

NATIONALISMS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA:
AN ESSAY ON THE CARTOGRAPHY OF STRUGGLE

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the concept of "nationalism" in Southeast Asia is neither a homogeneous nor a monolithic notion, but is understood, practiced, and lived through in as distinct and differing ways both across the region itself characterized by a "kaleidoscopic diversity", and even more significantly, within particular states or nations. Thus, this paper's use of "nationalisms" in South East Asia reflects not only the varying interpretations of the term and the plurality that characterizes the historical, political, economic, cultural, and religious specificities of the region. At the same time it is also suggestive of the highly contested field that is the study of nation and nationalism which has brought about a maze of definitions, theoretical approaches, and methods of understanding and enacting nationalist discourses.

Introduction

NATIONALISMS, CONTESTATIONS, TRANSFORMATIONS

Change is the hallmark of the *fin-de-siècle*. As the world moves into the 21st century, nations, states, and peoples have been forced to deal with the fundamental transformations in the political, economic, cultural, technological, and, ecological processes that have occurred worldwide in the last quarter of this century, but particularly in the last decade largely brought about by the transnationalization of capitalism, if not its globalization, and its accompanying market-driven constitutionalisms, with their underlying normative, conceptual, and institutional discursive practices.¹ Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the way the questions around nationalism have been addressed, particularly in the context of such pressing issues as peace, development, and security, as well as the broader themes of culture, democracy, and governance.

As discursive, strategic, and tactical formations, nationalisms in Southeast Asia need to be understood in the context of these fundamental transformations now occurring. Put in this way, these nationalisms are discourses of conflict and collaboration, and continuity and change—first, during the period of colonialism (including World War II), second, during the Cold War, and, third, during the post, post-Cold War period. In fact, nationalisms in Southeast Asia were both struggles against the "foreign colonizer" as well as the *ancien régime*; they were both struggles against westernization as well as consolidations of western assumptions of "nation", "state", and "community", and, they were both struggles against Euro-American-led globalization as well as the defense of one's place within this globalization process itself.

THE SPECTRE OF COMPARISONS:² DILEMMAS AND APORIAS IN NATIONALIST DISCOURSES

The work of scholars from Max Weber (1948) to Benedict Anderson (1983) to Homi Bhabha (1990) remind us of both the difficulty and necessity of understanding nationalism, not to mention of making comparisons of *different* nationalisms, in the context of the fundamental transformations noted above. Here there are at least three dilemmas or *aporias* that need to be confronted.

First, there is the *substantive* and/or *definitional* dilemma. No scholar or student of nationalism today can maintain that "nationalism", not to mention "Southeast Asia", is a singular, let alone unitary, totalized reality. Strictly speaking "nationalism" arrives in Asia not only as a creature of colonialism, but it enters a region characterized by a "kaleidoscopic diversity" of distinct, though inter-related cultural, political, economic, realities. For example, Southeast Asia is home to several distinct ethno-linguistic groups: the Malayo-Polynesian Cham, the Mon-Khmer, the Burman, the Thai/Lao, and the Vietnamese, with the Malayo-Polynesian being the largest. Parts of Southeast Asia bear the marks of Indian-Sanskritic-Hindu-Buddhist influence (e.g., Burma,

Thailand, Laos, Cambodia); others the Chinese-Confucian (e.g., Vietnam); while others the Islamic (e.g., Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei); still others bear marks of the Christian influence (e.g., Philippines). "Southeast Asia" which first emerges in 1943 as a British term for the reach of Japanese imperialism in the region is today comprised by Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, and the Philippines—an area roughly 1,750,000 square miles.

These realities notwithstanding, there are common threads in the *experience* of nations and states in Southeast Asia. Indeed, as this essay suggests later, one of the significant factors of nationalisms in Southeast Asia is that they emerge in the context of peoples' struggles against colonialism in the region.³ From an historical-methodological perspective, even if one took only the colonial experience of Southeast Asia, a period consisting roughly of four hundred and fifty years—with the Spanish and United States in the Philippines, the Dutch in Indonesia, the French in Vietnam, the British in Burma (now Myanmar), and the Japanese in the whole of Southeast Asia during World War II—ethnic, if not strictly (modern) nationalist, struggles against colonialism almost always involved assumptions, if not practices, of (i) a shared and common territorial basis, (ii) a shared and common language, (iii) a shared and common culture, (iv) a shared and common unity based on ties of blood, intermarriage, and kinship, (v) a shared and common history, and (vi) a shared and common sense of collective belonging (Parekh 1999, 296-298), as bases for what Max Weber called, in a different context, "community sentiments of solidarity"⁴

At the same time, and precisely because of these common threads traversing a wide historical and geographical area, these "nationalisms" were understood and articulated differently, both across the region, and even more significantly, within particular states or nations (Christie 1998; Anderson 1998). Indonesia's modern "nationalism", articulated in the *Pancasila*, for example, had (elective) affinities with Islam (*Sarekat Islam* being the first

mass nationalist movement of Indonesia) and, not to mention, with the communism that gave birth to the *Partai Komunis Indonesia*. Vietnamese nationalism was shaped by the ideological-political foundations of Marxism-Leninism, not to mention the cultural politics of a Phan Boi Chau and a Phan Chu Trinh, which were largely "patriotic struggles" against France (in contrast to Ho Chi Minh's "national liberation struggle" against both France and the U.S.). Philippine nationalism today travels between the bourgeois, *Ilustrado* liberalism of a Jose Rizal and the popular, if not millenarian, popular folk Christianity of an Andres Bonifacio, not to mention the Marxism-Leninism of both the (old) *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (PKP) and the (new) Mao-inspired Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP/NPA/NDF). And, of course, Siam (now, Thailand), perhaps the only state in the region that escaped direct "external" colonization, not only put forward a paternalistic 'Thai-based' ideology that explicitly rejected Western political norms (Christie, 1998, 252-253), but also articulated the "nationalist project" within the framework of the Thai monarchy which was understood as the embodiment of the nation.

