore up the problematic, porous borders of Laos and Cambodia in response to enduring, close connections to, and territorial claims by, Siam (and, by the 1930s, an irredentist

⁶⁸ Christopher E. Goscha, *Vietnam or Indochina? Contesting Concepts of Space in Vietnamese Nationalism, 1887–1954* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 1995), 13–95.

“Thailand”), began to encourage the reinforcement and reinvention of distinctly Lao and Cambodian conceptions of cultural, religious, and ethnic identity. These policies rendered increasingly problematic the potential incorporation of Laos and Cambodia into a unified independent Indochine dominated by Annamese and Tonkinese.

The possibilities for an independent Indochine were largely foreclosed by external pressures early in the Cold War era. Under Soviet pressure, the Indochinese Communist Party was formally dissolved, with separate parties for Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam formally constituted in 1951, although Cambodian and Laotian comrades were guided by Vietnamese counterparts in Hanoi as they fought the French colonial army. The French regime, working to confine the revolutionary struggle for independence within Vietnam, in the early 1950s enhanced the formal status of Laos and Cambodia within the French Indochinese Union. Both were then granted formal independence as part of 1954 Geneva Accords, which recognized the sovereignty of the three new nation-states while forestalling unification of Vietnam. The dearth of international support for a unified independent Indochine was evident in Soviet and Chinese pressures on the Vietnamese Communist leadership to accept formation of separate Communist Parties in 1951, and then to sign the Accords.⁶⁹

Yet the legacies of French colonial Indochine lived on in subsequent decades, decisively coloring relations between the three new nation-states for years to come. From the mid-1950s through the Communist victories of 1975, Vietnamese Communist Party leaders maintained significant influence among the Pathet Lao and the Khmer People’s Revolutionary Party.⁷⁰ Access to Laos and Cambodia allowed Vietnamese forces to infiltrate guerrillas, arms, and logistical support for the fight against successive American-backed governments in southern Vietnam, and the United States widened its counterinsurgency and bombing campaigns to cover the breadth of Indochina.⁷¹ When Communist forces seized Phnom Penh, Saigon, and Vientiane in 1975, they did so in an effort driven if not dictated by Hanoi.⁷²

In the mid-1970s, national integration began to develop, belatedly, across the three new nation-states of former French Indochina. With “Reunification” in Vietnam, the complicated history of attenuated imperial control of the Cochinchinese frontier from Hué and the hybrid cultural, ethnic, and religious

⁶⁹ Ibid., 96–146.

⁷⁰ Christopher E. Goscha, “Vietnam and the World Outside: The Case of Vietnamese Advisers in Laos (1948–62),” *South East Asia Research* 12, 2 (July 2004): 141–85; Steve Heder, *Cambodian Communism and the Vietnamese Model, Volume 1: Imitation and Independence, 1930–1975* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2004).

⁷¹ Timothy Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam: U.S. Military Aid to the Royal Lao Government, 1955–1975* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

⁷² Christopher E. Goscha and Thomas Engelbert, *Falling Out of Touch: Vietnamese Communist Policy towards an Emerging Cambodian Communist Movement (1930–1975)* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash Asia Institute, 1995).

complexion of the Mekong Delta were obscured in favor of an official nationalist narrative stressing restoration of a timeless Viet Nam long besieged by external enemies. Differences between the two parts of Vietnam separated by war from 1954 through 1975 were ascribed to residual neocolonial American influences and attacked as foreign pathologies to be eradicated in the extension of Communist control over southern society.⁷³ In Laos, consolidation of Communist control and socialist transformation required substantial external assistance, and Vietnamese advisors oversaw efforts to construct a coherent party-state and collectivize agriculture across the country.⁷⁴

