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The Grammars of Modern Identity

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Als die Tiger trinkend sich im Wasser erblicken,
werden sie oft gefährlich.

When tigers see themselves in the water they drink,
they often become dangerous.

—Bertolt Brecht

I. Preliminaries

On February 29, 1920, in the small township of Delanggu, Cen-
tral Java, close to the heart of the fabulously productive sugar
belt of the colonial Netherlands East Indies, something quite
without local precedent took place: an open-air political rally.
Among the fiery speakers who addressed the surely bewildered
but excited assembly of peasants in sarongs and sugar-central
workers in baggy shorts, none must have been more strangely
striking than the man known as Haji Misbach. For his title
showed that he was a pious returned pilgrim from Mecca, but
on this day he spoke also as a committed Communist. And his
dark brown face was positioned between a gleaming white pith
helmet and an elegantly tailored colonial-style high-necked
white jacket. What he said was no less extraordinary:

> The present age can rightly be called the *djaman balik boeono* [an
> ancient Javanese folk-expression meaning "age-of-the-world-
> turned-upside-down," or chaos] — for what used to be above is
> now certainly under. It is said that in the country of Oostenrijk
> [Dutch for "Austria"], which used to be headed by a *radja* [Malay
> for "monarch"], there has now been a *balik boeono*. It is now

headed by a Republic, and many *ambtenaar* [Dutch for "government official"] have been killed by the Republic. A former *ambtenaar* has only to show his nose for his throat to be cut. So, brothers, remember! The land belongs to no one other than ourselves.[1]

Misbach's account was quite correct, if, alas, three months late. Charles VII had abdicated the Austro-Hungarian throne in November 1918. Revolutionary upsurges had occurred in Vienna and Budapest. Béla Kun's Hungarian Communist Party had seized power on March 21, 1919, and in the four months before this regime collapsed in face of Czech and Romanian invasions, it did execute a good number of class-enemies. But by November 25, the Allies had helped put Miklós Horthy in power, and he proceeded to launch a white terror of his own.

Correct, but then astonishing. For he spoke to his illiterate audience with the fullest confidence in the existence of a country he called "Oostenrijk" — for which neither Javanese nor Malay had yet a name, and which he had never seen with his own eyes — on the other side of the "world." Furthermore, he described revolutionary events in Europe as if they were coordinated with events in Java — within a single global frame of time, so to speak: the age-of-the-world-turned-upside-down. This absolutely real, imagined coordination allowed him to predict that the fate that had befallen *radja* and *ambtenaar* in Oostenrijk would imminently strike their counterparts in the Netherlands Indies. What made this coordination conceivable was Misbach's use of the little word "a." "A" *radja*, "a" *balik boeono*, "a" Republic, "a" former *ambtenaar* — in each case the article "a" showed his imagining of global category-series that indifferently spanned visible Java and invisible Oostenrijk. That Misbach could use three different languages, including colonial Dutch, to indicate these series also indicated something then very new: that languages are transparent to one another, interpenetrate one another, and map one another's domains — at an equal remove from the material world. For this equality to become possible, Dutch had to descend from its status as the language of colonial domination, and Javanese from its position as the language of ancestral truth. A last crucial, half-invisible novelty was the matter-of-factly new way in which Misbach used the word *boeono*.

Its ancient meaning was something close to "cosmos" — a natural, vertical universe encompassing everything from the Deity (or deities), kings, aristocrats, peasants, fauna, and flora to the landscapes in which they were embedded. It was in this sense that petty Javanese rulers of the day could still call themselves *Paku Buwono* (Nail of the Cosmos), i.e., pivots of a natural cosmic order. But Misbach, gleefully anticipating a series of overturnings of *boeono*, clearly meant by it "world" in the novel sense of a horizontal universe of visible and invisible, utterly comparable human beings from which demons, water buffalo, volcanoes, and angels had disappeared.

What made Misbach and his speech possible and, at the same time, makes him such a familiar figure to us today? (Misbach's father, in his youth, would have found his speech incomprehensible.) The answer, I think, is that he spoke in the modern grammar of seriality, by which almost everything stands under the sign of "a," that is, as fundamentally representative rather than *sui generis*.[2] And what taught him to think in this manner were the institutions of mass urban culture that industrial capitalism and the technologies of mechanical reproduction were bringing to the colony from the 1890s onward.

The central institution, for our purposes here, was, and is, the newspaper. From its earliest days in Europe and the Americas, newspapermen — without thinking much about it — attempted to bring Misbach's "world" to their local readers by means of the locally dominant vernacular. Newspapers might give far greater coverage to events taking place within the political state where they were produced, but their reach always went much further.[3] Over time, as the means of communication were perfected and accelerated, this "world coverage," no matter how distorted in practice, became ever more normalized. No one in Rangoon is surprised to see European Football Cup results in his Burmese newspaper; Korean newspapers find it perfectly natural to report on atrocities in Rwanda; and so on. Everywhere, quite unselfconsciously, "this world of mankind" is taken for granted. But — and this is perhaps even more important — the paradoxical situation of local, vernacular presses reporting on the whole world, thus far beyond the real territorial domain encompassing particular readerships, necessitated a profound homogenization, standardization, and, indeed, serial-

ization of vocabularies. No matter how vast the concrete differences in languages, beliefs, economies, and social relations between the "subjects" of newspapers' reportage, their fundamental grammar overrides almost all such differences. Haile Selassie and Hirohito are serialized as *empéreurs*; Caracas and Hanoi as "capital cities"; de Gaulle and Nyerere as *nationalistes*, Plantagenet England and eighteenth-century Siam as *sakdina* social orders[4] — and, of course, Oostenrijk and Java as sites of *balik boeono*. In effect, the newspapers were and are producing, quite unselfconsciously, what I would call "quotidian universals," ceaselessly and seamlessly mapping a singular world. This is why we always find our own newspapers, no matter how irritating their bias, perfectly comprehensible even when they speak of remote places of which we know next to nothing. Furthermore, one should not forget another critical peculiarity of the newspaper, namely that dozens of unconnected developments in different parts of the *boeono* appear juxtaposed in the same pages of a particular daily issue: that is, they are bathed in a shared (serial) Time.