If nothing else, one thing can be concluded from the historical records: nationalisms in Southeast Asia have always been an historically-contingent pastiche of political, economic, cultural, religious specificities and pluralities which are not readily amenable to contemporary, modern-day systematic classification.

Second, there is the *methodological* dilemma. Basic paradigms, methodological approaches, and research projects in the study of nationalisms in Southeast Asia, many of which are profoundly different if not contradictory or contested, have contributed to the normative and conceptual, if not empirical, specificities and pluralities of nationalism itself. Here one is not only faced with the absence of consensus *vis-à-vis* definitions of nationalism, not to mention delimitations of the field, but also with what may be incommensurable terminological difficulties not only in the academic discipline in which the study of nationalisms is

situated, but equally important, in the warp-and-wool of life where nationalisms are enacted.

Indeed, even more difficult than understanding the substantive dilemma is perhaps navigating through the maze of definitions, theoretical approaches, and methods of understanding and enacting nationalist discourses. Here, Anthony Smith's (1998) useful *heuristic* classification of basic paradigms in the study of nations and nationalism is instructive. Primordialists like Clifford Geertz (1973) understand nationalism as fundamentally rooted in the interplay of basic social and cultural phenomena like language, religion, territory, and kinship. Ethno-symbolists like John Armstrong (1997) locate these sentiments in the myths, symbols, and values of peoples and communities, and track their roles in creating national identities. Modernists, like Benedict Anderson (1983) work at the role of discursive networks and of ritualized symbolizations in the forging of "imagined communities", i.e., nations, especially in the context of the experience of modernity. Postmodernists like Partha Chatterjee (1986) underscore the fragmentation of contemporary identities and identify emergent "post-national" identities.

How one *negotiates* these linkages—the connections of these perspectives—especially since what is at stake is not only the plurality of these perspectives, but their inextricable relations, and the fact that the grounds of these perspectives are constantly shifting may be the ultimate challenge for those who seek to understand both nations and nationalism, in general, and nations and nationalisms in Southeast Asia, in particular. In fact, political, epistemological, disciplinary boundaries are today constantly being negotiated and re-negotiated, just as the strategies and tactics of politics of everyday life, including the competing nationalisms in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, are today being negotiated as well. Mohammed bin Mahatir's (1996) struggle for an "Asian capitalism" is, perhaps, one of the more visible of these "negotiations". Benedict Anderson's *The Spectre of Comparisons*, (1998) while not as visible, is no less emblematic.

What is shared by these different perspectives in varying degrees is the methodological, if not intuitive, sense that nationalism

is a particular form of political identity rooted in a *fictive* community called "nation" (Balibar & Wallerstein 1991). In a different, though not unrelated context, Eric Hobsbawm (1983; cf. Anderson 1983), in his work on nations and national traditions, articulates this shared understanding. "Invented tradition", Hobsbawm explains, "is . . . a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. . . ." (1-2). This continuity—or solidarity, if you like—is not established for the sake of the past but, fundamentally, for the sake, and in the name, of the present. In fact, nationalisms are not about *empirical* continuities with the past, but rather, legitimations of the present.

Modern nationalisms are about "community sentiments of solidarity" primarily within the context of the *modern* state. Strictly speaking, nationalisms in Southeast Asia are largely creatures of Euro-American modernity. Elements of this modern "nationalist" idea have been noted previously, but in particular, it is the dynamic interplay between the creation of strong and unified identities in the context of Euro-American assumptions of state and society, that is, of modern liberalism,⁵ that is decisive to the introduction of the "national idea" in Southeast Asia. While this does not fully explain the intensity, resilience, or depth of these "community sentiments of solidarity", it certainly underscores what is involved: institutions, behavior, perceptions—and their intersections.

Third, there is the *metatheoretical* dilemma. As in the wider field of the social sciences, definitions, theoretical perspectives, and methodological approaches in the study of nationalisms are always and already implicated not only in the dilemmas noted previously, but also in the normative commitments, interests, and (institutional) politics of the field. Value-orientations do shape research agendas as well as political action. The discussion concerning the importance of nationalism *vis-à-vis* the

contemporary historical drift to globalization, for example, has given rise to renewed interest in the study of the problems, perspectives, and prospects of nationalism. The inadequacies of Eurocentric theories and practices of nation, state, and identity have given rise to postnational, postcolonial challenges to the discourses of nationalism. And the failures, if not inadequacies, of state-sponsored *national* development, in particular its tendency in Southeast Asia to overshadow, if not ignore altogether, cultural and indigenous movements and identities, have forced the re-examination of nationalism as a viable model for development, as well as solidarity.

NATIONALISMS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND THEIR STRUGGLES

There are at least four areas in which nationalisms in Southeast Asia not only played significant roles but also found their articulation and self-definition: a) in the anti-colonial struggles against both “the colonizer” and the *ancien regime*; b) in the struggles for “national development”, i.e., the creation of the nation-state and its accompanying “national” identity; c) in the struggles of communism against national and international capitalism; and, d) in the struggles against what is called by some, capitalist and imperialist-led globalization.

