

For Whom Are Southeast Asian Studies?

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Which audiences, publics, and peoples do Southeast Asianists address and serve? The question of “audience(s)”—real and imagined, intended and unintended—is arguably central to (re)conceptualizing the rationale, scope, efficacy, and limits of Southeast Asian Studies. It has an important bearing on what kind of topics are chosen for study, what and how personal and institutional networks and intellectual exchanges are mobilized, which dialogues and collaborations are initiated, in what language(s) one writes in, where one publishes or works, which arenas one intervenes in, and how the region is imagined and realized. After surveying the recent literature on Southeast Asian Studies, I focus on Jose Rizal’s two novels—*Noli me tangere* (1887) and *El filibusterismo* (1891)—and Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983, 1991, 2006) and examine the ways in which the issue of audience(s) crucially informed the intellectual projects of the two authors, and how the vicissitudes of production, circulation, translation, and reception shaped the intellectual, political, and artistic trajectories and legacies of these three notable Southeast Asian studies texts. I will also discuss the power of these texts to conjure and call forth unexpected and unintended audiences that have the potential to galvanize Southeast Asian studies while stressing the connected histories that link Southeast Asia to other regions and the world.

Keywords: Southeast Asia, area studies, nationalism, Benedict Anderson, José Rizal

Introduction

The best career advice I ever received came out of my B exam, the oral defense of my dissertation, twenty-two years ago at Cornell University. Among the toughest questions I received from my Special Committee concerned my position—in relation to a discussion in my dissertation—on the role of Philippine literature in the making, unmaking, and remaking of the nation. The question was “For whom are you writing?”

Now, if you are a graduate student defending your dissertation, the answer is obvious: you are writing for the members of your Special Committee, your first readers. My committee, however, was already looking beyond the B exam to the time when the dissertation would be turned into a book, and was asking me to think seriously about where the book would be published and who its readers—imagined and actual (Rabinowitz 1977, 126)—would be.

The question of audience—or, as I was soon to realize, audiences in the plural—has stayed with me all these years. The question has shaped and influenced my academic career and life decisions. The issue of audience(s) is, of course, fundamental to the study of language and literature. As Mikhail Bakhtin (1986, 95) reminds us,

An essential (constitutive) marker of the utterance is its quality of being directed to someone, its *addressivity* [original underscoring].... The work, like the rejoinder in dialogue, is oriented toward the response of the other (others), toward his [*sic*] active responsive understanding, which can assume various forms: educational influence on readers, persuasion of them, critical responses, influence on followers and successors, and so on. It can influence others’ responsive positions under complex conditions of speech communication in a particular cultural sphere. (95)

The question of audiences is particularly germane to Southeast Asian studies, and to area studies more generally, in light of the vicissitudes, trajectories, uncertainties, and challenges of the field. Who are the “target audiences” of Southeast Asian studies (Ostwald and Schuler 2015, 874)? Are they students, teachers, researchers, policy professionals, bureaucrats, state agencies, politicians, governments, companies, cultural workers, nongovernmental organizations and their workers, activists, the intelligentsia, the educated public, the general public, various communities, ordinary people, “the masses,” or “the people”? In college, as a student at the University of the Philippines, I was constantly reminded that my tuition was subsidized, not just by the government or by taxpayers, but also by no less than the Filipino people, and that as an *Iskolar ng Bayan* (scholar of the nation), I was indebted to “the people” and was expected to serve the country.

More often than not, the “target audience” is (understandably) defined by Southeast Asianists based in educational institutions in the developed world as largely academic, consisting mainly of students and scholars (see, for example, Ostwald and Schular 2015, 875). These communities are quite diverse in terms of their disciplines, their areas of expertise, their methodologies, and their research interests and concerns. Given the pressures exerted on the academia by “the new quantification cult” (Mau 2019, 2), which is sadly embraced by many Southeast Asian universities, the audience is preferably one that can read and hopefully also write in English. Publishing in English, however, does not guarantee global visibility, let alone impact, as Japanese scholars have learned (Hayami 2006, 73). There exists a hierarchy in status and prestige when it comes to journal-, book-, and newspaper-publication venues. This seemingly global yet actually parochial, even exclusionary, idea of a largely Anglophone audience for prestige publications—generated out of the Anglo-American academia (see Jackson 2019)—has proven to be deeply problematical for scholars born or based in Southeast Asia (and elsewhere) who are concerned with addressing multiple sets of audiences in multiple languages.

Conceptualizing Southeast Asian Area Studies

We now know that the term “Southeast Asia” was a geographic designation before it evolved into a regional concept (Fifield 1976, 151). We know that it was a theater of World War II, the product of a division of military labor and imperial territory among the Western allies (which explains why Douglas MacArthur put the Philippine islands under his own command while Louis Mountbatten included Sri Lanka under his Southeast Asia Command) (Emmerson 1984, 7–8, 11). We know that in the postwar period, it served as a policy arena for American military and political intervention abroad (7–8) and a cultural arena of the Cold War battle for hearts and minds (Day and Liem 2010). It has since become the basis of a series of region-originating inter-state mechanisms for security and economic cooperation, for mediating political and territorial issues and disputes, and for nurturing a prospective supranational identity. It is also conceived as a “hotspot” fraught with risk, danger, and uncertainty: a hotspot for emerging infectious diseases (IRIN News 2014); a “bio-cultural hotspot” that is home to twenty percent of the world’s plant, animal, and marine species (Subramanian et al. 2011); a blue-water hotspot in terms of the consumption and wastage of surface and groundwater resources (Johnson and Lichtveld 2017, chapter 10); a hotspot of land conflicts (Roughneen 2017) and boundary, border, and territorial disputes at the local, national, regional, and international levels (see Wain 2012; Talmon and Jia 2014); a hotspot in the New Cold War between mainland China and the United States (Kaplan 2019).

We know that the area studies programs in the United States and the so-called “West” (a concept that often includes Japan) evolved out of the imperative to produce knowledge about areas that are by definition “outside” and spatially (and even temporally, epistemically, and existentially) distinct from that of the researcher (Harootunian and Miyoshi 2002, 7; Cheah 2008, 55). We also know that the relationship between the area studies specialist and the area, between knower and known, is fraught

yet productive in the sense that “biopower grounds itself in the mechanism of area as a means to order, combine, separate, and classify life at a distance” (Walker and Sakai 2019, 10, 23). Claiming that one is doing area studies in one’s own area—that one is studying one’s own country or people—does not resolve the issue. It raises the vexing question not only of one’s implication in the will to knowledge and governmentality, but also, to me, the even more vexing questions of how one goes about “making-doing” (11) belonging to any community or place, what claims are made on one by places and people in that process, and whether one can belong to any place or community. Well aware of the contingency, even accidental nature of the biographical, intellectual, and political encounters that fuel interest and careers in area studies (Rafael 2003), scholars are careful to treat Southeast Asian studies as a “heuristic device” (Chou and Houben 2006, 13), a “contingent device” (Sutherland 2005, drawing on Subrahmanyam 1997, 743), a “Euro-Japanese construct” (Reynolds 1995, 420), an “intellectual site” (Mojares 1994, 139), a “theoretical problematique” offering new sets of questions and methodologies (Tadiar 1999, 18), and “a reserve of intellectual diversity” (Cribb 2005, 55).