Something quite similar has been taking place in the domain of the image, and for connected reasons. Let me draw again on turn-of-the-century colonial Java for a vivid illustration of the transformation I have in mind. Up until the end of the last century, all popular indigenous performances (shadow-puppet theater, dance drama, masked dance, and so on) were grounded in a logic that was profoundly iconographic. The stories were invariably drawn from local legends or from episodes in the Mahabharata and Ramayana epics, which over the centuries had become so indigenized that only a tiny minority of the population was aware of their Indic provenance. Not only were the stories familiar to audiences, but so were their characters, which were differentiated by strictly defined rules: body types, coiffures, speech styles, makeup, costumes, gestures, and so on. There was, so to speak, only one Shiva or Rama, who was instantly recognized the minute he appeared on stage — by his modulated singularity. (We recognize this type of representation in Western traditional conventions about what Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, Saint Sebastian, and Satan must look like.) In this kind of drama there was no question of consciously interpreting the characters, and it was often thought unimportant

that a female character was performed by a male actor (and sometimes vice versa). Scripts were unheard of because the traditional rules for how each character could speak were rigid, leaving easy improvisation the normal order of the day.

But at the end of the century, a new type of theater, partly stimulated by the examples set by traveling European and Eurasian operetta and vaudeville troupes, crystallized in the newspaper towns of the colony. What happened when — as in fact did happen — indigenous troupes decided to perform their own vernacular versions of *The Merchant of Venice* or *La Traviata*? Neither Venice nor Paris was known to traditional drama, and they came to audiences of 1900, if at all, through newspapers, magazines, and atlases, within the series "strange places on the world map." More significant, the characters in such dramas — precisely because they were interestingly new — could not be presented iconographically. Take Shylock, for example. How was he to be presented?[5] No Jews had ever figured in traditional drama—no moneylenders either. Marguerite? No tuberculars or loving prostitutes had ever appeared on the older stages. The actor (now his or her gender began to matter) could no longer improvise, but required the help of script and rehearsal to "create" Shylock and Marguerite, i.e., to give them *social* verisimilitude: this meant situating them at the intersections of such universal series as cruel moneylenders, prostitutes, doting fathers, tubercular women, obsessive misers, and so forth.

The fact that these troupes were trying to make a living out of the new and the serial required that they do their best to advertise themselves in advance, and repertory prospectuses thus began to appear in local newspapers. The form of these advertisements — "Buy Tickets to See *a* Beautiful, Tubercular, French, Tender-Hearted Prostitute" — showed their strict grammatical alignment with serial capital cities, football matches, industrial strikes, and elections but also with the burgeoning world of advertised mass-produced commodities (Come, See, and Buy a Raleigh Bicycle—or, indeed, Misbach's white topee).

It was this revolutionized grounding that prepared the way for the rise of the commercial cinema in Haji Misbach's lifetime, and, of course, television in that of his children and grandchildren. These media work, in the manner of the newspaper, on the principle of seriality and thus travel pretty well — gangsters in

Tokyo and Brazil, bored teenagers in Jakarta and Chicago, loving mothers in Mexico City and Accra. Nothing shows this fundamental feature more than the complete calm with which dubbing is everywhere received. Thai couch-potatoes watch without any sense of discomfort J. R. and Dr. Huxtable speaking in Thai. After all, they belong comfortably in global worldwide series (crooked millionaires and goodhearted doctors) that stretch out and away from Bangkok.

Needless to say, the serialization of the imagination was not generated out of thin air by the rising mass media, but depended ultimately on the uneven global spread of the material, technological, and institutional foundations of industrial society—the most basic of which are perhaps man-made globally coordinated clock time and Mercatorian map-space, such that schoolchildren almost anywhere know "where" they are on a stable world map and "what time it is" in a system that locates every other place on that map this many hours ahead or behind.

II. Seriality and Census

In exactly the same year that Haji Misbach was campaigning for a coordinated revolution in Oostenrijk and Java, the Netherlands East Indies government executed the first-ever scientific census since the Dutch colonizing enterprise began more than three centuries earlier. It too was, after a fashion, coordinating and serializing, if in a radically different manner. To grasp the difference, one needs to step back and consider briefly the global history of the census, in the sense of a public counting of a polity's inhabitants. In these terms, the United States was the pioneer with its rough and ready population count of 1790, though France and the United Kingdom followed within a decade. As the institution developed in the nineteenth century, it combined two quite distinct projects. The first, which accounts for America's vanguard role, emerged from the logic of republican institutions, the concept of the citizen, and the development of suffrage. Fair and equal representation of citizens in national legislatures required an accurate count of their numbers. Needless to say, for a long time, citizens did not include females, and, in the United States at any rate, slaves. But the republican census grammatically treated each citizen as an equal integer of various

bounded series, which was what permitted their mathematical aggregation for electoral purposes. This was the convention that allowed Tocqueville to coin the phrase "tyranny of the majority," a concept unthinkable under the *ancien régime*.[6] There is no doubt that the spread of the census in the noncolonial world went hand in hand with the rise of legislatures, the democratization of political life, and the expansion of suffrage.