In the first place, nationalisms in Southeast Asia found articulation in the anti-colonial struggles against both “the colonizer” and the *ancien regime*. Clive J. Christie’s *Southeast Asia in the Twentieth Century: A Reader* (1998) provides an insightful narrative of the early but decisive, dynamics of modern nationalism in Southeast Asia. The period 1900 through 1941 marks, for Christie, a historical period of education, reform and national awareness, as well as of revolution and constitutional change. At the center of these changes was a growing awareness of national identity, forged through struggles of resistance against colonialism. In the Philippines, for example, the Revolution of 1898, first against Spain, and then, against the U.S.—was rooted, on the one hand,

in the ideas of the European enlightenment, including freedom, individuality, and citizenship, brought back to the Philippines by *ilustrados* like Jose Rizal, Marcelo H. de Pilar, and Emilio Aguinaldo—and, therefore, in this sense, was a modern nationalist revolution. On the other hand, it was rooted in the resistance of people informed by the values of folk Christianity (Ileto 1979), including *layaw* and *utang na loob*—and, therefore, in this sense, was a “pre-national” resistance movement. In fact, while the popular Revolution of 1898, up until it was “hijacked” by the so-called “middle classes”, was less about the creation of a “national society” and more about resistance of local groups to Spanish and US colonialism, the struggle itself led to the formation of a political community based on Euro-American assumptions of national community.

In the case of what W. R. Roff (1967) calls “Malay nationalism”, the struggles of resistance in what is now Malaysia and Singapore at the turn of the century, not unlike “Philippine nationalism,” revolved around issues of national identity and anti-colonial struggle this time against the British, and to some extent, the Dutch. What is particularly interesting in this particular setting is that the nationalist idea is part of an Islamic-inspired resistance (cf. *Sarekat Islam* in Indonesia), not only against the “colonizer”, but also against the *ancien regime*. “The principal confrontation in Southeast Asia”, Christie observes, “was not between the Islamic reformers and the colonial powers, but between the Islamic reformers and the entrenched Islamic hierarchies throughout the maritime Southeast Asia region...” (17).

Before they could challenge *kafir* (unbeliever) colonial power, Islamic reformers (the so-called *Kaum Muda*, or ‘young faction’) had to challenge the *ancien regime* (the so-called *Kaum Tua*, the ‘old faction’) represented by traditional Islamic scholars at the village level and by the administrators of Islamic law at the level of local states (17).

Of course, the relationship between Islam and nationalism was never unambiguous. *Sarekat Islam*, in Indonesia, for example, is illustrative. While Islamic-inspired reform movements almost always involved challenges both to the “colonizer” and to the *ancien regime*, these reforms were carried out largely within the framework of a pan-Islamic vision rather than a national, i.e., nation-state, framework. Indeed, most Islamic reform movements in Southeast Asia, including *Sarekat Islam*, viewed nationalism as a “secular” movement that was a threat to the survival of Islam. Much later, with the Sukarno announcement of the nationalist, and largely *institutionally-secular Pancasila*, the relationship between Islam and nationalism is fundamentally revised. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the anti-colonial struggles of the early 1900s, in Indonesia provided the initial impetus for the development of nationalism in the region.

Also in the early part of the 20th century, the pan-Buddhist reform movement of Phan Boi Chau (1867-1940) and Phan Chu Trinh (1871-1926) both against French colonialism in Vietnam and the Nguyen dynasty which it supported similarly illustrates the “nationalist” challenge posed by resistance movements to both the “colonizers” and their domestic surrogates. Phan Boi Chau challenged the *ancien regime* which was based on the assumptions of Chinese-based classical learning (fundamentally tied to Chinese language and writing), by advocating the rejection of Chinese characters in favor of a popular/populist romanized form of writing. In so doing, it was believed that Chinese cultural hegemony would eventually collapse and with it, French colonialism. In contrast, Phan Chu Trinh, while also critical of the French, held the Nguyen dynasty mainly responsible for the oppression of the Vietnamese peoples, and advocated a strategy of “learning from the West”, in order to strengthen Vietnamese society, and through its strengthening, bring about the eventual demise of French colonialism. (Hue-Tam Ho Tai 1992). In fact, both are examples of culturally-based resistance movements that understood themselves to be engaged in a struggle less in terms of the creation

of a modern national community, and more in terms of the religio-cultural transformation of the *ancien regime* and, consequently, of the colonial power. One might say that in this case “anti-colonial struggles” preceded “nationalist struggles”.

The so-called inter-war years were a period of growing “nationalist” identities. The Philippine Commonwealth was established in 1934 after almost 30 years of both overt and covert suppression of Philippine nationalism by the U.S. colonizers. An independent Burma was established in 1937 also after years of rural and urban resistance to British colonialism; and, even though the British in the Malayan peninsula, the Dutch in Indonesia, and the French in Indochina continued to assert their colonial rule through the end of World War II, these years saw the burgeoning of grassroots participatory movements, resistances to colonial rule—all in the name of both anti-colonial and nationalist values (Christie 1998)—values that were often contradictory. For example, the Hsaya San rebellion that occurred in British-ruled Burma in 1930-1932 played a central role in the establishment of Burmese independence, not only because it was, in fact, one of the sites of resistance to British rule, particularly in its appeals to the “symbolism of royalty, of the mythical Galon (garuda) bird, the drinking of oath-water, the rebels’ faith in tattoos and amulets...” (Herbert 1982, in Christie, 63), as the inspiration for rebellion, but, in its being a movement deeply rooted in the village nationalist associations (*wun-tha-nu athin*) that dominated Burmese nationalist politics during this period. More than a traditionalist, millenarian movement, these associations, informed, among others, by the writings of C. P. Hkin Maung’s *Wun-tha-nu Ret-hki-ta* (Nationalist Principles), for example, were expressions of Burmese national spirit, pride, and character. Indeed, they were *rural* grassroots political movements that served as a precursor to a much larger Burmese modern nationalist movement. Their existence, however, underscores a truth about nationalism, reflected elsewhere in Southeast Asia (e.g., in the popular movements in the Philippines between 1840 and 1910), namely, that most

rebellions, including peasant rebellions and urban insurrections, are, for the most part, conjunctures of economic, traditional, millenarian, and other elements, and that the establishment of nationalism as a modern ideology, was not exclusively the work of the elite of, in this case, Burmese, society.

