

## Obituaries

### **Benedict Anderson (1936–2015)**

Benedict Anderson died in a hotel in Malang, Indonesia, on December 13 of last year. He was born in Kunming, China, in one of the far reaches of a languishing British Empire. Anderson's perspective on nation and empire was marked by his natal colonial eccentricity. Indeed, from a young age Benedict Anderson showed unusual linguistic abilities. According to the obituary published in the *New Republic*, he read Dutch, German, Spanish, Russian, and French, and spoke Indonesian, Javanese, Tagalog, and Thai fluently.<sup>1</sup> Anderson's prose in English was elegant and luminous, notable for its literary economy.

Benedict Anderson studied for his undergraduate degree at Cambridge, where he earned high honors. It was at Cambridge that he had his political initiation, during the Suez Crisis of 1956. Anderson took Gamal Abdel Nasser's side on that occasion and pitted himself against the nationalism of most of his cohort. From that moment forward, Anderson immersed himself in Marxism and anticolonial politics. It is likely that his interest in Indonesia dates back to his years at Cambridge, since the Non-Aligned Movement got its start in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955, months before the Suez Crisis. Whether or not this was indeed the case, the fact is that Anderson chose to do his doctoral work on Indonesia at Cornell, which was already then a major center for the study of Southeast Asia.

Anderson was a rarity in the field of political science. Starting in the fifties, American political science began to move away from deep local knowledge and toward comparative analyses and "theory." This led the field increasingly to historical and linguistic detachment. Even so, there was a fair amount of toleration for transdisciplinary work then. Thus, Anderson appreciatively reminisced that when he defended his doctoral dissertation at Cornell's Department

1. Jeet Heer, "Benedict Anderson, Man Without a Country," *New Republic* (Washington, DC), 13 Dec. 2015, <https://newrepublic.com/article/125706/benedict-anderson-man-without-country>.

of Government, in 1967, his committee “cheerfully asked” whether the dissertation was in history or in political science; their disciplinary doubts did not deter them from offering him a job as an assistant professor.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, disciplinary boundaries continued to get firmer and more difficult to trespass.

In that context, Anderson’s sustained commitment to intensive local engagement stood out. In fact, it still stands out. So, for instance, Anderson, Ruth McVey, and Fred Bunnell founded the journal *Indonesia* on the prewar model of European area studies journals in which “you might find articles on Javanese music, economics, religion, urban engineering, archaeology, traditions, governance, and so on.”<sup>3</sup> To this encompassing, multifaceted engagement, the journal added an element that was entirely distinct from its prewar, colonial forebears: in Anderson’s words, “enthusiasm for the nation itself.”<sup>4</sup> Anderson’s analytical engagements required that combination of broad trans-disciplinary reach and political commitment; his studies could range from Filipino nationalism by way of close analyses of language use in key novels to turning to history to unpack the changing relationship between state and society in Indonesia.<sup>5</sup>

Understanding Indonesia (or, for that matter, the Philippines) required deep conceptual innovation. Indonesia is today the fourth most populous country in the world and so sounds like it might be a stodgy, well-established place rooted in ancient cultures, but when Anderson began working there it was what Clifford Geertz and Edward Shils called a “new nation.” Sukarno had declared independence after Japan’s defeat in 1945, but how was nationhood even imaginable for an archipelago composed of more than 17,000 islands and with no fewer than 700 living languages? Understanding a social formation of this kind demanded new sensibilities and approaches and an altogether different level of sophistication. Serious engagement left little room for “normal science.” Indeed, thinking through Indonesian politics required equal doses of anthropology, history, political science, and even linguistics. It is no coincidence that some of the most innovative anthropology of the second half of the twentieth century came out of that region—I’m thinking especially of Clifford

2. Benedict Anderson, “Origins of *Indonesia* and the Sustainance of Its Excellence, 1966–2015,” *Indonesia*, no. 100 (2015): 7.

3. *Ibid.*, 5.

4. *Ibid.*, 6.

5. Benedict Anderson, “Forms of Consciousness in *Noli me tangere*,” *Philippine Studies* 51, no. 4 (2003): 505–29; Benedict Anderson, “Old State, New Society: Indonesia’s New Order in Comparative Historical Perspective,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 42, no. 3 (1983): 477–96.