Such imperative nonetheless produces its own circles of esteem (Cribb 2005); its hierarchy of countries to study (with Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand as the “main” domains, and Laos, Myanmar, Malaysia, and the Philippines as “subsidiary” [Chou and Houben 2006, 11]); its “sexy” topics (the Vietnam War, ethnic minorities and relations, democratization, terrorism, borderlands, anthropocene); its “intellectual tariff barriers” (or, to be more accurate, nontariff barriers) set by language competence and fieldwork experience (Cribb 2006, 53–54); and its disciplinary limits (the exclusion, for example, of the natural sciences, which have long been a pillar of Southeast Asian studies in Japan [Hayami 2006, 67]).

Southeast Asianists’ links with the American government or American policy circles have sparked controversy. In 1970, anti-Vietnam War activists and students accused scholars like Lauriston Sharp, Michael Moerman, Herbert Philips, and Charles Keyes of colluding with the US government in their advisory roles in American agencies that were running

projects in rural Thailand (Thak 2019, 17; see also Wakin 1992, 129–81). As Thak Chaloeontiarana has pointed out, this controversy reoriented Thai anthropology away from studies of national integration and development toward analysis of social and cultural conflict that sought to explain the divisions haunting the Thai state (*ibid.*). A similar controversy broke out in Japan when student activists demonstrated against the establishment of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Kyoto University in 1963; the seed money was provided by the Ford Foundation.

This does not mean that area studies is not capable of being progressive (Dirlik 2005, 160), even as scholars based in America and other countries, especially Southeast Asia, have had to grapple with the challenges not only of debating with fellow academics but also of engaging with larger audiences and publics on the issues, for example, of how to explain the abortive coup attempt by the 30 September Movement (*Gerakan September Tiga Puluh*) in Indonesia in 1965 (Purdey 2011, 9–11) or the precise nature of the People Power Revolution in the Philippines in 1986.

Southeast Asian Studies in Asia

A more serious complaint against the largely American-dominated area studies had been its lack of significant intellectual engagement with the people and societies of what is now called Southeast Asia, and the marginal role of Southeast Asian students and academics in the formation of the field, even though Southeast Asians and Southeast Asian Americans have formed an important constituency of scholars and students (Heryanto 2002, 7; Bonura and Sears 2007, 21). Although Southeast Asian scholars trained abroad have written dissertations on their respective areas of interest, the majority of English-language books or articles on Southeast Asia are published by scholars working outside the region (McCargo 2006, 110), and relatively fewer works by region-based scholars writing in their local and national languages are tackled at length in discussions of Southeast

Asian studies (Heryanto 2002, 3). Southeast Asian scholars are urged to do comparative work, even though there are few institutional, career, and intellectual incentives to do so. The Indonesian scholar Ariel Heryanto (2002) famously posed the question, “Can there be Southeast Asians in Southeast Asian studies?.” Heryanto stated that there was a “need to expand further the space and respect for Southeast Asians as speaking subjects and fellow analysts, rather than silent objects of analysis” (16; on the importance of space and spatial difference for theory, see Jackson 2003a).

Not surprisingly, Southeast Asia-based scholars have been at the forefront of calling for the development of region-based perspectives and practices that address multiple publics in Southeast Asia and critically engage with—yet also pursue research, policy, and activist agenda that may be distinct from—those of area studies in the West. Goh Beng-Lan (2011, 13–14) envisions forms of “*thinking from and about Southeast Asia*” (original underscoring) as “subject position but without excluding others not from or located in the region.” “Southeast Asian studies in the region,” Goh argues,

has an ethical obligation to forge its own direction rather than being tied to any particular sets of disciplinary or theoretical outlooks...For Southeast Asian scholars, thinking about the local is inevitably a combination of their location in time, as well as their intellectual politics to resist domination and recover subjugated knowledge. (35)

It is heartening to know that more and more young Southeast Asian scholars are studying each other’s languages, doing research on each other’s countries, and forming their own academic and activist networks, thanks in part to scholarships offered by Southeast Asian universities and to region-based programs like the SEASREP (Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program, funded in part by the Toyota Foundation) and the Asian Public Intellectuals Fellowship (funded by the Nippon Foundation, now concluded). It remains the case, however, that—owing to history, cultural connectivity and affinity, geographical proximity, and geostrategic

interests—scholars from Thailand, for example, are more likely to study Vietnam or Myanmar. Filipino scholars find it easier to learn Bahasa Indonesia and are interested in the shared history of activism involving these two countries.

By and large, as Thongchai Winichakul (2014, 884) rightly emphasizes, Asian scholars, and by extension Southeast Asian scholars, often work on their own countries. Because studying their country means studying their “home,” their relationship to “Asia” (or Southeast Asia)—which, given its economic development and geopolitical significance, to them is far from being a marginal area—cannot be reduced to the Self/Other dichotomy that informed older notions of area studies. Furthermore, Thongchai (1995, 99) points out that Thai intellectuals do not confine themselves to working in the academia. They write in Thai, not English, to reach the Thai general public, often engage in social and political activism, are more active in public affairs (even serving in government), put more value on policy-oriented and applied knowledge, and routinely concern themselves with the needs and interests of their local and national audiences (Thongchai 2014, 888).

For Filipino scholars based in the Philippines, there are few incentives—career, institutional, and intellectual—to do comparative work on Southeast Asia. Scholar-activist Ramon Guillermo (2018) of the University of the Philippines, one of the country’s top scholars who has done research on Philippine and Indonesian literary and activist cultures, has stated that

In the first place, the main reason for the relative dearth of comparative studies is the fact that there is (as of yet) no strongly felt need for doing them in the Philippine academic context. In other words, the rationale for undertaking such work is still a puzzle for Philippine academics. It is not yet clear what comparative studies with respect to other Southeast Asian countries can contribute to a better understanding of Philippine issues and realities. All other obstacles (including language study and study grants) could potentially be overcome if these questions are answered in a way that would convince more academics.