In Cambodia, on the other hand, where the French had constructed the notion of a Khmer identity resurrected from the premodern Angkorean empire and threatened with extinction, the impulse to assert national independence was much greater, and Vietnamese hegemony was resisted.⁷⁵ The Communist Party of Kampuchea undertook drastic internal purges to eliminate Vietnamese influence, embarked on a desperate, genocidal drive to achieve economic autonomy and political control over the countryside, and provoked border disputes with Vietnam.⁷⁶ By late 1978 Cambodia and Vietnam were at war, and in early 1979 Vietnam invaded Cambodia, occupying the country despite enduring opposition from the United States, Thailand, and other U.S. allies in Southeast Asia, as well as the People's Republic of China, which fought brief border wars with Vietnam in 1979 and 1981.⁷⁷

Overall, although colonial-era state formation had made an independent Indochine imaginable as an object of nationalist struggle and plausible as a unified, if perhaps federalized, new nation-state, Cold War circumstances dictated otherwise. French maneuvers to forestall decolonization together with American, Soviet, and Chinese policies encouraged the creation of separate national states, Communist parties, and, in due course, party-states in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. But the struggle to "reunify" Vietnam through 1975 spilled over into Cambodia and Laos, and processes of post-1975 national integration in Cambodia led to efforts to assert the embryonic party-state's national independence from Vietnamese hegemony, leading to violence and Vietnamese invasion and occupation. In all three countries, achievement of national

⁷³ Philip Taylor, *Fragments of the Present: Searching for Modernity in Vietnam's South* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000); Patricia M. Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

⁷⁴ Grant Evans, *Lao Peasants under Socialism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Vatthana Pholsena, *Post-War Laos: The Politics of Culture, History, and Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

⁷⁵ Anthony Barnett, "Cambodia Will Never Disappear," *New Left Review* 180 (Mar./Apr. 1990): 101–25.

⁷⁶ David P. Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War, and Revolution Since 1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

⁷⁷ Evan R. Gottesman, *Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge: Inside the Politics of Nation Building* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

independence and establishment of a national party-state from 1975 entailed entrenchment of decidedly “Mainland” Southeast Asian forms of official nationalism, with essentialized notions of Khmer, Lao, and Vietnamese ethnic identities promoted at the expense of diverse hybridities and connections across Indochina’s historically porous borders. Only the opening of the Cambodian, Lao, and Vietnamese economies and a loosening of party-state control from the 1990s have brought greater tolerance for the rich diversity of cultural, ethnic, and religious life within and across the three nation-states. Even so, there remains a strong discourse of protecting Khmer, Lao, and Vietnamese identities against the ravages of globalization.

This pattern of nation-state formation in former French Indochina differs markedly from the fate of nationalism across the various British colonial territories that developed as the Federation of Malaysia (and Singapore) from the 1950s into the early to mid-1960s. As elsewhere across “Island” Southeast Asia, the Malay Peninsula and the northern shelf of Borneo had, since the fall of Malacca to the Portuguese in 1511, seen fragmentation of political authority into petty sultanates, and over the next three centuries neither conversion of coastal rulers and their subjects to Islam nor the establishment of successive Portuguese, Dutch, and British trading forts created any overarching framework for centralized state formation or identity construction. The consolidation of British power from the late eighteenth century onwards was accomplished in a piecemeal fashion, with directly ruled Straits Settlements in Malacca, Penang, and Singapore, with Residents later imposed over the states of the Malay Peninsula. The Sultanate of Brunei, the British North Borneo Company’s territory in Sabah, and the Brooke dynasty’s empire in Sarawak were not under direct British colonial rule; all three retained separate, protected status instead. This pattern of pre-colonial and colonial-era state formation across the sprawling hodgepodge of territories that became Malaysia provided a fragile historical basis for a new nation-state, arguably much weaker than the Indochinese prospects of what would become Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.⁷⁸

In addition, the unparalleled extent of immigration into the Malay Peninsula, northern Borneo, Penang, and Singapore problematized the articulation of “Mainland”-style nationalism(s) based on essentialized notions of authentic, indigenous ethnic core population(s) there. From the late eighteenth century, migration from southern China had created sizeable mining communities in the Malay Peninsula and northern Borneo. Over the subsequent century and a half of deepening integration into the British imperial economy the harbors, mills, and sweatshops of various port towns and cities swelled with