The second project emerged from new ideas for conscription of soldiers and levying of taxes, combined with the interest of early modern states in accumulating (mostly in secret) systematic information about their potential assets. This is how the term *statistics*—derived from the German word for the State—was coined in the second half of the eighteenth century by a Cameralist economist at the University of Göttingen.[7]

One can see how in America after the 1850s these genealogies combined in unexpected ways, as the census began carefully counting women and children who could not vote, and, as the huge tide of immigration from Europe swelled, also counting persons who were not-quite, not-yet Americans and needed to be mathematically segregated, for the purposes of policymaking, in various ruling class-determined subseries: Italians, Poles, Irish, Hungarians, and so on. Eventually, in the twentieth century, the census would become a vast institutional complex designed both to assure the foundations of democratic institutions and to be the basis for every kind of macrosocial and macroeconomic state planning. This meant that it became more and more politically important how one was counted—along what axes, within which series—since this seemed likely to determine the costs and benefits accruing to each countee from state policies. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the institution had become so "normalized" as a policy instrument that it could move from the sphere of citizenship and elections into the autocracies of the colonies in Asia and Africa with instructive results, to which I will return.[8]

Three crucial features of the census helped shape the ways people became accustomed to thinking about themselves. The first was its rigorous anonymity. Person and personal names, kin, ancestors, real everyday social ties were rigidly excluded by its conventions. So, if one tries to find oneself in one's nation's census, it will be with difficulty, and piecemeal, as digits in a

kaleidoscopic array of serial tabulations: salesperson, female, Catholic, married, between 40 and 50, and so on. The second, closely related feature was the impermissibility of fractions, or a miragelike integrality of the body. For example, if census makers decided that a population was to be counted along the two parallel series of Blacks and Whites, while the ambiguous reality was that millions of countees were of mixed descent, then the historical options practically available were: (1) arbitrary assignment of countees to one series or the other, and (2) proliferation of subcategories such as quadroon, mulatto, or, as is used today, "mixed race," whereby fractionality could reassume integral status.[9] But this integrality always turned out to be spectral because the same person would also reappear — anonymously, piece-meal—as an integer in dozens of other series. The third, perhaps most important feature of all, was the convention of aggregability on the basis of identity, which makes every series a bounded one. One can count total medical doctors, total Armenians, and total high-school graduates because the series stop at the state's edge.[10] Meanwhile, just across the borders in Mexico and Canada, the countings of identical aggregable doctors, Armenians, and high-school graduates begin again, but within a new national n.

From a political point of view, and bearing in mind that the census is a facet of governmentality, counted series necessarily mean, in principle, series that "count," in other words, series that the state wishes to recognize, either on its own autocratic planning account or in accordance with the dominant conventions of the society over which it rules. If we observe that in most censuses sex is handled in binary fashion so that everyone is counted as either male or female while wealth is handled scalar-fashion in a set of broad graduated steps, precise in the middle range and opaque at the extremities so paupers and billionaires are decently obscured from view, we can assume a pervasive hegemonic ideology at work. It would be virtually everywhere a revolutionary provocation to make gender scalar (say, from 90 percent female down to 10 percent) and wealth binary (so to say, Privileged Rich and Deprived Poor). There are many other series of which the public is mostly unaware and that have consequences only indirectly. But for reasons that we will be looking at shortly, the series that tend to be most fraught

are those that relate to exclusionary, quasi-ascriptive groupings: religious, racial, and ethnic.

How much the question of counting counts and how various the possibilities can be is nowhere better shown than in the two important "Western" countries with a long history of naturalizing foreign immigrants: France and the United States (of the two, France actually had proportionally higher immigration rates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). Until now — though this is going to change in the next census — the French state has refused to count "ethnics," partly as a matter of pride in *francité* and partly out of a fear of the divisiveness that recognition could encourage.[11] For decades this policy can be said to have been very successful in that, except during Vichy, there was no effective political mobilization along ethno-racial lines. However, the huge immigrations in recent years from former French colonies in Northern and Western Africa have aroused racist hostility. These racists demand that the immigrants be counted — for deportation. In reaction, immigrant groups have pressured the government for "recognition;" they and their France-born (and therefore citizen) children have demanded to be counted explicitly as such. This development has led many enlightened French observers to worry that their country may be headed in the direction of America, where, undoubtedly because of the country's political origins in racial slavery and near-extermination of the indigenous inhabitants, ethno-racial categories have always "counted" and look as if they will be counting more than ever in the future.

To grasp more fully the repercussions of the bounded seriality that censuses introduced and consolidated, it is useful to look beyond the industrial democracies of the turn of the century. Colonial censuses, which developed as extensions of normalized metropolitan practice, nonetheless were carried out by autocratic bureaucracies, and thus, until very late, had no connection with republican institutions and suffrage. The bureaucrats themselves, originating in utterly different societies thousands of miles away, rarely commanding local languages, and often with very imperfect ideas about the cultures and of the populations they governed, were usually guided by their own cultures' *idées reçues*, as well as amateurish anthropological and historical studies. On the other side, for a good while, to the

colonized populations, who were accustomed to (evading) the highly concrete prying of the taxman, the census remained opaque. Hence a good deal of wild fantasy from above and below.

An extreme, but amusing, illustration of this condition is presented by the successive inaugural censuses of 1911 and 1921 in the remote Himalayan territory of Ladakh, on the outer perimeter of the British Raj. In 1911, groping young bureaucrats urged people to fill in whatever "caste" they felt they belonged to (they assumed that the Hindu institution of caste was a relevant category in this predominantly Buddhist region). To their horror, in a precomputer age, they found no less than "5,934 names returned as principal castes, tribes, and races, etc., and 28,478 as subcastes and minor divisions." To prevent a repeat of this avalanche, the bureaucracy drew up for the 1921 census its own list of 54 castes, which were then entered on the census forms and to which the Ladakhis were commanded to assign themselves.[12] In much the same fashion, one finds comparable wild fluctuations in the successive 1921 and 1931 censuses carried out in British Burma, where the population of a bureaucratically determined "Mon" minority increased by 81 percent in a decade because the census makers changed some of the questions asked.[13]

Such examples, which could be duplicated in dozens of colonies, merely underline the governmental origins of the bounded series. They do not show how, or in what ways, bounded series had real identitarian consequences. We may recognize these consequences better if we consider briefly two parallel cases of very old neighboring colonies — the Netherlands Indies and the Spanish (later American) Philippines, where the census, late in the game, was superimposed on ancient political-jural grids and categories.