It is true, however, that in the face of the consolidations of Euro-American modernity, particularly after World War I, it became clear to many engaged in anti-colonial struggles that the fate of their struggles rested on the *rapprochement* between modernity and these struggles. The *modern* state, or at least, aspirations for a modern state, with its accompanying liberal assumptions of nation, state, and community, became the primary vehicle for reform and revolution. "National" identities were articulated in terms of western ideals of citizenship, participation, democracy.

These anti-colonial and nationalist struggles were "overtaken" by the events of World War II. With the European colonizers pre-occupied with the war on the European front, Southeast Asia was largely surrendered to Japanese imperialism effecting a temporary "truce" in the anti-colonial and nationalist struggles against the West. British Malaya (including Burma, now Myanmar), Dutch Indonesia, French Vietnam, and American Philippines, were all overrun by the Japanese with their project of a "Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere" and its "nationalist" ideology of "Asia for the Asians". In fact, many of the anti-colonial and nationalist movements became anti-Japanese movements, for example, the *Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon* in the Philippines—the *Huks*, as they were popularly known—the *Viet Minh* in Indochina, the Malay People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) in Malaya, the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI), as well as, minorities along the Burma-India border (the Karens and the Mons, for example), and aligned themselves with the Western colonizers in their respective struggles against the Japanese. These strategic and tactical alliances resulted in part in the ideological and institutional consolidation of the already existing anti-colonial

movements, especially the communist-led movements, and the strengthening of the idea of *modern* nationalism as a basis for identity, citizenship, and solidarity.

In the second place, nationalisms in Southeast Asia found articulation in the struggles for "national development," i.e., the creation of independent and modern nation-states and their accompanying ideologies of "national" identity in the long post-World War II era—reaching from the immediate postwar period (1945-1955), through the decade of instability (1955-1965), through the period of stabilization (1965-1975), and beyond (1975-present).⁶ In this context, Sukarno's *Pancasila*, or five principles (nationalism, internationalism, representative government, social justice, and belief in God), announced in 1946, reveals some of the substantive, methodological, and political/institutional contours of the struggles of nationalism in this period of "national development." On the one hand, it defined nationalism in terms of territory "from the tip of Sumatra right to Irian..." and *one* "national identity": "... neither Javanese... nor Sumatran Nationalism... nor the Nationalism of Borneo, or Celebes, Bali, or any other, but the Indonesian Nationalism which at one and the same time becomes the principle of one National State..." (Sukarno 1946 in Christie 1998, 132). On the other hand, it rejected a "chauvinistic nationalism" by affirming the principle of "internationalism", although, to be sure, it was to be "rooted in the soil of nationalism." The *Pancasila* also affirmed the place of a "civilized" Islam and Christianity in "national development," at the same time that it placed importance on the "principle of consent, the principle of representative government, the principle of consultation..." (136) in order to safeguard "national" solidarity. Sukarno's *Pancasila*, in fact, was a "nationalist project" that sought to provide a context, if not the opportunity to reconcile, the contested multiplicities of religion, culture, and politics, as well as of regions of a fundamentally pluralistic Indonesia (Reid 1974). The establishment of *Bahasa Indonesia*, as the national language, as well as the attempt to establish a *national* bureaucracy or state

apparatus, were important steps in this direction. Nationalism in this period, in fact, becomes associated with the modern state and, as in other Southeast Asian contexts, becomes the ideology of the nation-state.

Thus, in the Philippines, following political independence in 1945, the struggles for “national development” largely took the form of consolidation of the newly-independent Philippines against the excesses of U.S.-led westernization. Elite leaders from Ramon Magsaysay to Carlos P. Garcia to Diosdado Macapagal, embodied this consolidation not only in their attempts to overcome more unacceptable aspects of the colonial legacy, but also in the ways in which they were unable to—or refused—to overcome this legacy. President Garcia’s objectives both reveal the “nationalist aspirations” that fueled these struggles and the fundamental contradictions that characterized these struggles:

1. To complete Philippine economic independence through the adoption of the Filipino First policy and similar measures;
 2. To establish Filipino dignity as a free people by dealing with foreign powers on terms of sovereign equality;
 3. To achieve a balanced economy by providing equal impetus to agriculture and industry;
 4. To promote social justice and the general welfare of the masses; and,
 5. To minimize and, if possible, to eradicate graft and corruption.
- (Agoncillo and Guerrero 1977, 549).

In fact, “national development” in post-World War II Philippines, as with other nations and states in Southeast Asia, was not only circumscribed by a colonial legacy that promoted national economic development within a U.S.-led capitalist framework, the growth and institutionalization of a U.S.-oriented middle class as the origin and goal of development, and a popular demand for a representative and responsive government free of excessive “foreign” and elite control; it was also largely carried on

and articulated through, a state-sponsored nationalist ideology. It is not surprising, therefore, that 1955 marks the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement in Bandung, Indonesia. In other words, nationalist struggles became part of the post-colonial leadership most of which were part of the anti-colonial struggles of the past.

To be sure, national development in this period was not uncontested, not least because of the identification of the nationalist agenda with the state. In fact, capitalist development was challenged primarily because of the structural poverty and inequality that it engendered, including the asymmetries between agriculture and industry, between the rural and the urban, between the elites and the masses, between the national and international. Similarly, direct foreign control of the economy, as well as through its domestic surrogates, and their refusal to recognize “national sovereignty” was largely challenged in the name of “popular sovereignty” and because of the neo-colonialism that it continued to sustain, including the so-called “colonial mentality” in education that bred class and social stratifications. The *de facto* marginalization of the so-called masses was mainly challenged in the name of social justice and for the same reasons, including the serious lack of direct and indirect representation in national governments.