⁷⁸ William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

Hokkien- and Teochiu-speaking laborers.⁷⁹ Combined with the thousands of rubber plantation laborers recruited from India in the late colonial era, these immigrants made up the working class of what would come to be known as Malaysia, and they matched and often outnumbered the sparsely scattered Malay-speaking peasant population, as seen most dramatically in overwhelmingly “Chinese” Singapore. In the Malay Peninsula, the “Malay” population increased considerably through steady migration from the Netherlands East Indies. These huge immigrant populations, combined with the patchwork pattern of state formation, made for a very fragile basis for nationalism in a unified “Malaysia.”⁸⁰

Nevertheless, Cold War circumstances conspired to enable an agglomeration of these disparate territories into what would prove to be—with the exception of Singapore—the basis for an enduring federalized nation-state. By the time the Japanese surrendered in August 1945, the armed guerrilla units of the Communist-controlled Malayan People’s Anti-Japanese Army effectively controlled many towns and cities across the Peninsula, and the restoration and reconstitution of British colonial rule—under the Malayan Union from 1946–1948, and the Federation of Malaya from 1948–1963—encountered strong resistance from the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), which also maintained strength in the “Red City” of Singapore. On the Malay Peninsula, the British succeeded in defeating the MCP through counterinsurgency operations, hamletting of rural communities in “New Villages,” and creation of the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) as a British- and Chinese business-backed patronage network to counter the overwhelmingly ethnic-Chinese MCP. At the same time, a carefully stage-managed decolonization was effected on the Peninsula, with the British gradually handing over power to a coalition of Chinese business elites in the MCA and Malay aristocrats, the latter now mobilized as the United Malays’ National Organisation (UMNO). In 1957, more than a decade after Aung San, Ho Chi Minh, and Soekarno had respectively declared independence in Burma, Vietnam, and Indonesia, a “National Alliance” government of the UMNO, the MCA, and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) was handed power, as Lee Kuan Yew famously noted, “on a silver platter with red ribbons by British royalty in uniform.”⁸¹

Although in the Malay Peninsula the British effectively transferred power to a conservative, compliant, “neocolonial” government, fervently anti-communist and fully open to foreign capital, in Singapore and the northern shelf of Borneo Cold War tensions and uncertainties persisted well into the

⁷⁹ Carl A. Trocki, *Opium and Empire: Chinese Society in Colonial Singapore, 1800–1910* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

⁸⁰ Charles Hirschman, “The Meaning and Measurement of Ethnicity in Malaysia: An Analysis of Census Classifications,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 46, 3 (Aug. 1987): 555–82.

⁸¹ Timothy N. Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

1960s. The MCP remained a powerful force within the dominant People's Action Party (PAP) in Singapore, which was granted formal independence in 1959 but was compelled to accept a continuing British military presence and involvement in the city-state's internal security. Meanwhile, Soekarno's Indonesia supported left-wing mobilization among ethnic-Chinese mining communities in Sarawak, among the local population on Brunei, and in parts of Sabah, and also the goal of an independent federation of North Kalimantan. Prospects for Communist takeover in Singapore, and for left-wing Soekarnoist anti-imperialism in the remaining British territories, loomed large on the horizon.

The period from 1962–1963 saw London-led movement toward the formation of a broadly-based Malaysia that would subsume these disparate hotbeds of left-wing activism within a federation dominated by the “pacified,” politically conservative heartlands of the Malay Peninsula. In 1962, the left-wing Partai Rakyat Brunei was suppressed and forcibly disbanded amidst a failed popular rebellion, and in 1963 moves towards formation of the Federation of Malaysia were advanced by British officials in London, the Federation of Malaya government in Kuala Lumpur, and conservative elements within the PAP in Singapore led by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. In May 1963, a Federation of Malaysia expanded to include Sabah, Sarawak, and Singapore was proclaimed despite resistance by the left-wing Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) and, in Sabah, by the Pasok Momogun (Indigenous Peoples') party, even as MCP cadres were being rounded up by the security services under “Operation Cold Storm” in Singapore. The formation of this “neo-colony” was bitterly opposed by Indonesia's Soekarno, leading to two years of armed hostilities on Borneo (*Konfrontasi*). The overthrow of Soekarno and the decimation of the PKI in late 1965, however, spelled Indonesian acquiescence in the incorporation of Sabah and Sarawak into Malaysia, with the Indonesian Army violently eliminating sources of refuge and support for residual SUPP resistance to Malaysia in Sarawak in 1967. With the exit of the now MCP-free Singapore from the Federation in 1965 due to frictions between the PAP and the UMNO-led government in Kuala Lumpur, the contours of Malaysia were now firmly fixed.⁸²