The Indies censuses of 1921 and 1931 have, of course, the usual colonial proliferation of unstable, often arbitrary "ethnic" groups. What is much more striking, however, is that they show (a) no persons of Eurasian ancestry, though European men had been producing children with local women for more than 300 years; and (b) millions of people in the series "Chinese," though everyone knew that most of these people were of mixed descent, knew no "Chinese" languages but used local vernaculars as

their mother tongues, and had been resident in the Indies for generations. The census counted such people, together with a smaller group of recent "Chinese-speaking," Confucian immigrants—with whom they could not communicate—as "Foreign Orientals."

These bizarreries did not come out of the blue, but stemmed from decisions made in early colonial days not to permit mixed ancestry a distinct legal status (if the White father recognized the child—and there were social penalties for this—it became European, otherwise it ended up as Native) and to compel people whom the rulers decided were "Chinese" to live in ghettoes policed by their "own" leaders, and with a distinct legal status. The censuses thus reflected a long-standing juridically founded mapping. The crucial innovation brought about by the public census in this colony was to produce a politico-sociology out of a maze of administrative regulations. The invisibility of Eurasians in the fine-grained, minutely differentiated "ethnic" portrait of the colony showed that by not being counted, they did not count and they had no role to play as such; only masked, so to speak, would they show up, anonymously, as fictive Whites or fictive Natives. Although there is plenty of evidence that the present national culture of Indonesia has important roots in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Eurasian communities, almost no Indonesians are aware of this.[14] And after a hard-fought independence came in 1949, "white" Eurasians mostly slipped quietly away to California and the Netherlands, while the "native" ones disappeared into various ethnic groups or survived in the marginal roles of small-time gangsters, nightclub singers, call girls, and movie starlets.

The colony was also now publicly on view as containing several million "Chinese foreigners," a numerated, trans-insular "minority" group that "counted," but only in an ambiguous sense. (Note that the White rulers, who included themselves also as a "minority" in their own census, did not appear as "Foreign Occidentals.") It is no surprise, then, that popular anti-Chinese pogroms became a regular feature of colonial life from that census-time on and have persisted in the postcolonial era. Although the censuses after independence abolished ethnic categories *à la française*, in today's parlance a WNI (*warga negara*

Indonesia, "citizen of Indonesia") always and only means a "Chinese," i.e., a residual "Foreign Oriental."

In the Philippines, the Spanish rulers had for centuries pursued "category" policies diametrically opposed to those of the Dutch. From the start, people of mixed ancestry were given their own jural status, in the classical Iberian colonial manner, as *mestizos*, below the Peninsulars and Creoles but above the Indios. Their numbers grew enormously over the years as they married among themselves and drew in newer products of sexual intercourse between Spaniards, "Chinese," and "Natives." On the other hand, with conversion to Catholicism as one core aspect of the colonial project, Madrid tried, with great success, to make it juridically impossible for a male "Chinese" immigrant to have "Chinese" children. Women from southeastern China did not migrate to the Philippines until late in the nineteenth century, and all marriages had to be performed by Catholic rites. To have families at all, immigrants had to marry local women, and by law all their children were classified as mixed, "not-Chinese," so to speak. Thus, in the only census the Spanish managed successfully, one finds almost the exact opposite of the formal sociology of the Netherlands Indies: a large number of "mixed," and a small number of "Chinese," who were genuinely Hokkien- or Cantonese-speaking immigrants. We should not be surprised to find therefore that with this census-truth the modern Philippines has no history of racial pogroms, and that its ruling class is overwhelmingly *mestizo*.

There is one aspect of the censuses in these two colonies that deserves our special attention: the novelty of ethnicity.[15] The basic grids for both Spanish and Dutch were juridical, not anthropological. "Ethnicity" as such is simply invisible in the Spanish census, and when it showed up in the Indies in 1921, just two decades before the collapse of the Dutch Empire, it had a rather fanciful character, precisely because the vast colony had not been juridically organized along "ethnic" lines. But it was a powerful beginning: for the first time in history, the census brought to the public imagination the existence of x million "identical" Balinese, y million "identical" Javanese, and z million "identical" Acehnese, as well as "totals" that turned these millions into percentages and majorities or minorities.

It was the Americans who brought ethnicity to the Philippines, and in spades. Even as they brutally suppressed the Philippine revolution and imposed their own imperium, they set about creating a census-portrait of their new acquisition along Washingtonian lines. Quite suddenly, the social map of the colony was transformed. The 1903 census produced new races by color, *inter alia*: White, which included Arabs; Yellow, which included Siamese; and Black, which merged Afro-American soldiers with the tiny ancient Negrito populations of the islands' mountainous interiors. Furthermore, dozens of real and bogus ethnolinguistic groupings were counted — in alphabetical, telephone-book order — as either "civilized" or "wild." It was now possible for ordinary speakers of Tagalog or Cebuano to think of themselves as "counting": "There are x million of 'us,' and we amount to y percentage of the population." Out of this was born a conflict that is still with us today over the political status of these languages. (Fortunately, the Americans' rule, lasting barely four decades, did not last long enough to deeply institutionalize, juridically or administratively, most of their weirder fantasies.)