Speaking of the Philippines, Maria Serena Diokno (2005, 134) has pointedly observed that there had been a time when Filipinos for the most part tended not to “think of themselves as part of the region” and considered Southeast Asia as an “other.” The Philippines had once been considered an outlier in Southeast Asian studies. Observes Diokno, the Philippines was “often described as atypical of the region, or, less kindly, as an aberration” (136). In the first edition of his monumental *History of South-East Asia*, published in 1955, British historian D.G.E. Hall excluded the Philippines on the grounds that the country, owing to its Spanish and American colonial experience, “stood outside the main stream of historical developments” in the region (Emmerson 1984, 11, citing Hall 1955, 3). As Hall explained it later, “so little was known of their history before the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century. That conquest linked them with Spanish America. Then, at the end of the nineteenth century their cession to the United States linked them even more closely to North America” (Hall 1973, 166). It is telling that Hall’s deliberate omission provoked protest from his own Filipino students, who “made it quite clear that they regarded themselves as Southeast Asian; and they could point to important historical connections between their country and Southeast Asia” (166). Hall, convinced by his Filipino students to include the Philippines in subsequent editions of his book, nonetheless argued that the Spanish policy of isolationism kept Filipino society “*incomunicado* from the outside world except Spain herself” and therefore proved “remarkably effective in cutting them off from contacts with Southeast Asia” (167). Excluding the Philippines from Southeast Asia owed as much to ignorance of the country’s history, culture, and people as to the failure to think of “Southeast Asia” in transregional terms (Hau 2020).

The interest in market-led regionalism and institution-building regionalization explains the growth of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) studies, as distinct from Southeast Asian studies, in the region, even as Southeast Asian scholars trained in America and other Western countries have played crucial roles in setting up Southeast Asian studies programs and centers in the region. Programs and centers for Southeast Asian or ASEAN studies have been established in the National

University of Singapore, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, University of Malaya, Chulalongkorn University, Thammasat University, University of the Philippines' Open University, and Vietnam National University. The past two decades have also seen the founding of similar programs and centers in Taiwan, China, and South Korea.

Funding opportunities, resource constraints, the scope and limits of academic networking, and institutional politics largely explain why the promotion of Southeast Asian studies may be initiated by institutions with either a broader geographical scope than Southeast Asia or a more specific disciplinary focus than area studies. This is evident in the list of members of the Consortium for Southeast Asian Studies in Asia, established in 2013, which not only include the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore; the Center for Southeast Asian Studies of Kyoto University; the Center for Southeast Asian Studies of the National Chengchi University in Taiwan; the Taiwan Association of Southeast Asian Studies; and the Southeast Asia Research Centre of the City University of Hong Kong, but also the Indonesian Institute of Sciences; the Asian Center of the University of the Philippines Diliman; the Institute of Asian Studies of Universiti Brunei Darussalam and of Chulalongkorn University; the School of Social Sciences of the Nanyang Technological University; the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore; the Center for Asia-Pacific Studies of Academia Sinica, Taiwan; and the School of International Studies of Jinan University, China.

Southeast Asia-based scholars continually confront the challenge of speaking out on "taboo" subjects in their respective countries. For instance, it is difficult to have frank discussions about the monarchy in Thailand and Brunei, or to criticize the Communist Parties of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia; the People's Action Party in Singapore; the military of Myanmar; Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines; and the Malay Agenda and political Islam in Malaysia. Southeast Asian studies require the presence of multiple institutional hubs spread around the world to provide safe havens for research on, and frank discussion of, sensitive issues that may not be easily undertaken within the region itself.

Japan has a century-long history of *Nanyō* (literally, “South Seas”) studies and, after the war, *Tōnan Ajia Chiiki Kenkyū* (Southeast Asian Studies) (Yu 2013). The Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS) at Kyoto University, where I am based, celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2015. Over the past two decades, it has stepped up its internationalization efforts through large-scale networking and collaboration, not only with Southeast Asian universities, but also with Northeast Asian and European universities, along with Cornell and Berkeley in the US. Southeast Asia is of strategic importance to the Japanese state and business and is therefore not viewed as marginal. For this reason, the Center has secured large-scale funding for its various flagship research programs. Its status as a national resource center enables it to connect Japanese scholars with their international, and especially Southeast Asian, counterparts. The CSEAS also has a clear idea of who its “target audiences” are, as these audiences include not only Japanese, but also Southeast Asians and other people interested in Southeast Asia. For example, its online journal, the *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*, currently edited by Pavin Chachavalpongpun, provides a forum for connecting university-based researchers with NGO workers, journalists, and cultural workers within and across the region. The major essays in the journal are available in six languages—Bahasa Indonesia, Filipino, Vietnamese, Thai, Japanese, and English. The journal’s issues, published thrice a year, attract about 300,000 visitors annually, with 413,000 unique page views. Its readership is largely from Southeast Asia and Japan, but also includes a substantial number of people from the US, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, South Asia, and Europe.

In an age where academic journals need to finance themselves by entering into contracts with large academic publishers and relying on subscriptions that place knowledge behind paywalls, the Center has sought to buck the trend by making its Japanese- and English-language journals freely available for download, and donating copies of its publications to Southeast Asian universities. This is quite costly, of course, in both material and intellectual terms. At the time the CSEAS Kyoto was relaunching its English-language journal, *Southeast Asian Studies*, its editorial committee

had been warned by a senior scholar and editor that making its content freely available would lessen its prestige. Our faculty took the principled stance that it was more important to reach out to Southeast Asian readers and universities that are unable to afford the prohibitive journal subscription rates. To put things in perspective, even the well-endowed Harvard University has stated that it can no longer afford the subscription fees charged by large academic publishers (Norrie 2012).

Diverging audiences, interests, and agenda not only differentiate region-based Southeast Asian studies from their counterparts elsewhere in the world. Such divergences may also create schisms within and among national communities of scholars. Take the case of the Philippines. In recent years, the Philippines' newly minted status as an emerging economy—along with the notoriety of its president, Rodrigo Duterte—has increased its visibility on the world stage. Filipino-American writers like Mia Alvar, Gina Apostol, Elaine Castillo, and Grace Talusan, have garnered mainstream critical acclaim in the United States. But with a few intermittent exceptions (Miguel Syjuco, F. Batacan, Ninotchka Rosca, and F. Sionil Jose), creative writing by Filipinos based in the Philippines, even those written in English (let alone the vital work done in Filipino and Philippine languages), remains largely invisible in the World Republic of Letters (to use Casanova's [2007] term). There are also intellectual movements that eschew the use of English as an academic lingua franca and strongly criticize what they see as the hegemony of Tagalog and of "imperial Manila." The fact that a scholar carries a Philippine passport is no guarantee that she is exempt from criticism. The geographical location of the Filipino scholar who studies her home country can be problematical as well. Filipino scholars based in foreign universities can be, and have been, dismissed by some Philippine-based scholars as "outsiders," because their "geographical distance is perceived to circumscribe their ability to discover, apprehend, or engage in indigenous discourse" (Diokno 2005, 139), even though they can speak Philippine languages.