Given the shallow historical roots of this new nation-state, the fate of nationalism in Malaysia should perhaps be viewed retrospectively as having been highly uncertain in the early years of the country's existence. Indeed, the mid-late 1960s saw a dramatic decline in the strength of the ruling “National Front” coalition between UMNO and the MCA in Kuala Lumpur, and the May 1969 elections threatened to permit a political turnover not seen since Independence in 1957. But violence in the aftermath of the elections provided an excuse for proclamation of emergency rule and for elaboration of a New

⁸² Matthew Jones, *Conflict and Confrontation in South East Asia, 1961–1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Economic Policy the following year as a new strategy for managing the “plural society” inherited from colonial rule. In the British colonial government’s racial classification scheme, the category of “Malay” incorporated recent migrants from the neighboring Netherlands East Indies and offered special “protection” to such supposed “natives” in the face of steady (British-induced) flows of immigrant labor.⁸³ This protected status for “Malays” was noted in the 1957 Constitution, and, under the New Economic Policy (NEP) from 1970 onwards it was extended to serve as the basis for affirmative action (via quotas, preferential loans, and hiring schemes) in favor of “Sons of the Soil” (*Bumiputra*).⁸⁴ Under the NEP, the avowed aim of creating a *Bumiputra* business class through vastly expanded forms of state intervention and ownership in the economy strengthened both the federal government’s powers across Malaysia and UMNO’s political position in Malaysian politics, achieving unbroken hegemony well into the twenty-first century, with no turnover in national politics.⁸⁵ The federal system drew state-level elites in distant Sabah and Sarawak into alliance with UMNO, even as the federal government’s growing reach made inclusion in Malaysia increasingly meaningful and materially rewarding for “native sons” in far-flung northern Borneo, who conveniently qualified as *Bumiputra*.⁸⁶ The hodgepodge of largely unconnected former British territories muddled through the first decades following the formation of “Malaysia,” with promotion of an “indigenous” *national* bourgeoisie serving as an attractive basis for inclusion within the new nation-state and an effective rubric for expanding national state power.

CONCLUSIONS

Viewed from the early twenty-first century, the fate of nationalism in the new nation-states of Southeast Asia no longer appears—even retrospectively—as uncertain as described by Geertz in his landmark essays of 1973. With the benefit of hindsight, the tensions between “essentialism” and “epochalism” and the conflicts between “primordial sentiments” and “civil politics” once identified and emphasized by Geertz no longer seem to have been so crucial to the varying fates of nationalism across the region. Nor do the diverging

⁸³ Maurice Freedman, “The Growth of a Plural Society in Malaya,” *Pacific Affairs* 33, 2 (1960): 158–68; Charles Hirschman, “The Making of Race in Colonial Malaya: Political Economy and Racial Ideology,” *Sociological Forum* 1, 2 (1986): 330–61.

⁸⁴ Gordon P. Means, “‘Special Rights’ as a Strategy for Development,” *Comparative Politics* (Oct. 1972): 29–61.