It can be safely said that everywhere in the colonial world, the effect of the censuses and the institutions that barnacled themselves to them had the effect of initiating a transformation of people's imaginations along potentially political lines: there was a new way of counting by being counted; one could conceive of oneself as "a" Sikh or "a" Somali among "exactly" so many millions of "identical" Sikhs and Somalis whom the state had authoritatively counted. What made these "exactnesses" possible was the fact that these series were bounded by the reach of the state. (Javanese outside the Indies did not count and were not counted.) And in this way, even in the colonial autocracies, people were gradually being prepared from on high for a majoritarian-minoritarian politics of ethnicity and ethnicized religious affiliation when the time for independence and republican institutions would arrive.[16]

We can now turn to some wider political implications of the two serialities I have been describing — one, born in society, unbounded, and unenumerated; the other, born in the state, bounded, and numerated — as the world has changed its shape in the course of this dying century.

III. Unbounded Series

The figure of Haji Misbach is emblematic. The world-turned-upside-down in which he came to young maturity made it possible for him to enter, locally, every kind of unbound series: he would become "a" communist, joining unnumbered other communists all over the world working for the Revolution; he would become "an" anticolonial agitator in a transgenerational world series that included Mahatma Gandhi and Thomas Jefferson, Sun Yat-sen and Giuseppe Garibaldi; he would become "a" political prisoner, "a" newspaper editor, "a" Muslim preacher, "a" businessman, and so on. In every case, to enter the series meant that he had to "act" in both senses of the word. He could be an agitator only if he agitated; and he would have to learn how to "play" agitator, which he would do partly from his reading of the newspapers and partly from practical experience. Which series he entered were always in principle provisional: he might one day become "a" Christian, "a" reactionary, "a" musician, "a" nationalist, "an" assassin. And he would have to accept that he might have to pay for his ticket of entry and that a certain kind of responsibility inhered with each series.

This kind of seriality has lost none of its importance in our own times. If we decide to be "an" environmentalist, "a" feminist, "a" human rights activist, "a" conservative, "a" translator, "a" zoologist, "a" football fan, and so on, we are following in Misbach's steps. In no instance are we, before we start, entitled to anything, and in every case, we have to pay our dues. We cannot become any of the above without "acting" the part out, and we recognize that the acting is, if locally based, quotidianly universal. It is indeed exactly this universalism that made the rise of unbound seriality such a powerful force for human emancipation over the past two centuries: the series in Misbach's head were among the things that gave him courage to try to subvert the powerful long-standing White regime that controlled his society. This is also why nationalists understood themselves as belonging to an honorable unbound series that included, provisionally at least, George Washington, Kwame Nkrumah, Ernest Bevin, Ho Chi Minh, and, by a fanciful retro-historical movement, Jeanne d'Arc, Ch'in Shi Huang-ti, Boadicea, and so many others. This is also why it was possible

for the Italian nationalist Mazzini to be regarded as the father of the League of Nations and why the United Nations today seems so normal, so absolutely unoxymoronic. Finally, it is also why, in spite of the ever-tightening integration of the world capitalist economy, the number of new and smaller nations entering the UN continues to increase. (As Misbach said, "Brothers, remember! The land belongs to no one other than ourselves.") The series "nations" is unbounded and innumerate.

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to fail to notice the melancholy aspects of the rise of unbounded seriality. To illustrate the point, I would like here to turn to Vietnam. The nineteenth-century French colonial conquest of Vietnam was not a pleasant business, but, as one looks back, one is struck by the smallness of the military and bureaucratic apparatuses employed and by the modesty of the atrocities committed — certainly by comparison with the vast, savage eight-year war that in the 1940s and 1950s brought French imperialism there to its downfall. One also notes that in those early days almost no Frenchman understood any Vietnamese, knew any Vietnamese history, or appreciated the complexity of Vietnamese cultures. Conversely, only a small group of converted Catholic Vietnamese knew any French, and the dynasty in Hué was almost entirely enclosed within its local Confucian consciousness. The men of Hué and Paris, then, genuinely came from two utterly different civilizations that scarcely comprehended one another. It is certain that serial habits of mind did not yet substantially exist in Vietnamese ruling circles. Did they even think of their adversaries as belonging to an abstract series "French"?[17]

By the early twentieth century, however, unbounded seriality had become normalized, at least in urban colonial Vietnam — which was a new world filled with clocks, newspapers, atlases, secret police, railway stations, liberty-equality-fraternity, anarchism, interest rates, standardized school curricula, homosexuality, and gramophones. And, of course, Marxism. So it did not seem peculiar for Ho Chi Minh to travel thousands of miles to Paris, to work there, and to join that radical wing of the French Socialist Party that became the French Communist Party. (Nor did it seem odd for the PCF to admit him.) Both in France and Vietnam people were becoming aware of playing "universal" roles in a world much bigger than either. Hence, by the mid-

1940s French and Vietnamese leaders understood each other almost perfectly, in absolute contrast to the situation only seventy years earlier.

They recognized each other serially too, as "communists," "imperialists," "nationalists," and "reactionaries," and these categories were not at all aligned with their respective states. There were common serialities linking "reactionaries" in Vietnam and France — "left-wingers" too. They used much the same maps, guns, educational structures, diplomatic procedures, military tactics, and so on. This is why, from a certain point of view, one can think of the duration and savagery of the Franco-Vietnamese War of 1945–54 as characteristic of a civil war.