In the third place, and in the context of “national development”, nationalisms in Southeast Asia found articulation in the struggles of communism against national and international capitalism. As noted above, communist movements played a decisive role in the resistance against the Japanese in World War II. In fact, the history of the relationship between communism and nationalism in Southeast Asia goes further. Almost all Southeast Asian states have had communist and communist-led movements: from Indonesia’s PKI, to Malaysia’s Malayan Communist Party (MCP), to the Philippines’ *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (PKP) and the Communist Party of the Philippines

(CPP), to Vietnam's Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), and later, the *Viet Minh*—to name several of the major ones.

Communism was attractive for those engaged in struggles in Southeast Asia primarily because of its practical anti-colonial program and a compelling, if not coherent, alternative worldview. Indeed, it was V. I. Lenin's "Preliminary Draft of Theses on the National and Colonial Questions" (1947) that was the key text for many of the Southeast Asian Marxist-Leninists. Thus, Ho Chi Minh (1960) wrote:

At first, patriotism, not yet communism, led me to have confidence in Lenin, in the Third International. Step by step, along the struggle, by studying Marxism-Leninism parallel with participation in practical activities, I gradually came upon the fact that only Socialism and Communism can liberate the oppressed nations and the working people throughout the world from slavery. (450)

Marxism-Leninism provided a political and economic analysis of the dynamics faced by colonized nations and states: imperialism, feudalism, and, bureaucrat-capitalism, and, an ethical and moral vision about a "new humanity" that was liberated and free. The historical development of communism in Vietnam illustrates the continuities and discontinuities between communism and nationalism. Huynh Kim Khanh (1971 in Christie 1998) identifies three moments in the Communist movement of Vietnam: i) 1930-1931, characterized by a nation-wide, Communist-initiated, revolutionary protest typified by workers' strikes and peasants' demonstrations surpassing all previous anti-colonial rebellions from the *Can Vuong* Movement to the Tax Protest Movement of 1908, to the Yen Bay Mutiny organized by the *Vietnam Quoc dan Dang*; ii) the Popular Front period of 1936-1939, characterized by Communist involvement in the open and legal struggles; and iii) the period of 1941 and the creation of the Viet Minh Front which led directly to the August Revolution in 1945 that marked "the end of French colonial imperialism, the

end of the Confucianist-oriented monarchical regime, the regaining of Vietnamese independence and the beginning of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam" (128).

In its earliest formulations, the ICP understood itself as waging a "bourgeois-democratic revolution" consistent with the Comintern's two-stage theory of revolution, namely, an anti-imperialistic stage with the liberation of Vietnam from French colonial imperialism, and an anti-feudalist stage with the overthrow of the landowning-mandarin class. This formulation was radically revised with the formation of the Viet Minh Front in 1941 when the Indochinese revolution was no longer described as a bourgeois-democratic revolution.

It is no longer a revolution to solve the two problems of anti-imperialism and land [reforms], but a revolution to solve only one urgent problem—national liberation. Thus, the Indochinese revolution during this period is a revolution of national liberation... [our] revolutionary forces... [do not discriminate] between workers, peasants, rich peasant, landlords, or national capitalists. Whoever loves our country and race will together form a united front, gathering all the forces to do everything possible to fight for independence, destroying the French and Japanese bandits who have occupied our country. [*emphasis mine*] (122-3)

The communist-led Democratic Republic of Vietnam, under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, was "interrupted" by World War II, and while it managed, at the end of the war to consolidate power in the north, it was unsuccessful in administratively unifying the country. With its acknowledgement of its communist identity, and the recognition and support of the Bao Dai government (later to be replaced by the Ngo Dinh Diem government) by the Japanese, the French, and later the U.S., the Viet Minh Front was forced to continue its anti-colonial and nationalist struggle, finally succeeding with the defeat of the U.S. in the Vietnam War. Indeed, the case of Vietnam, illustrates

the ways in which communism and nationalism were interwoven in the struggles against national and international capitalism.

The history of Philippine communism shows remarkable similarities with its Vietnamese counterpart, their different organizational and ideological origins notwithstanding. As noted above, its trajectories included resistance to the Japanese as well as to the “national government” established under the auspices of the U.S., and, since the 1970s, resistance against “U.S. imperialism, feudalism, bureaucrat-capitalism”. The failures of the “independence” government to address the fundamental problems of poverty, governance, and “national development”, as well as its continued support of and by the U.S. provided reasons for the establishment of communism in the Philippines. The historical origins of communism, however, reach back to nationalist literatures like the *Muling Pagsilang* of 1906, which placed the tenets of socialism before the view of the peasants and laborers. As early as 1922, peasants banded themselves together into the *Confederacion de Aparceros y Obreros Agricolas de Filipinas*, a socialist-inspired peasant movement. However, it was not after 1928 when representatives of the Philippine Labor Congress, after attending a trade conference in Canton, China, and the subsequent organization of the Labor Party, and the Congress affiliation with the Red International (Organization) of Labor Unions in 1929, that communism was “officially” introduced in the Philippines. In 1929, the Socialist Party was founded. The following year, 1930, the *Partido Comunista ng Pilipinas* (PKP) was established with the avowed purpose of: i) working for the improvement of the living and working conditions of the workers and peasants, ii) overthrowing the American colonial government and the establishment of an independent Philippines patterned after Soviet Russia, and iii) uniting all workers (Agoncillo and Guerrero 1977, 522). However, while the Socialist Party continued to receive legal recognition, the PKP, in 1932 was outlawed, forcing it “underground”. Later, both parties merged (CPP 1988, 4).

As in other Southeast Asian nations and states, World War II brought together Philippine communists, socialists, and nationalists to fight the Japanese. “Anti-Japanese Above All” became the slogan of the peasant underground movement. In 1942, the *Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon* (*Hukbalahap*) with the communists and socialists at its organizational core was established based on a “united front” ideology for a “free and democratic Philippines”. With the defeat of the Japanese and the restoration of the U.S.-supported Philippine government, the communists were arrested and jailed, although later, were granted amnesty. This was to be a major setback of the communist movement in the Philippines.