Geertz and James Siegel. Benedict Anderson was a leading light in Southeast Asian studies, comparable in originality and impact to Geertz and Siegel.

Benedict Anderson's first books were on the Javanese revolution of the 1940s. He was much engrossed by the Javanese's capacity for negotiation and the promise that this capacity held out for the new nation. It was perhaps because of his love for Javanese culture that Anderson was so deeply disturbed by the counterrevolution that brought Suharto to power in 1967 and, above all, by the subsequent massacre of more than 600,000 communists or alleged communists. How could the subtle Javanese have gotten involved in political genocide? Anderson's denunciation and writing on these monstrous developments led to his expulsion from Indonesia in 1972. He was unable to return there until 1998, after Suharto's resignation.

Beyond Southeast Asian studies, Benedict Anderson's name is best known for his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, published in 1983. That book is, without exaggeration, the most innovative and influential work published on nationalism to date. Indeed, *Imagined Communities* spawned a veritable cottage industry of articles and books dedicated to extending its insights and revising its theses. I, too, contributed to the effort of assimilating, criticizing, and amending Anderson's theses, based on Latin American materials. There was nothing unusual about the obsession: *Imagined Communities* deeply redefined the terms of the analysis of nationalism.

In particular, Anderson argued several things relevant for Ibero-America. For instance, Anderson believed that nationalism first emerged in colonial peripheries rather than European metropolises. Up until the publication of *Imagined Communities*, it was assumed as a matter of course that nationalism had been conceived in Europe and not, as Anderson argued, in Europe's American colonies. This idea was a boon for Latin American political studies, since the historiography on Spanish American, Brazilian, and even Haitian independence had before this tended to regard nationalist movements as derivative, lacking in either originality or world-historical significance. Anderson demonstrated the role of colonial lifeworlds in the conformation of global politics, not only through political action but also through political imagination.

Anderson took a cultural-historical approach to nationalism and studied its technological conditions of possibility. He focused especially (though not exclusively) on commercial print—so-called print capitalism—and the emergence of newspapers and the commercial novel as relevant innovations. Just as the novel allowed for the parallel and simultaneous development of characters whose lives then intertwine, so too did the newspaper allow readers to image a world made up of independent nations that developed in contrast and dialogue

with one another. The nationalism that Anderson imagined was a cultural formation based on the experience of parallel readings of the news, in a kind of synchronized, progressive race between nations moving across what he, following Walter Benjamin, called “homogeneous, empty time.” In that regard, one of the key underpinnings and effects of nationalism was secularism—the emptying out of messianic time and its reduction to “progress.”

I don’t believe it was a coincidence that Anderson understood the historical significance of the colonial experience as well as he did. He had lived through the last gasps of the British Empire since childhood and later became a privileged witness to the hopeful beginnings of anticolonial nationalisms. He then watched the shocking devolution of these nationalisms into counterrevolutions or war among the newly independent republics. The introduction to *Imagined Communities* opens with the deeply troubling problem of nationalist wars between revolutionary, postcolonial states such as Vietnam, China, and the Soviet Union. There is in Anderson’s version of nationalism an account of not only the emancipatory thrill of decolonization but also revolutionary entrapment. Working through disillusion is a key aspect of Anderson’s insights, and disillusion, even shock, ran deep in this unusually sensitive and engaged author. Anderson compared the impact of the Indonesian genocide on his life to discovering that one had loved a murderer.

I met Benedict Anderson only once, at a small conference organized at the University of Chicago in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of *Imagined Communities*. I was invited to that event because of the critical essay that I had published on the work. Apparently Anderson appreciated it. In person, Ben Anderson was as gentle and amiable as he was cultivated, evenhanded, and incisive. He made one of the most important social scientific contributions of the final quarter of the twentieth century. May he rest in peace.

CLAUDIO LOMNITZ, Columbia University

DOI 10.1215/00182168-3677651

### **Arnold J. Bauer (1931–2015)**

Arnold J. Bauer—Arnie to just about everyone—passed away on July 30, 2015, after a sudden case of meningitis. He left a huge community of friends and family who valued his sense of humor, passion for conversation, and loyalty. He contributed to Latin American history through wide-ranging and engaging publications and his work as a teacher and mentor in the United States and Chile.