The politics of location fuels the contest over epistemic power and authority and implicates not only Filipino scholars working abroad, but also Filipino-Foreigner academics. For while Overseas Filipino Workers are generally hailed as *bagong bayani* (new heroes), Filipino migrant intellectuals based in First-World countries, and Filipino-American scholars in particular, by virtue of their relatively privileged locations, are subjected to the nationalist “departure-as-betrayal” discourse, which views their spatial “exteriority” to the Philippines as an existential, intellectual, and political problem (Hau 2014). While scholars need to be attentive to issues of asymmetry in prestige and unequal access to resources and power that inform relations between scholars based in the metropole and in the so-called periphery, other issues undercut such attempts at easy, lazy “us-”-versus-“them” generalizations. Philippine-based middle-class intellectuals who draw a clear separation between “inside” and “outside” risk downplaying their own privileged location and status vis-a-vis other Filipinos and their sense of entitlement to speak on behalf of the “Filipino people.” On the other hand, Filipino-Americans have had to contend with their “invisibility” in America. Activists among them draw inspiration from ethnic, pan-ethnic, and transnational solidarity-building and civil rights movements to lend their voice and energies to the global fight for social justice.

Area Studies: Crisis and Response

Ironically, Southeast Asian studies came “home,” so to speak, put down roots in Southeast Asia and began flourishing in Northeast Asia, at precisely the time when it went into crisis and found itself embattled in America and Europe. A recent article by Chua Beng Huat, Ken Dean, Engseong Ho, Ho Kong Chong, Jonathan Rigg, and Brenda Yeoh (2019) in *South East Asia Research* argues that, in an era of funding cuts, “declining student interest,” and “loss of intellectual legitimacy,” area studies (and Southeast Asian studies in particular) has lost its validity and significance

as it grapples with the three-pronged problems of “weak rules, hard borders, and ancestral sin” (i.e., the absence of a “canon of defined theories and methods,” the constraining effects of “defined geographical borders,” and the “politically and intellectually corrosive legacy of Area Studies’ origins in the global North”) (see Chua et al. 2019, 33, 45).

Faced with this gloomy prognosis, Southeast Asianists have responded in creative and productive ways.

One trend has been to re-orient area studies not only toward theme- or issue-based research, with Southeast Asia as “grounds of comparison” (Cheah and Culler 2013), toward a more rigorous engagement with, and foundation in, the various disciplines. This trend is especially pronounced in the United States. While area studies “laid the institutional basis for the subsequent establishment of Women’s Studies, Gender Studies, African American Studies, Ethnic Studies, Asian-American Studies, Cultural Studies, Agrarian Studies and numerous other interdisciplinary centers and programs since 1970s” (Szanton 2004, 18), area studies, much like the local scholarship produced in the region itself (Heryanto 2002, 5), had been dismissed by social scientists for their alleged lack of theory and disciplinary rigor. The disciplinal and theoretical turns represent efforts to broaden the appeal of area studies in crisis by attracting broader academic audiences within and hopefully across disciplines (Katzenstein 2001).

Instead of being bogged down in debates between area and discipline, and between qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis, Cornell’s Thomas Pepinsky calls for embracing, rather than transcending, “the tensions *within* disciplines, *between* discipline and area, and across disciplines *in* the area” (2015, 216). An example is Goh Beng-Lan’s proposal (2019, 499) to effect a synthesis between anthropology and Southeast Asian studies by bringing them into “mutual competition.” Goh looks at emergent “alternative Islamic imaginaries,” which are evident in grassroots activism and artistic practices that challenge the religious dogmas and deeply bifurcated civil society that Islamic orthodoxies have enforced (502). Books like *Southeast Asia in Political Science* (Kuhonta, Slater, and Vu 2008)

argue that while Southeast Asian studies can generate theoretical and empirical knowledge, Southeast Asianists “need to think more comparatively, engage theory more explicitly, and delineate causal findings more precisely” (328). Addressing the Anglophone community of social scientists based mainly in America, Kuhonta, Slater, and Vu (2008, 24) declare that “Southeast Asia’s geographical marginalization may be insuperable, but its relative theoretical marginalization in the social sciences should not be.”

In economics, there has been an empirical turn, as young economists conduct empirically grounded research that not only yields theoretical insights but also contributes to policymaking (The Economist 2018). Calls for “globally relevant and publicly engaged Southeast Asian political studies” (Pepinsky 2014, 458) are most welcome, even as tensions between the scholarly desire for rigor, on the one hand, and policy and social relevance, on the other hand, persist and need to be managed (Desch 2019, *passim*). Michael Desch has faulted the professionalization of the social sciences with promoting an overly narrow preoccupation with method at the expense of interdisciplinary, in-depth, and broader knowledge (2019, 14, 15). Policymakers continue to find area studies scholarship useful; in fact, the failure of the Kennedy and Johnson administration policies in Vietnam has been partly attributed to the lack of area expertise and the marginalization of area studies in the wake of the Behavioral Revolution in political science (Desch 2019, 199, 204, 299). Moreover, policymakers tend to prefer “historical analysis, case studies, [and] theoretical writings that illustrate theory with case studies and concrete examples” over “more sophisticated social science methods such as formal models, operations research, theoretical analysis, and quantitative analysis” (Avey and Desch 2014, 229, 231). At the same time, scholars involved in policymaking must grapple with the fraught issue of the social responsibility of intellectuals and the politically contentious nature of the mental maps of the world and reality that they help draw and defend.

Duncan McCargo (2010) has rightly pointed out that scholars like Benedict Anderson, Alfred McCoy, and James Scott were singled out by the editors of *Southeast Asia in Political Science* as examples of Southeast Asianists who have made important contributions to political science but are not, in fact, considered mainstream political scientists (188). What is remarkable about the work of these Southeast Asianists is that it is “typically characterized by interdisciplinarity, eclecticism, and even sheer eccentricity” (189). Richard Robison (2010, 191), on the other hand, sees *Southeast Asia in Political Science* as addressing political scientists “specifically in the US context” and that the kind of analysis the editors call for represents only “one tradition of political analysis” and that “much of the political analysis of the region has taken place outside this framework” (191). As Don Emmerson (2008, 308) has remarked, this debate goes beyond arguments about theory and methodology; rather, it indexes “dilemmas of allegiance” that are particularly vexing for young scholars who need to jump through academic hoops in their quest for tenure. Emmerson believes that achieving tenure may lessen the pressures of claiming allegiance to disciplines, even as he criticizes the propensity of certain scholars based in one discipline to denigrate other fields such as social anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, and literature (316).