What is important to note, in the context of the struggles of nationalism in the Philippines, in particular, and Southeast Asia in general, is that the socialist and communist movements of the period, not unlike their Vietnamese counterpart, were largely agrarian/peasant movements informed not only by communist ideology, but by peasant—that is, anti-colonial and popular/nationalist—sentiments. It was left to the re-organized Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) in 1968, to develop a much more comprehensive ideological-political-organizational framework based this time, on Marxist-Leninist-Mao-Tse-Tung-Thought. If the earlier socialist and communist movement bore affinities to the national liberation sentiments of the Viet Minh, the CPP reflected its “bourgeois-democratic” strategy, except, perhaps where the organizational centrality of the Party was concerned. Indeed, the CPP, following the Maoist principle of the “Three Magic Weapons” organized a “national democratic movement” comprised of an army (the New People’s Army), a united front (The National Democratic Front), and a party (CPP). Led by the Party, this tripartite organization spearheaded a movement engaged in an armed struggle to overthrow U.S. imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucrat-capitalism, and in the establishment, first, of a national-democratic government followed, eventually and

finally, by the establishment of a socialist government. In both the Vietnamese and Philippine contexts, nationalism continued to play a central role.

The relationship between communism and nationalism, however, has not been entirely uncontested or problematic. Indeed, the experience of the PKI suggests that while it was successful in the 1920s in mobilizing the people around anti-colonialism, it found itself at odds with the nationalist elite, on the one hand, and the Islamic elite, on the other hand. Communism for the latter was a secular ideological project contrary to Islamic religious sentiments; while for the former, it carried the seeds of an “internationalism” that would eventually threaten the nationalist project. Indeed, the almost complete, not to mention bloody, elimination of the PKI in 1965, in the now infamous *Gestapu* affair that paved the way for the installation of military rule in Indonesia was due, in part, to the “fear” which communism generated within Indonesian experience, namely, that a political ideology not completely congenial with either Islam or nationalism, was a fundamental threat to public life and order and, therefore, in a world not only of change, but of the Cold War’s geopolitical rivalries, necessitates its elimination in the name of “order, development, and progress”.⁷

In the other contexts of Southeast Asia, wherever communism allied itself with, if not accommodated to, anti-colonial and nationalist/patriotic sensibilities and movements, as was the case in Vietnam and the Philippines, and to some extent, in Malaysia, it found itself providing a viable and meaningful context and opportunity for struggles of national liberation; where it did not, it found itself either isolated from these struggles, if not completely irrelevant. At the same time, where communism (and, indeed, nationalism) became a political and ideological threat, particularly in terms of capitalist-led “national development” as in Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines, it faced challenge and elimination, as well. In fact, the wars and insurgencies in mainland Southeast Asia beginning in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s and 1970s (the *Pathet Lao*, the *Viet Minh*, the *Khmer*

Rouge) as well as the repudiation of the PKI and of Sukarno’s “Guided Democracy” in Indonesia, and the long “communist insurgency in the Philippines” (1950s through the 1990s) may be understood not only as the playing out of the logic of the Cold War, but also as the resolution of the relationship between communism and nationalism, on the one hand, and capitalism, on the other hand, as sites of resistance, solidarity, and identity.

In the fourth place, nationalisms in Southeast Asia found articulation in the struggles against multinational, if not global, capitalism. The triumph not only of global capitalism, particularly in the post, post-Cold War era of the late 1980s through the 1990s, but also of the ideologies of “national development” which arises in the mid-1960s through the 1980s when nationalism became the ideology of the state, fundamentally transformed the character of nationalisms in Southeast Asia and significantly shifted the grounds on which resistance and struggle were articulated in Southeast Asia.

In fact, the last half of this century has seen the conflation of ideologies of modernization, national development, and globalization, where the “national” is not only identified with a particular territory or people (whether as *populus* or *ethnos*) but with the logic and values of the modern state, its apparatus, and, in almost every context, of the “development process” or what Kinhide Mushakoji (1998), called “development nationalism”—state-centered ideology of national economic growth; and, where “modernization” is not only identical with development, but, where both are circumscribed, if not defined, by global capitalism. Moreover, while authoritarian regimes during this period, whether in its military form (particularly in Indonesia and Thailand) or in its civilian form (as in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Singapore), were almost always accompanied by appeals to the “nationalist”, if not “national,” origins and goals of economic development. Nevertheless, their hidden logics, if not their explicit definitions, remained inextricably-wedded to the assumptions of capitalism’s “global reach”. Ironically, despite its protestations, *modern*

nationalism has become a representation of capitalist-led globalization.⁸

This “development nationalism”, with its centralizing and homogenizing tendencies, as well as its historical, if not pervasive, rituals of authorization, has led both to the political, economic, and cultural subordination of poor people, women, and cultural/indigenous peoples, and to the proliferation of local sites of knowledge, and as a consequence, the insurrection of these subjugated knowledges (Foucault 1980). Indeed, postmodernists and/or postcolonialists like Bhabha (1990) and Chatterjee (1986) have reminded us that such *modern* nationalisms have created monolingual and anti-pluralist cultures and discourses that often frustrate and inhibit the formation of autonomous local cultures. Indeed, *modern* nationalism’s fundamental flaw was its legitimization of the massive asymmetry between a dominant culture (with its ruthless drive toward cultural homogenization) and local cultures. Here, local sites of resistance and struggle are overrun.

What may have been movements and flows of capital, people, goods, information, ideas, and images among and within nations, states, and peoples in Southeast Asia, in fact, have become embedded in processes of profound structural transformation that have gained some level of autonomy at the global level, altering thereby the conditions under which “national” communities and identities are enacted (Featherstone 1990). The restructuring of labor on a global scale, for example, the migration of peoples in search of meaningful and productive work, essentially following the scent of capital, has raised questions not only about the state and its capacity to provide for its citizens “at home and abroad,” but also about the nature of “national” identity, citizenship, and the boundaries of “nation” (See, for example, Klein-Beekman 1996).