One could even go so far as to see the Vietnam-American War (1965–75) from the same angle: as an unbelievably brutal civil war, marked by Washington dropping a higher tonnage of high explosive bombs on tiny Vietnam than it had done on Nazi Germany and its continental allies. From the start, the Vietnamese leaders knew that ultimately this war, like civil wars generally, could only be won politically; and in the end the American leaders themselves decided that they had been defeated, not militarily but merely "politically."[18] A political victory for Ho Chi Minh and his associates had two aspects—one domestic, one external. With the first—developing the committed support among large sections of the population that would enable nation and state to survive three million killed by the Americans—we are not here primarily concerned. The second, however, is very relevant. The leaders in Hanoi understood their adversaries extremely well, and it was just for this reason that they were positioned to, as the hostile phrase goes, "manipulate" public opinion in the United States and in dozens of countries around the world. And the discourse of this "manipulation" was cousinly, not Confucian: We want our independence, just like you and every other nation. Uncle Ho is our George Washington. We both agreed to free elections throughout Vietnam in the Geneva Convention, but you prevented them and created a puppet state instead. We, like hundreds of millions around the globe, are resisting Western imperialism.

In the aftermath of defeat, there was a great deal of hand-wringing among American policymakers and academics about American ignorance of Vietnamese language, culture, and his-

tory, as if to say had we been less ignorant, we would have prevailed. Robert McNamara's fairly recent *apologia pro sua vita* continues to sound this theme. But in a basic respect this handwringing is beside the point. By 1946, the French had an incomparably better knowledge of Vietnamese culture, history, and language than they had had in 1860, and it did them not a bit of good. What Washington "did not understand" was not something ancient, Asian, and alien, but something perfectly modern: a Vietnamese nationalism that in its fundamental grammar was aligned with American nationalism. This may be why out of this war came a post-civil war language of "healing," alongside that of revenge, and why visits to Vietnam by American veterans can have the aura of visits by Southerners to Gettysburg.

A similar argument could be made in cases much less controversially described as civil wars. Abuse of the "Mayan" populations of Guatemala has a long, grim history going back to the earliest days of the Spanish colonial presence. Nonetheless, after 1954, when the C.I.A. engineered the toppling of the Arbenz regime, there was an unprecedented and sustained increase in the scale and cruelty of the horrors committed in Guatemala. No doubt, the military and police now have more technically advanced means of committing mass atrocities than they once did. But the increase in abuse also derives from evolving conditions in which Mayans and Ladinos have become more and more alike, serially aligned in Misbach fashion — that is, at the point when Mayans find it normal to wear wristwatches, listen to the radio, read magazines, "organize," develop relations with agencies outside Guatemala, and so on, exactly the conditions under which colonial war has given way to genuine civil war. We can also be fairly sure that if the Mayans were successful in taking power, Guatemala would stay Guatemala — even with a Burkina Faso-style name change. It would have its place in the UN, flourish a national flag, sing a national anthem, and have a president, an immigration service, a standardized school system, and a (hopefully not secret) police.

IV. Bounded Series

As noted earlier, the origins of the bounded, numerable series lay in the census and suffrage. Outside the colonial world these two "parents" were normally copresent and were connected and subordinated to the great nineteenth-century conception of citizenship. The Norwegian census counted as "Norwegians" only those who were legally citizens of Norway and did not bother its head about "Norwegians" in Alberta or North Dakota. Similarly, if the Canadian census decided to count "Norwegians," it focused on those who were citizens of Canada. The series was strictly bounded by the state. Viewed from this angle, it is clear that "ethnicity" was always parasitic on the nation. To be "ethnic" required a prior entitlement as a national; to participate politically as an ethnic one had to have the right to participate as a citizen of something nonethnic. And one's entitlements — especially after the onset of the age of the welfare-developmental state—always originated in this national-citizenship.

Nothing indicates this more clearly than the strange business of voting. It is hard to think of a more minimal kind of political act. On a given day, one joins a line of people taking turns to enter a particular closed space (ideally as private as a public toilet), pulls the same levers or fills in the same ballots as everyone else, and then leaves. As in the census, the voter appears as an anonymous, unfractioned member of a bounded series so that her vote ends up as simply another digit in the accumulation of different totals. At the time of casting her ballot, she can, for the moment, be thought of as "a" voter in the same way as one might be "a" strikebreaker or "a" socialist, but in the long rest-of-the-time she simply has an ascribed status as a person entitled to vote, even if she never again makes use of this title. Furthermore, under normal circumstances, as a young person growing up in a particular nation-state, she has "automatically" acquired this status, without paying any visible dues. It is here, in the quasi-ascriptive status that accrues from the bounded, numerated citizen-voter series, that we find the grammatical basis for a politics that at first sight seems almost the opposite of Misbach's, one that seems headed for dangerous exclusionisms.

But this kind of conclusion should not be reached too hastily. In the heyday of the classical nation-state — between, say, 1840

and 1940 — there was a clear idea that along with the ascriptive entitlements of citizenship came no less clear responsibilities. As a citizen, one was morally obliged to obey the law, pay taxes without too much fuss, serve in the army if a young male, honor national emblems and offices, and so forth. In a more general sense, one was to assume civic responsibility for the practices of the national community of one's bounded fellow-citizenry. One can still find very clear and impressive traces of this conception in the outlook of some participants in the antiwar movement in the 1960s and 1970s, who went so far as to break the law *in order not to be ashamed of their country* or to stop their country from doing something they saw as wicked. They were both entitled, and morally obliged, to act.

It was out of this frame of thinking that the shaping of the first "new world order" emerged with the founding of the League of Nations. Woodrow Wilson's proposals for redrawing the boundaries of states in Europe was guided by just this idea: a Polish nation-state must come into being that would, should encompass those populations committed to being citizens of Poland — with the reasonable likelihood that most, but not necessarily all, of these would be Polish-speakers and Polish-readers. Somewhat later the same logic applied to the extra-European possessions in their movement toward independence, since colonial rule made any modern form of civic responsibility unlikely or even impossible. The significance of this should not be lost even in today's very different conditions of life. It is not difficult for Amnesty International to recruit activists and helpers among the politically stateless or among refugees who have acquired another citizenship; what is much more difficult, and much more important, is to recruit resident citizens of countries with brutal regimes just because of their ascriptive entitlement to act there politically.