There are other strategies to rescue area studies from the margins. Pheng Cheah’s idea of “universal areas” (2008) underlines the capacity of area studies to generate insights that can be shared with the world. Inter-regional, trans-regional, and global approaches make Southeast Asia a ground (better, grounds) not only for comparisons, but also for rethinking foundational concepts and, even better, creating new ones. This type of approach has been fruitfully employed, for example, in the study of Islam and the Arabic cosmopolis (see, for example, the excellent works of Kahn 2015; Tagliacozzo 2013; Ricci 2011; Formichi 2016); the Sanskrit cosmopolis (Pollock 2006); zomia (Schendel 2005; Scott 2009); Communism (McAdams 2017; see also the essays in Musto and Amini 2018); oligarchy (Winters 2011); and empire (see Fradera 2018 and Go 2011). There exists a substantial body of scholarship under the rubric of what Liu Hong calls

“Sino-Southeast Asian Studies,” which explores the multidimensional relationship between China and Southeast Asia (Liu 2000; see also Wade and Chin 2019). Since the 1990s, the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Society has promoted regional intellectual exchange by showcasing the work of scholars in and on Asia in conferences and through its eponymous journal.

Another approach is to seek synergies between area studies and other fields, as Peter Jackson (2003a and 2003b) and Rommel Curaming (2006) have done in their respective calls for “a post-structuralist area studies.” There have also been attempts to use Southeast Asia as a jumping board for interventions in postcolonial literary and cultural studies (Hidalgo and Legasto 1993; Foulcher 1995; Philpott 2000; Day and Foulcher 2002; Chua 2008; Bernards 2012), which have traditionally received less attention than the social sciences in Southeast Asian studies.

Asian-American scholars have sought to bridge Southeast Asian area studies and American ethnic studies through the concept of “Southeast Asian American Studies,” which is based on a “regional diaspora” connecting Southeast Asian nations to each other and to each other’s diaspora (Nguyen 2012, 917). The impetus for Southeast Asian American Studies developed out of the demands of “identity politics, academic-field building, community organizing, social service work, and political representation” (913). Viet Thanh Nguyen has pointed out that while Asian American studies valorizes the “oppositional and contestatory” (924) qualities of Asian immigrant cultures, practitioners often find themselves confronting “actually existing” Asian-American political subjects (*ibid.*), whose political inclinations and actions do not neatly align with the progressive ideals espoused in Asian-American studies. An influential strand of Southeast Asian Studies in America does have an oppositional, progressive bent, but the experience of promoting Southeast Asian studies in Southeast Asia highlights the fact that assumptions about progressive politics and critique are not necessarily shared by scholars, students, and policymakers, let alone by the members of societies that are supposedly the subjects of study (Goh 2011, 9).

At the same time, diaspora studies exhibit their own hierarchies and internal limits and exclusions. Let me use the Filipino diaspora as an example. Filomeno Aguilar (2015) has argued that the Filipinos in America often serve as the typecase and paradigm of the Filipino diasporic experience, even though they represent only a third of the Filipinos living abroad. The Filipino-American anthropologist Deirdre de la Cruz (2006, 38, cited in Aguilar 2015, 443) poses this cogent question, “What does it mean that with several million Filipinos living—and importantly, working—in all corners of the world... ‘diaspora’ continues to be defined along a US/Philippine axis?” De la Cruz and Aguilar caution against the methodological bilateralism at work in scholarship that views the Filipino diaspora exclusively in terms of US-Philippines relations while glossing over the experiences of Filipinos living in other parts of the world (Aguilar 2015, 442–43).

Yet another approach is to integrate areas into “greater area studies” as we see in American area studies. Daniel Immerwahr’s *How to Hide an Empire* (2019a) draws on Benedict Anderson’s idea (1991, 176) (via Thongchai Winichakul’s *Siam Mapped* [1994]) of the “logo map” to examine the ways in which Americans have created racialized, boundary-setting, and exclusionary mental maps and policies that served to distinguish states from territories, citizens from nationals and subjects. Among the interesting facts the book presents, using a perspective that treats America’s colonies as an “integral part” rather than “outside” of the US, is that the Philippine colonial bill was the basis of the design for the American dollar bill (2019a, 16); that the Spanish colonies of the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico acquired by the Americans constituted about ten percent of the US population (79); that Manila was the sixth-largest city in the US (larger than Boston and Washington, D.C.) (210); and that its devastation during World War II was “the most destructive event ever to take place on US soil” (212).

Before the book’s publication, Immerwahr had delivered a lecture in which he argued that writing the history of the “Greater United States” necessarily includes the experiences of countries such as Philippines, Puerto

Rico, Guam, and Cuba over which the US had once claimed sovereignty (2016, 377). This provoked a response from Paul Kramer (author of the critically acclaimed *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* [2006]), who criticized the concept of “Greater United States” for its conflation of US colonialism with “empire” and its uncritical stance on the politics of naming and the fraught history of the use of such a concept. Kramer also took Immerwahr to task for ignoring the substantial body of scholarship, including contributions from area studies and ethnic studies produced in and outside the United States, on the issue of past and present US colonies. (A cursory look at *How to Hide an Empire* reveals that the book cites more Philippine area studies scholarship than Filipino-American empire studies scholarship.) Kramer questions Immerwahr’s claim that such scholarship remains outside the so-called “mainstream” (2018, 919) and provides a lengthy bibliographic appendix listing published books and dissertations relating to US colonialism in the Philippines and Puerto Rico (924–31). In his response, Immerwahr (2019b, 402–03) provides a broader definition of a “mainstream” audience that is served by middle-school textbook publishers, “flagship” journals, and “prominent historians.” He also cites African-American history as an example of a subfield that goes well “[b]eyond the subfield of African-American history, beyond history departments, beyond academia.”

The Question of Audience(s): Rizal and Anderson

As the Immerwahr-Kramer debate shows, questions of audience(s) continue to haunt academia. I would like to push the concept of “audience” further by examining the audience(s) conjured by three acknowledged classic texts in Southeast Asian studies: Filipino National Hero José Rizal’s two novels, *Noli me tângere* (1887) and *El filibusterismo* (1891), and Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1991). I use the word “conjured” deliberately to emphasize three things: the fact that these texts were written with specific audiences in mind; the fact that upon publication

these texts interacted with audiences in ways that exceeded the imagined, hypothetical audience that these authors claimed to address; and the fact that the interaction between the texts and their actual readers, whether intended or unexpected, had lasting effects that arguably account for the influential afterlives of these texts.