In fact, at the same time that capitalist-led globalization is contracted in Southeast Asia, the traces of resistance embedded in the anti-colonial, nationalist, and communist movements noted above were gradually shifted to other sites of “community sentiments of solidarity”, even as new forms of resistance were

discovered, invented, and articulated. These new sites of resistance included, in particular, social movements influenced, on the one hand, by the gradual acceleration of movements and flows of capital, peoples, goods, information, ideas, and images throughout the globe brought about primarily by the advances in modern technology; and, on the other hand, by the gradual recognition of the serious inadequacies, if not failures, of the so-called “western project of modernity”—including the alternatives emerging from within it, in particular, of socialism as an alternative to capitalism and the state, as well as institutions of the international system of states (e.g., the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions, and other regional organizations).

Unlike the earlier anti-colonial, nationalist, and communist movements that were largely committed to the creation of a “national” community, which in this period was the nation (or the state), these social movements were primarily engaged in the creation of alternatives to the practices of the modern state. While many of these movements continue to be informed by anti-colonial, nationalist, and communist sensibilities, they are oriented more around concerns that reach beyond state and nation. Peoples’ movements, citizens’ groups, and non-governmental organizations around, for example, the U.N. conferences on environment (1992), human rights (1993), population and development (1994), social development (1995), women (1995), as well as people’s conferences around APEC, WTO, ASEAN, are illustrative of these social movements. In other words, new forms of resistance, as well as different concerns accompany and are accompanied by new forms of identity: local, national, regional, international/global.

The proliferation of these peoples’ movements, citizens’ groups, and non-governmental organizations in Southeast Asia in the last fifteen years, has dramatically transformed the political, economic, cultural, and epistemological geographies, not only of the state, but also of nationalism. In fact, the question of nationalism, in general, and of nationalisms in Southeast Asia, in particular,

directs our attention not only to the importance of immediate historical and structural contexts, but rather suggests that any discussion of nationalism cannot be detached from the even more basic claims about human identity and subjectivity. Indeed, the history of nationalisms in Southeast Asia may be interpreted, as postmodernists have done, as a question not only about *who* are the people, but *what* is entailed in being a people and, most important, *how* a people are brought into being (Benhabib 1996). As noted above, this coming into being of a people, as the history of nationalisms in Southeast Asia has clearly shown is an essentially long, intensely contested, and fundamentally protracted, struggle.

THE FUTURE OF NATIONALISMS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: IDENTITY, REFLECTION, DISCOURSE

These transformations in the geographies of nationalisms in Southeast Asia raise a number of issues for the future of nationalisms in the region, in particular, of nationalism as a fundamental question of identity: i) the character and location of the political, i.e., the nature of the social totality, ii) whose “nationalism” is being assumed and under what conditions, i.e., the question of the subject and of subjectivity, and, iii) the languages (or discourses) of nationalism.

The first area of identity asserts that nationalism is tied to the location of the “political”; and precisely because this is so, it is today no longer possible to simply assume that the state (or the system of states) is the primary if not the exclusive, locus of politics, and that the “political” which has always been more than government or the state, needs to be re-thought in order that the question of nationalism can be re-thought as well. The restructuring of labor on a global scale noted above does, in fact, raise the question not only of the nature of the social totality, but, of the character and location of the “political”. As well, the discourses around, for example, the revitalization of civil

societies, of ecological and environmental politics, as well as of gender, race, and class—are significant also for this reason.

The second area of identity contends that it is today no longer possible to simply assume that nationalism is mainly either about the identities of particular individuals or specific states, but, rather, about the demands for recognition by those who have been historically mis-recognized, indeed, excluded; and that, any notion of identity must include these demands as part of its self-understanding. This is the significance of discourses that raise the question of the marginalization and proletarianization of peoples of color, the pauperization and feminization of poverty, the sexual division of labor, not to mention sexual slavery, the commodification of sex, domestic violence, and enforced prostitution and trafficking of women and children, for the understanding and definition of nationalism. These peoples are the ones excluded, or mis-recognized, and made to pay for the costly obsessions and rituals of repetition of capitalist-led globalization.

The third area of identity insists that it is no longer possible to make facile assertions, as modern epistemologies and ontologies do, about the separation, say of knowledge and power, reason and desire, fact and value, language and institutions; that, in fact, what appears to be abstract, in reality, are articulations of actual relations of ruling—beyond the fact that they may also be *mere* ideological legitimations of certain ruling elites (Mohanty 1991). Thus, there is a need to attend today to the very language, that is, the discursive formations and strategies, of nationalism itself—as part of the task of re-thinking nation, peoples, and identity. The point, of course, is not only that language is not innocent, nor that who speaks, and whose language is spoken, shapes the political agenda, but also that language, as Foucault and others have amply demonstrated, is productive—it produces an effect.