⁸⁵ James V. Jesudason, *Ethnicity and the Economy: The State, Chinese, Business, and Multinationals in Malaysia* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990); Edmund Terence Gomez and K. S. Jomo, *Malaysia’s Political Economy: Politics, Patronage and Profits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁸⁶ See the various fine essays by Francis Loh Kok Wah, Lim Hong Hai, and Andrew Aeria, in: “Sabah and Sarawak: The Politics of Development and Federalism,” *Kajian Malaysia* 15, 1 & 2 (special issue, 1997).

trajectories of nationalism in post-independence Southeast Asia appear explicable in terms of constellations of ethnic diversity and their variously enabling or impeding impact on the imperative of national integration. Apparently improbable new nation-states—Indonesia, Malaysia, Laos—have seemingly settled quite comfortably into nationhood over the years, with little remaining fear of dissolution. Even in Burma, ethnic separatist movements remain weak, with the military regime exercising more effective national sovereignty over its territory today than ever before. For better and for worse (just ask around in Pattani or West Papua, Mae Sot or Maguindanao), the fate of various nationalisms across Southeast Asia now appear to be firmly fixed. East Timor’s independence is the sole exception that proves this impressively un-falsified Andersonian rule.

How, then, can we explain the variations observed across Southeast Asia in the trajectories of nationalism over the past several decades since the transitions to independence in the 1940s and 1950s? As I have argued, the diverging fates of nationalism in the region can be understood from a perspective very different from that suggested by Geertz. The crucial questions, challenges, cleavages, and conflicts facing the new nation-states of Southeast Asia, it has been shown, were not those of “national integration” in contexts of “internal” ethnic diversity, but those concerning (re)integration into the world capitalist economy and the Cold War geopolitical order. Whether cast in terms of imposed constraints or ideological choices, the ways in which various nation-states negotiated their international relations served as critical determinants of nationalist (de)mobilization, nation-building, and nationhood. How else to understand the conspicuous similarities between Thailand and the Philippines, the belated divergence between Burmese and Indonesian nationalism, or the disparity between successful federation-making in Malaysia and federation-breaking in Indochina? The consequences of capitalist development and the circumstances of the Cold War era smiled far more favorably on some nationalisms than on others.

The variegated fate of nationalism across Southeast Asia in the post-independence era was also profoundly shaped by enduring legacies of state formation in the region. Indeed, as I have shown, the meanings and trajectories of nationalism differed markedly across the “Mainland”/“Island” divide along lines familiar from early modern Southeast Asian history. They have prefigured much more exclusivist and essentialized forms of official nationalism in independent Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam than the more inclusive and openly constructed forms found in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore. Furthermore, variegated patterns of colonial-era state formation in Southeast Asia proved crucial for shaping the parameters of the possible in the making of post-independence national identities across the region. The boundaries, identities, and institutions of new nation-states were variously enabled and constrained by absolutist centralization under the

Chakkri dynasty in Siam, decentralized colonial democracy in the Philippines in the American era, deepening incorporation and bureaucratization of local aristocracies in the Netherlands East Indies, and the complex patchwork of direct and indirect rule found in British Burma and greater “Malaya,” as well as French Indochina. The varying treatment of immigrant minorities and their offspring, categorization and reconfiguration of ethnic and religious differences, and choices of state languages, nomenclatures, and boundaries in various ways survived the transitions from colonial rule to independent nation-states. The expulsion of Indians from Burma and the varying pattern of incorporation of “the Chinese” in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand serve as obvious examples, as does Bahasa Indonesia, or the very notion of “Laos.” After independence, Southeast Asian nationalists made new nation-states, but not in circumstances of their own choosing or materials of their own construction.

Beyond Southeast Asia, this revisionist account suggests the illuminative power of a comparative historical sociology of nationalism attentive to patterns of state- and identity-formation, and to the broader international economic and political context within which new nation-states are enfolded. As the differences between various Mainland and Island Southeast Asian countries have suggested, and as scholars working on other regions of the world have also shown, the underlying logics of nationalism may exhibit profound differences, differences prefigured by diverging patterns in the formation of states rather than varying “national characters” or ethnic constellations.⁸⁷ While Geertz emphasized and perhaps exaggerated the challenges of managing cultural diversity and the existential problems inherent in “nation-building” in the new states of post-independence Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, this essay has offered a reminder of the importance of state institutions, economic power, and international relations in shaping the fate of nationalism across the postcolonial world.

⁸⁷ See, for example, the highly illuminating and instructive account of Greek and Italian nationalism in Michael Herzfeld, “Localism and the Logic of Nationalistic Folklore: Cretan Reflections,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, 2 (Apr. 2003): 281–310.