Let me first turn to Rizal's novels. *Noli me tângere* (which Filipinos call the *Noli*) and *El filibusterismo* (the *Fili*) were written in Spanish and published in Berlin, Germany in 1887 and Ghent, Belgium in 1891, respectively. They are arguably the two most important literary works produced by a Filipino, "foundational fictions" (to use Sommer's [1993] term for analogous novels in Latin America) that have cast a long shadow on Philippine nationalism and shaped Filipino political and social thinking and the development of literature in Filipino, English, and other Philippine languages.

Rizal was clear about the intended audience of his novels. The *Noli*, he wrote in a letter to a fellow reformist, was "written for Filipinos, and it is necessary that it should be read by Filipinos" (Rizal 1938, vol. 2, 29, translation mine). Writing to his Austrian friend Ferdinand Blumentritt, Rizal called the *Noli* "the first impartial and bold book about the life of the Tagalogs. The Filipinos will find in it the history of the last ten years" (Rizal 1938, vol. 5, 96–97). He went on to say, "Here, I answer all the false conceptions that they [the government and the friars] have written against us and all the insults with which they have humiliated us" (97). His goal?

It is better to write for my countrymen... I must wake from its slumber the spirit of my fatherland... I must first propose to my countrymen an example with which to struggle against their bad qualities and afterwards, when they have reformed, then many writer will rise up who can present my fatherland to proud Europe, as a young damsel enters society after she has completed her education. (291–92)

To this effect, “I have told our compatriots of our faults, our voices, our culpable and shameful complacency with these miseries” (Rizal 1963, 83–84).

If you are puzzled by Rizal’s explanations of who he imagines the readers of his novels to be, welcome to the club! Rizal says that the *Noli* was “written for Filipinos, and it is necessary that it should be read by Filipinos,” and yet his first novel dealt mainly with life in the Tagalog region (even as he went on frame his second novel nationally by calling it a “Filipino novel”) and his audience included “proud Europe” before which he hoped Filipino writers to come would present their country as worthy of inclusion in world civilization. We should also remember that by the end of the Spanish colonial period, less than three percent of the Filipino population had a good command of Spanish (Sibayan and Gonzalez 1996, 139). That Rizal was well-aware of the dilemma of writing in Spanish is evident in the fact that at different times in his life, he had considered writing a novel in French and begun writing one in Tagalog (Ocampo 1992). He wrote about ten pages in Tagalog, gave up, attempted to write the novel anew in Spanish, and gave up; he never completed the third novel. In which language to write was a dilemma for Rizal. French, the transcontinental lingua franca of the world’s elites (and, in particular, “proud Europe”) at the time, might have brought him more cultural prestige, but doing so would bar most Filipinos, even some Spanish friends and, just as important, foes from reading his novels. Tagalog might have brought him an audience in the Philippines, but his novels would not have been read by the majority of Filipinos (not even other *ilustrados*), who were non-Tagalogs speaking different Philippine languages.

Even though the language in which these novels were written set limits on who were able to read them, the novels take as their theme the presence, communicative power, and incalculable effects of crowds of people. The novels attempt to provide cues on how they should be read, even as the play of reticence and revelation opens these novels to interpretation and appropriation beyond the author’s ken. Gossip, rumors, fake news, private conversations, public speeches, town hall debates,

quarrels, newspaper accounts, letters—the *Noli* reports them all to the reader, who occupies a privileged position in making sense of the occurrences in the novel, sorting out the truths from the lies, and sifting the wheat of fact from the chaff of speculation.

Who were Rizal's imputed readers? Rizal's novels set up an ideal reader as an adjudicator. The imputed reader of these novels is a highly select, literate, and cosmopolitan sort who can recognize and appreciate the allusions and epigraphs inlaid in the novel. Rizal's presumed readership is made up of an elite cohort of "friends and foes," literate in Spanish, residing in the Philippines or abroad, and well-versed in the milieu of these places. This ideal reader must be privileged enough to have had a sufficient Western-style education to recognize classical, Christian, European, and Enlightenment references (names like Bécquer, Berzelius, Boussuet, Champollion, Cicero, Lope de Vega, Delaroché, Galen, Gay-Lussac, Heine, Schiller, Secchi, Sulla, and Voltaire). At the same time, the ideal reader understands, and delights in, the novel's strategic use and explanation of both local (Tagalog) vocabulary and local references. The ideal reader, in other words, would be someone from within Rizal's own small circle of fellow (male, if not Tagalog) *ilustrados* and the Spanish-speaking, educated reading public in and beyond Filipinas.

The actual impact of the two novels far exceeded Rizal's expectations, not owing to the fact that they became bestsellers and were widely read. On the contrary: only two thousand copies of the *Noli* were printed, and due to strict censorship, only a small number of copies found their way into Filipino hands. We can surmise that at best, the novel was read by a small number of people, mostly Spaniards and Spanish-literate Filipinos. And yet, the controversy aroused by these novels, which were impounded by the government and condemned by religious authorities, enabled the circulation and transmission of the *Noli*'s content. This relaying of the novel's message took the principal form of gossip and rumors, and was therefore crucially mediated by the perspectives of the various readers who interpreted the novels, and their author, according to their own

languages, interests, and agenda. In fact, the close attention accorded by Rizal to depicting crowds—people from all walks of society, moving and acting and, just as important, talking and commenting on unfolding events—had the conjuring effect of calling forth a revolution.

By questioning the foundations of colonial authority, Rizal and his novels gave rise to images, thoughts, and fantasies among their readers and audiences that exceeded Rizal's own stated political intentions, engendering political effects that Rizal could neither have foreseen nor forestalled.

While the *Fili* imagined a failed revolution led by the Creole Juan Crisóstomo Ibarra, a reference to the abortive Creole revolutions in the Philippines that were inspired by the revolutions in Latin America, Rizal's novels were actually being read, rumor-mongered, interpreted, and acted upon by other social groups: the urban middle sector and municipal elites, that is, the people who came from the same social background as Ibarra's foil and fellow protagonist, Elías. The urban middle sector would in fact seize the initiative to establish the revolutionary secret society, the *Katipunan*, and municipal elites would join the Philippine Revolution that broke out a few years later (Cullinane 2014). The *Katipunan* used Rizal's name as a rallying cry. Although Rizal claimed he had been misinterpreted, and adamantly denied authorship of the 1896 Philippine Revolution, he would nonetheless pay the ultimate penalty for being the author—in both senses of writer and agent/instigator—of the revolution, “el verbo,” the word incarnate, of *Filibusterismo* (De la Costa 1961, 43, 33, 158).