Where nationalisms in Southeast Asia are concerned, Smith (1998) lists at least four areas for further reflection:

1. the impact of current population movements on the prospects of the national state, and especially the fragmentation of national identity and the rise of multiculturalism [cf. Bhabha (1990) and Chatterjee (1986)];
2. the impact of feminist analysis and issues of gender on the nature of national projects, identities and communities, and the role of gendered symbolism and women's collective self-assertion [cf. Mohanty et al. (1991) and Jayawardena (1986)];
3. the predominantly normative and political debate on the consequences for citizenship and liberty of civic, ethnic types of nationalism, and their relations with liberal democracy [Miller (1995)]; and
4. the impact of globalization trends and of 'postmodern' supranational projects, on national sovereignty and national identity. (202)

However, the future of nationalism as a discourse, may require at least, three discursive "tasks". First, nationalist discourses need to continue to recognize, affirm, and articulate different ways of producing and reproducing knowledge (epistemology): here, not only is this about situated knowledges and partial perspectives, but also of subjugated and insurrectionary knowledges and agents of knowledges—and the ways in which they are related. Even more important, however, is the need to consistently focus, among other things, on the fundamental situatedness and partial character of our ways of organizing thinking, feeling, and acting, as well as on the necessity, if not desirability, of rethinking "the relationship between knowledge and emotion and construct [ion of] conceptual models that demonstrate the mutually constitutive rather than oppositional relationship between reason and emotion" (Jaggar 1994). On face value, this may be a straightforward, even

simplistic, if not obvious, statement about the nature of knowledge. However, when one understands that these claims are set in the context of the historical pretensions about the universality of (masculinist) reason as opposed to say, feminist desire, and of the reality that emotion is associated with subordinate groups—particularly women—and deployed to discount and silence those realities deemed to be irrational, then one begins to realize how these epistemologies actually explode patriarchal myths about knowledge (Harding 1991, 1998).

Second, nationalist discourses need to continue to recognize, affirm, and articulate different modes of being (ontology): here, not only is this about thinking, feeling, and acting—as relational practices, but also about "volatile bodies", i.e., of re-figuring and re-inscribing bodies, of moving through and beyond the conventional divide of gender as socially-constructed, on the one hand, and of sex as biologically-given, on the other hand, to "our bodies our selves". Elizabeth Grosz has suggested that the "male (or female) body can no longer be regarded as a fixed, concrete substance, a pre-cultural given. It has a determinate form only by being socially inscribed" (Grosz 1987, 2). "As a socio-historical 'object'", she continues, "the body can no longer be confined to biological determinants, to an immanent 'facticious', or unchanging social status. It is a political object par excellence; its forms, capacities, behaviours, gestures, movements, potential are primary objects of political contestation. As a political object, the body is not inert or fixed. It is pliable and plastic material, which is capable of being formed and organized" (Grosz 1987, 2). This profound insight is shared by Foucault who argues that the body is an "inscribed surface of events" (Foucault 1984, 83). Thus, the body becomes "malleable and alterable", its surface inscribed with gender, appropriate behavior, standards of, for example, femininity. The significance of such an understanding cannot be underestimated. For this means not only that nationalism, for example, is about "imagined communities" or "community sentiments of solidarity", but that it is "what, when, where, and

how” are inscribed—written on, embodied—in our very bodies.

Third, nationalist discourses need to continue to recognize, affirm, and articulate different *empowering* practices (politics): here, not only is this about the importance and power of self-definition, self-valuation, nor of self-reliance and autonomy, but also about transformation and transgression, of finding safe places and voices in the midst of difference, and of making the connections. Chandra Mohanty summarizes this point quite well. She notes:

... third world women’s writings on feminism have consistently focused on (1) the idea of the simultaneity of oppressions as fundamental to the experience of social and political marginality and the grounding of feminist politics in the histories of racism and imperialism; (2) the crucial role of a hegemonic state in circumscribing their/our daily lives and survival struggles; (3) the significance of memory and writing in the creation of oppositional agency; and (4) the differences, conflicts, and contradictions internal to third world women’s organizations and communities. In addition, they have insisted on the complex interrelationships between feminist, antiracist, and nationalist struggles... (1991, 10).

This may turn out to be the most serious challenge for nationalist discourses as we enter the new millennium.

NOTES

¹ The term “global capitalism” used throughout this essay is intended to be imprecise. My concern is less with a substantive definition of capitalism—clearly an impossibility given the plural forms of capitalism today—and more with specifying a region of discursive practices characterized by the globalizing trajectories of *modern* capitalism. In fact, it might be argued that “multinational capitalism” could very well be the more useful term to describe the many capitalisms at the end of this century. See, for example, Anthony Giddens’ *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990). By “globalization” I refer to those processes of profound structural transformation that

have gained some level of autonomy at the global level, which sustain the movements and flows of capital, people, goods, information, ideas, and images, and which are altering the conditions under which communities and identities are enacted. See Michael Featherstone, ed., *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity* (London: Sage, 1990).

² The phrase is Benedict Anderson’s, in *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (London: Verso, 1998).

³ This is the central argument of Clive J. Christie’s *Southeast Asia in the Twentieth Century: A Reader* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1998).

⁴ Max Weber writes, “A nation is a community of sentiment which would adequately manifest itself in a state of its own; hence, a nation is a community which normally tends to produce a state of its own” (1948, 176).

⁵ For the definition of “liberalism” used in this essay, see Roberto M. Unger, *Knowledge and Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1975). Cf. C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

⁶ The periodization is Clive J. Christie’s (1998).

⁷ The interesting contrast, of course, is the experience of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) or the Khmer Rouge, when, in 1975, after achieving victory in a five-year civil war against the U.S.-backed Khmer Republic, it engaged in a bloody war eliminating its political, class, and/or ethnic enemies. The Pol Pot regime may very well be an example of the alliance between extremist interpretations of both communism and (xenophobic) nationalism. The so-called *Kahos* “purgings” inside the Communist movement in the Philippines in the 1980s when elements of the Party, with the tacit consent of the leadership, sought to eliminate “deep penetration agents” from within its ranks, deserve further study in relation to the question of the relationship between communism and nationalism as sites of struggle and resistance.

⁸ In Southeast Asia, this is difficult to ignore, particularly if one focuses on the political and economic agendas and/or aspirations of nations and states (from Mahatir’s Malaysia, to Arroyo’s Philippines, to Hatta’s Indonesia, not to mention Brunei, Thailand, and, even Vietnam) that all hew towards capitalist development. In addition, of course, there is the APEC.

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