



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

By Benedict Anderson

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“‘Come, let us build a Third Kingdom, and in this Third Reich, hey, sisters, you will live happily; hey, brothers, you will live happily; hey, kids, you will live happily; hey, you German patriots, you will see Germany sitting enthroned above all the peoples in this world.’ How clever Hitler was, brothers and sisters, in depicting these ideals!”

Thus the late President Sukarno of Indonesia, an anti-colonial leader, in a public speech while accepting an honorary degree, and viewing Europe and its history through an inverted telescope, as Europeans often regard other parts of the globe. Strange shifts in perspective can take place when Berlin is viewed from Jakarta, or when complex histories of colonial domination strand what counts as the founding work of a national culture in a language its people no longer read. The “spectre of comparisons” arises as nations stir into self awareness, matching themselves against others, and becoming whole through the exercise of the imagination.

In this series of profound and eloquent essays, Benedict Anderson, best known for his classic book on nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, explores these effects as they work their way through politics and culture. Spanning broad accounts of the development of nationalism and identity, and detailed studies of Southeast Asia, the book includes pieces on East Timor, where every Indonesian attempt to suppress national feeling has had the opposite effect; on the Philippines, where it is said that some horses eat better than stable-hands; on Thailand, where so much money can be made in elected posts that candidates regularly kill to get them; on the Filipino nationalist and novelist José Rizal for whom “we mortals are like turtles—we have value and are classified according to our shells;” and a remarkable essay on Mario Vargas Llosa, detailing the fate of indigenous minorities at the hands of the modern state.

While *The Spectre of Comparisons* is an indispensable resource for those interested in Southeast Asia, Anderson also takes up the large issues of the universal grammars of nationalism and ethnicity, the peculiarity of nationalist imagery as replicas without originals, and the mutations of nationalism in an age

of mass global migrations and instant electronic communications.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

To open this collection of essays, Anderson (international studies, Cornell) refines the theory of nationalism he developed in his acclaimed *Imagined Communities* (1983). Anderson deftly identifies the forces that forge a nation?an "imagined community" frequently incongruent with the state?from a group of people sharing some degree of common heritage. Subsequent essays examine the nationalism peculiar to each Southeast Asian country and draw comparisons among countries. Anderson also highlights the forces inhibiting the coalescence of a regional consciousness and the formation of a regional political bloc. Chief among these, he contends, are the proximity of China and the prevalence of authoritarian regimes. Finally, a provocative closing essay seeks to rehabilitate the reputation of nationalism, which has suffered in the post-Cold War years. A useful addition to the burgeoning literature on nationalism, this book illuminates the passions that have formed?and sometimes deformed?the modern world. Strongly recommended for academic libraries. James Holmes, Fletcher Sch. of Law & Diplomacy, Tufts Univ., Medford, MA

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Review

[A] collection of subtle and scholarly essays by Benedict Anderson, author of "Imagined Communities." Anderson is a rare bird: a learned Cornell professor who writes about international politics with subversive elegance and a philosopher's flair for first principles. -- *Boston Globe*, 29 November 1998

About the Author

Benedict Anderson is Aaron L. Binenkorp Professor of International Studies Emeritus at Cornell University. He is editor of the journal *Indonesia* and author of *Java in a Time of Revolution*, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* and *Imagined Communities*.

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