Here, then, is a case in which writing two novels inspired their audiences to act in two ways: wage an anticolonial revolution, the first of its kind in Asia, and get the author executed, despite Rizal's insistence that he had not supported the *Katipunan*-led revolution.

Sixty years after Rizal's execution, the Philippine state would pass a bill to include the national hero's life and works (including unexpurgated editions of the two novels) in the official curricula of public and private

schools, colleges, and universities. The Catholic Church would undermine this bill by forcing a compromise that exempted students from reading the novels “for reasons of religious belief.” Translations of Rizal into various Philippine languages, including English, would shape the readers’ experiences of these novels. One hard-hitting analysis by a Southeast Asianist of Leon Ma. Guerrero’s influential (1961) English translation of the *Noli* lays bare the linguistic and textual strategies by which the Guerrero translation, produced in the era of official nationalism, works to stifle the subversiveness of Rizal’s laughter, entomb the novels in the “antique past” (Anderson 1998a, 239), sanitize their earthy and radical content, and cut the reader off from the local references (most of them in Tagalog) and European allusions. The Guerrero translation, in effect, turns Rizal into a “silent waxwork martyr” (ibid., 253), effaces the hybrid histories and cultures of the Filipino elite, renders unimaginable Rizal’s world, and makes the *Noli* boring and irrelevant to contemporary readers.

That hard-hitting analysis was written by Benedict Anderson, a professor of Government at Cornell University, who taught himself Spanish in order to read Rizal in the original, and who would play a crucial role in bringing Rizal before a larger international audience. A polyglot expatriate who carried an Irish passport all his life and was deeply aware of his own country’s fraught history of anticolonial struggle against the British, Anderson had an affinity with Rizal, and would fondly refer to him as “Lolo José” (Grandfather José).

This brings me to my second case study, Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1991, hereinafter *IC*). *Imagined Communities* is arguably the most-cited English-language book produced by a self-professed Southeast Asianist. In 2016, it was the fifth most-cited social science book (Green 2016), after Thomas Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolution* (1962), Everett Rogers’ *Diffusion of Innovation* (1962), Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968/1970), and Michael E. Porter’s *Competitive Strategy* (1980). In the Humanities, not even Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1979),

Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1976, 2016), or Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) come close.

Anderson had originally written *IC* with a specific intended audience in mind: the intelligentsia of the United Kingdom. Here is his account of the making of his book.

This is why the book contains so many quotations from, and allusions to, English poetry, essays, histories, legends, etc. that do not have to be explained to English readers, but which are likely to be unfamiliar to others. There are also jokes and sarcasms only the English would find amusing or annoying. For fun I always titled British rulers as if they were ordinary people, e.g. Charles Stuart for Charles I, but used the standard format for foreign kings (Louis XIV). A radical English feminist once wrote to complain about this “discrimination.” Of course, I was pleased. (Aguilar et al. 2011, 125)

Anderson also left the German and French quotations untranslated, intending this as a

rebuke to American academic culture, also UK to a lesser degree. But the book was aimed at a British public, not an American one (on the whole), and I knew very well that at least older U.K. intellectuals would feel patronized if I translated the French and German. (Aguilar et al. 2011, 123)

In his memoir, Anderson shares that his targets, as it were, included “Eurocentrism, traditional Marxism, and liberalism” (2016, 126). His style of comparison differed from that of standard comparisons undertaken in comparative politics. Comparisons, which he thought of not as a method or academic technique, but as a “discursive strategy” (129), were meant to “surprise” readers and also, to “globalize” the history of nationalism (127). They required the reader to “leap back and forth” between “Naples, Tokyo, Manila, Barcelona, Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Brussels, St. Petersburg, Tampa, and London” (129). They also required the reader to “think about one’s

own circumstances, class position, gender, level and type of education, mother language, etc., when doing comparisons” (131).

Anderson also gave freedom to his Japanese translators to substitute “appropriate Japanese quotations, allusions, jokes” (125–26). The Japanese translation of *IC* by Takashi and Saya Shiraishi would go on to be the biggest-selling translation edition of *IC*, and be a required reading for Japanese college students (on the “geo-biography” and translation history of *IC*, see Anderson 2006). In this process of collaboration, reinterpretation, appropriation, and multiple authorship by the author, translator, and reader, *IC* has circulated in more than thirty languages. For Rebecca Walkowitz (2015), it is a “born-translated” work analogous to the novel, and it works only because *IC* ended up being widely translated, not because Anderson had originally conceived, let alone intended, his work to be translated into so many languages. Anderson was well-aware of the linguistic, intellectual, and material advantages conferred by his academic training, location, and movement across the two successive hegemonies of Britain and America, his tenured position with the premier hub of Southeast Asian studies in America (from which niche he went in search of revolution and later launched his nationalism salvo), and his use of English as the global lingua franca. More important, while it was written in dialogue with UK scholars, it was *IC*’s ability to fill the gap (or lack) in *American* scholarship on nationalism that arguably accounts for its widespread impact.

In the UK, the book was warmly received by reviewers such as Edmund Leach, Conan Cruise O’ Brien, and Winston James, who wrote for the so-called “quality press” (Anderson 2016, 149). The academic reception of *IC* in America was less straightforward. Although Anthony Reid (1985) had written a favorable and balanced review of the book, here is how Anderson recounts the general reception of the book in his memoir, *A Life Beyond Boundaries* (2016, 150–51).¹

In the US, the book was almost completely ignored. In a way, this was fair enough, since I hadn't written the book for Americans in the first place. Besides, in the US, nation-wide quality presses are not common. However, one old European emigré political scientist, writing for the *American Political Science Review*, did review it, and deemed it worthless apart from its catchy title.

This situation changed rapidly at the end of the 1980s, with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Like all empires, the American empire needs enemies. "Dangerous nationalism" (which of course did not include American nationalism) emerged to fill the vacuum left by the evaporation of "the communist threat." (150)

* * * *

A second factor was that, mainly by word of mouth, *Imagined Communities* had caught on in departments of history, sociology, anthropology, and, strangely enough, English and comparative literature, and was being widely used as a graduate-level textbook. Political science was the one obvious exception, but eventually it had to yield to student demand for courses on nationalism, which, amazingly enough, did not exist almost anywhere in the US. As a result, in my fifties, I found my position completely changed. Suddenly I became a "theorist," not just an area studies figure. I was even urged to teach a graduate course on the "theory of nationalism," which I had never previously considered doing. To my amusement, the students who took the course came not only from political science, but from history, anthropology, comparative literature, and sociology. (150–51)

Here, then, we have a book that was initially ignored by the disciplinary field of the author but gained traction largely by word of mouth among students before it was taken up by professors across a range of disciplines in the social sciences and the humanities.