On the other hand, there are two aspects of the bounded series that have clearly ominous implications. First of all, it has proved only too easy to slide the ascriptive status of national-citizen onto subnational bounded series — ethnic, religious, racial, and so forth — thus encouraging unamiable identitarian politics within the national-state. These slides, precisely because they operate in a majoritarian-minoritarian matrix, often have a parodic character, so to speak — plenty of entitlement, little account-

ability.[19] They also reveal another kind of malformation. We have seen how the census matches up nicely with suffrage. The commonality of voters lies strictly in their belonging to the juridical series "citizens," who indeed from the "suffrage point of view" can be genuinely seen as "identical." (This is one reason to think that the moment when a self-imagined ethnic group decides to reimagine itself as a nation can have its hopeful aspects.)[20] This "identity" is also external and formal. But ethnic identities, like religious and gender identities, typically appear to their bearers as immanent and pervasive, located, so to speak, at the site where the soul once generally resided. Precisely for this reason, their serial alignment and aggregation tends to require a substantial measure of physical and psychological coercion: who is a citizen is normally a straightforward matter of law, but who is a Hispanic is anything but. Notice now the simple contrast with membership in unbounded series, where, as I suggested earlier, one has to "act" in order to make it plausible to reproach a comrade in these terms: "*You* say you are an anarchist, so show me by what you do." In the bounded series, on the other hand, the typical reproach is: "We say you are a Hispanic, a gay, or a Chechen, whether you like it or not, so you had better live by what we know you are."

The second rather melancholy implication of bounded seriality has its origins in the increasing and worldwide breakdown of nineteenth-century and Wilsonian assumptions. One can see this slow breakdown along two dimensions. The first concerns the real capacities of the classical nation-state and the obligations on which it was based.[21] The sovereign nation was supposed to be able to defend itself militarily on the basis of mass conscription of male citizens; and it was supposed to have an "economy" of its own, defended by its own currency, central bank, tariff system, and so on, which is why the word *nationalization* became the normal term for state expropriation of foreign businesses, or intolerable domestic monopolies, in the name of the nation. Confidence in a genuine "national economy" undergirded a substantial part of domestic political conflict over social and economic policy, and it also made the payment of taxes a good deal easier to endure. But the onward march of military technology has made the conscript army largely obsolete, while control over movements of financial capital to a substantial

degree escapes all governments of nation-states. One could add further that the institutional power of organized special interests and the impact of television has been making the vote appear less valuable (maybe especially in the United States, where voter participation has been declining for decades).[22]

A key assumption behind Wilson's view that a Poland should be created to house Poles was that populations would not substantially move. In the new Poland, Poles would be born, work, marry, act as citizens, and be buried on their now-native soil. This assumption was perhaps even in Wilson's day not very well grounded. But since then, especially in the past three decades, the rise of rapid, safe, and relatively cheap global transportation has made possible a scale of migration unimaginable in earlier epochs. (Typically, but by no means exclusively, it is migration from poor and violence-ridden countries to the better-padded industrial democracies.) Furthermore, such migrations no longer need to be once-and-for-all. The Filipino maid effectively domiciled in Rome can make enough money to "holiday" in the Philippines every year, and perhaps she will eventually retire there. At the same time, modern communications technology makes it far more feasible than it once was for migrants to "keep in touch," practically and psychologically. The telephone, electronic banking, videotapes, radio, and television, to say nothing of e-mail, are making a sort of "virtual," portable nationality more and more possible, and, exactly because of people's nomadic experience, more and more attractive. The implication is a widening split between citizenship and affective nationality.[23]

There is of course an old history of nationalist political activism on the part of "overseas" communities. Early Greek nationalism got its start outside the Ottoman Empire in Odessa and Vienna. Sun Yat-sen built his nationalist organization to a substantial degree on Chinese communities in different parts of the world outside China. But in most cases, these overseas groups saw themselves in a supportive, not a leading, role; as genuine political exiles, they hoped that when the repressive regimes they opposed collapsed, they would be able to go home. Things are rather different these days, when it has proved possible for American citizen Milan Panić to serve as the prime minister of Yugoslavia, and Canadian citizen Goyko Šušak to become

Croatia's minister of defense (i.e., war). The latter case is especially instructive, since Šušak, a successful Ottawa-based pizza millionaire who built a huge, right-wing North American network of "overseas" Croatians, used the ample funds at his disposal to win Croatia's presidential elections for Franjo Tudjman, and then get the (war) ministry as his personal reward.[24] His extensive North American political and military contacts also made him a key player in the buildup of the Croatian military. Networks of this general type have proved crucial to the victory of the Armenians over the Azeris[25] and the violent struggle of the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka.[26]

In such cases, which are likely to increase in the future, we can detect a mutation in the bounded seriality I described earlier. They are producing, shall we say, "private" censuses, which try carefully to count what they conceive of under the stately name of diasporas — 6,500,000 "Jews" in the United States, 1,500,000 "Indians" in the United Kingdom, 500,000 "Greeks" in Australia.[27] These are bounded series, but they are globally bound by private enterprise and not attached in any way to citizenship or suffrage. The politics that tend to emerge are not linked to democratic institutions or traditional accountability. They thrive on the secretive narcissism of e-mail nets and lend themselves to violence and paranoid fantasies. It is not at all surprising that people active in these networks are often "disappointed" by those in their series who actually live in, say, Armenia, the Punjab, Ireland, or Croatia, whom they find too soft, too impure, too contaminated by "foreign" cultures. There is plenty to worry about when ethnicity escapes the nation, and the bounded series the state.