Early in Anderson's career, when his dissertation came out as a book, *Java in the Time of Revolution* (1972), one senior colleague said to him, "I didn't finish your book, though it looked well done. Isn't it just history? Where is the theory?" Anderson had considered himself an "outsider" in the Department of Government. He said,

Later, I heard from students that a gifted senior said to them, "Anderson has a good mind, but he is basically an area studies person," which meant someone second-class. I didn't mind this judgment because I too saw myself as basically an area studies person. (Anderson 2016, 149)

The "problem of audience" was never far from Anderson's mind, and he talks at length about this in his memoir (2016). Students, he said, discern key features of their "future readership" (160).

They are typically told to write for other members of their disciplines, colleagues, editors of disciplinary journals, potential employers, and eventually their own students. Their prose should reveal immediately the guild to which they belong... Writing for a large, generally educated public, so they are often told, inevitably entails simplification, "popularization" and lack of technical sophistication (that is, it is too easily comprehensible). (160)

Books should be published by university presses rather than commercial presses (160). Anderson compared the process of "disciplining" students to think and write in the academic style to a form of Chinese foot-binding (161).

Who would have thought that *IC* would inspire Abdullah Ocalan, leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party, to undergo an intellectual conversion that made him open to negotiations with the Turkish state (Danforth 2013)? I do not know whether Ben ever heard of this news, but if he had, I'm sure he would have been pleased.

While much has been made of Anderson's theoretical contributions to the study of nationalism, it is interesting to note the Latin Americanist reception of *IC*'s thesis about the role of newspapers in providing a "national space" on the eve of the Latin American independence. While *IC* had an enormous impact on Latin American scholars and scholars of Latin America, this impact had less to do with the historical and empirical accuracy of Anderson's arguments concerning the region than with the intellectual fecundity of the questions he raised, and attempted to answer, about nationalism. In fact, Latin Americanist historians and literary scholars argue that the "nation" remained "more aspiration than fact for many decades after gaining independence between 1810 and 1825" (Chasteen 2003, xviii). Latin Americanists disagree with Anderson's thesis on the role played by newspapers in fostering national consciousness before the wars of independence, and on the role played by the circulation of creole bureaucrats in setting the territorial definition of what would later become independent states (xix–xx). Anderson's specific arguments about the region "have had little impact on Latin American studies. Reference to the chapter on Creole pioneers rarely appears in Latin American citations of Anderson. Instead, Latin Americanists cite *Imagined Communities* and (especially among critics) draw on his theorization of the central role of the print media in imagining national communities" (xxi). They also argue that Anderson's remarks on Latin America are pertinent more to its postcolonial age than to its pre-independence and revolutionary eras (xxiii).

Anderson sought to rescue the "goodness" of the nation from the evils and abuses inflicted upon people in its name (Anderson 1998b). For many Southeast Asians, the nation is something they can neither embrace nor repudiate. More than a century ago, Rizal used his novels to explore the possibility of the failure of communication, of belonging, of community

even. Far from being unique to a country with a fragile democracy, a weak state, a strong predatory elite, and a diasporic population, the possibility of failure that Rizal tried to map speaks to the more fundamental aporia at the heart of efforts to imagine and make community, and this very issue has returned with a “populist”/“nativist” vengeance to the developed world.

Conclusion

I end not with any definitive statement, but with a series of questions. For whom are Southeast Asian studies? Who gets to decide? What kinds of audiences, hypothetical and actual, do Southeast Asianists address? How may area studies practitioners contribute to progressive politics, and address the pressing claims of communities in which “making-doing” belonging is fraught, and not just for the area studies practitioner? What claims do our audience(s) make on us, and what are our scholarly commitments and ethical obligations toward them?

The way to go was already suggested in the late 1990s by Ruth McVey (1998) when she delivered the “Third Frank Golay Memorial Lecture” at Cornell University. “We need,” she said, “to emphasize cooperation rather than competition” (54). She spoke as well of the need “to think more in terms of networks than of institutions and these networks should in principle be global and not just regional or national” (55). Above all, McVey issued this important reminder, “It is not that Southeast Asia is the object of our study, but that Southeast Asians are its subject” (53). McVey’s choice of the word “subject” is telling, not because of the lines it seems to draw between subject and object and between “us” scholars and “them” Southeast Asians, but because of the ambiguity inherent in the idea of the “subject:” at once imbued with agency, yet also conditional, dependent, and as likely to do or act as to be acted or imposed upon; a subject that is both the topic of discussion and the branch of knowledge taught in an academic setting. Is this an issue of eschewing Southeast Asia

as a field and addressing Southeast Asians as people, or is it rather an issue of the ethico-political obligations and responsibilities that arise from all such attempts and undertakings? Saying that Southeast Asian Studies should include more Southeast Asian perspectives and practitioners does not resolve the issue, for Southeast Asians themselves are not free of these obligations and responsibilities toward people they call their own or countries they consider themselves part of.

What kinds of communities—intellectual, political, cultural, or religious—are Southeast Asian studies capable of conjuring? Can we conceive of audiences not simply as intended “targets” but also as accidental, unexpected interlocutors, “friends” but also “foes” from near and far? How much freedom can we carve out for ourselves within the constraints of the institutions and countries we work in to imagine and realize the kind of Southeast Asian studies we would like to have and share with our respective communities here and there, in Southeast Asia and the world?

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End Note

¹ The memoir was first published in Japanese as *Yashigara wan no soto he* (Out of the Coconut Half-Shell, 2009). I am unable to track down the negative review of *Imagined Communities* in the *American Political Science Review* that Anderson mentions in his memoir. It is possible that Anderson was referring to the review by Alexander Motyl (2002) in *Comparative Politics*, wherein Motyl stated that *IC* “did not really proffer a rigorous, conceptually coherent explanation of a set of phenomena, or a theory” (235), and that Anderson’s “main theoretical contribution to the study of nations and nationalism may be the term ‘imagined communities,’” a term that has “severe conceptual limitations” (*ibid.*). I thank JPaul Manzanilla for alerting me to the Motyl review. A review by the noted philosopher and scholar of the Holocaust Berel Lang (1984) in *Worldview* hailed *Imagined Communities* as an “illuminating and provocative book” and “a good read as well as an occasion for further reflection” (21).

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