Notes

1. Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912–1926* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 193.

2. Nice emblems of this way of thinking are American flags, which are absolutely equivalent and for which there is no original.

3. This point is developed further in my *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (revised and extended edition; London: Verso, 1991), 61–63.

4. This is elegantly shown in Craig J. Reynolds, *Thai Radical Discourse: The Real Face of Thai Feudalism Today* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program, 1987).

5. Just how "quotidianly universal" this new kind of theater was is nicely shown in A. Th. Manusama, *Komedie Stamboel of de Oost-Indische Opera* (Batavia, Indonesia: publisher unknown, 1922), 24–27, which contains a list of repertoires. These include nine placed in the Arabia of *The Arabian Nights*, six in Persia, six in "Hindustan," three in China, ten in Europe, and nine in the colony itself.

6. Tocqueville was intensely aware of the novelty of his anxiety. "*De nos temps, la liberté d'association est devenue une garantie nécessaire contre la tyrannie de la majorité.*" *De la Démocratie en Amérique* (Paris: Pagnerre, 1850), 230.

7. "The Sociology of Official Statistics," in *The Politics of Numbers*, ed. William Alonso and Paul Starr (New York: Russell Sage, 1986), contains an excellent historical overview.

8. Ibid. A central Census Office was set up in Washington for the first time in 1880, but the inauguration of the renamed Bureau of the Census as a permanent, full-time agency of the state had to wait until 1902.

9. Thus, between 1840 and 1910, the major series "Negroes" in the American census contained four subseries: "mulattoes," "quadroons," "octoroons," and "blacks." See William Petersen, "Politics and the Measurement of Identity," in *The Politics of Numbers*, 208. The current, rather successful campaign to compel various states to include a unitary "mixed race" series in upcoming censuses is especially interesting because it runs against a long tradition of binary thinking on racial matters in the United States (by contrast with Spanish and Portuguese America) and the political interests of certain Afro-American and "White" political blocs. One gets the distinct impression that for the mixed race activists inclusion in the census's series means a fundamental kind of legitimation of an interior identity.

10. This is what allows the census to serve as a decennial portrait, or x-ray, of the nation's social body.

11. See the fine analysis in Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), esp. chapters 5 and 7. The standard work on France and immigration is Gérard Noiriel, *Le creuset français: Histoire de l'immigration XIXe-XX siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 1988).

12. I owe this information to an unpublished 1994 research paper by Martijn van Beek, titled "Who Framed Tsering Phuntsog? Construction of Race/Caste/Class/Tribe/Community in Ladakh."

13. Martin J. Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (London: Zed Books, 1991), 34.

14. See Jean Gelman Taylor's fine book, *The Social History of Batavia: Europeans and Eurasians in Dutch Asia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).

15. Good sources on these population counts are the long appendix ("The Population of the Archipelago, 1565–1898") in Onofre Corpuz, *The Roots of the Filipino Nation* (Quezon City: Aklahi Foundation, 1989) and Peter Boomgaard, *Population Trends, 1795–1942* (Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute, 1991).

16. One could probably read the omens of colonialism's end in the fact that the censuses included colonial rulers themselves, gave their numbers, and specified their tiny percentage of the total.

17. I do not have the linguistic capability to interpret Vietnamese documents. But I have consulted an important contemporary document from the Dutch Indies, namely the memoir composed in "Siberian" exile by the Javanese Prince Diponegoro, who led so lengthy a military struggle against the Dutch between 1825 and 1830 that he is today Indonesia's foremost historical hero. What is most telling about the document is that Diponegoro does not speak of "the Dutch," but specifies his enemies, in feudal, "manuscript" style, by personal name and rank. Nor does he describe himself as "a" Javanese; he merely informs the reader that his plan was to "conquer" Java. A good part of these verse-memoirs has been translated in Ann Kumar, "Dipanegara (1787?–1855)" in *Indonesia* 13 (April 1972): 69–118.

18. One notes that the court of Hué in the 1860s did not yet even have a distinct word for "politically" in its language, and that the idea of beating the French colonialists "politically" would have been difficult for it to grasp.

19. Again, the real entitlement, even if it is unmentioned, is citizenship. For example, gay and lesbian rights are really American gay and lesbian rights.

20. Many observers believe that the English language would be much more freely and widely taught in Québec if the present province became a separate nation: the status of English would stop being majoritarian and become international-commercial.

21. For a succinct and comprehensive statement of the pessimistic view of the nation-state's future, see David Held, "The Decline of the Nation State," in *Becoming National*, ed. Geoff Eley and Ronald Suny (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 407–16.

22. A note from personal experience. Over roughly the first fifteen years after I acquired the status of permanent resident in 1967, I was frequently asked by airport immigration officers when I would become a citizen. After that, I never heard the question again. A comfortably employed resident alien has, in practical terms, a virtually identical everyday position as a citizen, except that he is exempt from jury duty and cannot vote—a loss he or she may not mind very much these days.

23. I have made this argument more elaborately and in more detail in "Exodus" in *Critical Inquiry* 20 (Winter 1994): 314–27.

24. See the remarkable account, based partly on interviews with Šušak, in the *New York Times*, 16 January 1994.

25. See "Revenge of the Armenian Diaspora" in the *Financial Times*, 16 September 1994.

26. See the extensive coverage in *Asiaweek*, 26 July 1996.

27. See Gérard Chaliand and Jean-Pierre Rageau, *The Penguin Atlas of Diasporas* (Harmondsworth: Viking, 1995).