
Travel and Traffic: On the Geo-biography of *Imagined Communities*^{*}

Now that almost a quarter of a century has passed since the first publication of *Imagined Communities*, it seems possible to sketch out its subsequent travel-history in the light of some of the book's own central themes: print-capitalism, piracy in the positive, metaphorical sense, vernacularization, and nationalism's undivorcible marriage to internationalism.

More generally, studies on the transnational diffusion of books are still fairly rare, except in the field of literary history where Franco Moretti has set an extraordinary example. The material for some preliminary comparative reflections is to hand. By the end of 2007, the book (henceforward to be referred to as *IC*) will have been published in thirty-three countries and in twenty-nine languages.¹ This spread has much less to do with its qualities than with its original publication in London, in the English language, which now serves as a kind of global-hegemonic, post-clerical Latin. (Had *IC* originally appeared in Tirana, in Albanian, or in Ho Chi Minh City, in Vietnamese, or even in Melbourne, in Australian, it is unlikely to have travelled very far). On

* Writing this Afterword would not have been possible without the selfless help of, above all, my brother Perry, but in addition, Choi Sung-eun, Yana Genova, Pothiti Hantzoulou, Joel Kuortti, Antonis Liakos, Silva Mezneric, Göran Therborn, and Tony Wood, to all of whom I would like to express my deepest thanks.

1. Aside from the advantages of brevity, *IC* restfully occludes a pair of words from which the vampires of banality have by now sucked almost all the blood.

the other hand, this proliferation of translations suggests that the force of vernacularization, which, in alliance with print-capitalism, eventually destroyed the hegemony of Church Latin and was midwife to the birth of nationalism, remains strong half a millennium later.

What I propose to do is to recount what I have been able to discover, thanks to the generous help of many colleagues, comrades, and friends, about these translations: what publishers were involved, with what motivations and strategies, and in what political contexts, both domestic and international. At the end I will try to draw a few tentative conclusions.

But it is necessary to start by saying something about my own original, assuredly polemical, intentions, since these have affected, often in unanticipated ways, the reception of the book and its translations. First of all, for reasons too complicated to get into here, the UK was the one country in the world, during the 1960s and 1970s, where high-level work was undertaken, in separate channels, on the nature and origins of nationalism in a general sense, by four influential Jewish intellectuals – the conservative historian Elie Kedourie, the Enlightenment-liberal philosopher and sociologist Ernest Gellner, the then Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm, and the traditionalist historian Anthony Smith. But there was no real public debate until 1977, when the Scottish nationalist-cum-Marxist Tom Nairn published his iconoclastic *The Breakup of Britain*.² The Scottish nationalist described the United Kingdom – to which Gellner, Hobsbawm, and Smith were strongly attached – as the decrepit relic of a pre-national, pre-republican age and thus doomed to share the fate of Austro-Hungary. The revisionist Marxist turned his guns on what he saw as classical Marxism's shallow or evasive treatment of the historical-political importance of nationalism in the widest sense. In the debate that followed my sympathies were very much with Nairn.

Hence one important polemical intent behind *IC* was to support

2. Kedourie came from Baghdad, Gellner from Prague, while Hobsbawm's mother came from Vienna. Perhaps because of his origins, Kedourie was interested in the Near East, and beyond. His book on nationalism in Asia and Africa came out in 1970. Gellner's first essay on questions of nationalism was partly a rejoinder to Kedourie. Hobsbawm's big book on nationalism did not come out until 1990, but he had attacked Nairn's theses in *New Left Review* in the autumn of 1977, and played a major role in making the magisterial comparative work of Miroslav Hroch on Central and East European nationalist movements known in the Anglo-Saxon world.

(‘critically,’ of course) Nairn’s position on both accounts. The traces are obvious enough in the quite disproportionate amount of space devoted to the UK, the British Empire, and even Scotland (perhaps because I had been living and working in the US since 1958): in a plethora of quotations from and allusions to ‘English’ literature likely to be opaque to many readers not educated in the UK; provincial provocations in a republican spirit (all UK rulers named as if they were next-door neighbours [Anne Stuart], while foreign rulers were titled in the traditional manner [Louis XIV]); and some regrettably disobliging references to Nairn’s debate-opponent Eric Hobsbawm.

A second polemical intent was to widen the scope of Nairn’s theoretical criticisms, which were aimed almost exclusively at classical Marxism. It seemed to me that Marxism’s ‘failure’ to grapple with nationalism in any deep way was in no way idiosyncratic. Exactly the same criticism could, and should, be levelled at classical liberalism and, at the margins, classical conservatism. (This is why *IC* joked about the implausibility of a Tomb of the Unknown Marxist and of a cenotaph for fallen Liberals). There had to be a common cause of this general inadequacy, but Marxism (with a difference) seemed likely to be a better place to look for it than Liberalism. But framed this way, *IC* could interest critical Marxists as well as critical liberals, by suggesting to both that a great deal of really new thinking and research was needed. So I was not at all downhearted when a generally favourable reviewer still rather irritably described the book as being too Marxist for a liberal, and too liberal for a Marxist.

A third polemical intent was to de-Europeanize the theoretical study of nationalism. This impulse had nothing to do with Nairn, but derived from long immersion in the societies, cultures, and languages of the then utterly remote Indonesia and Thailand/Siam. Despite the wonderfully broad stretch of the polyglot work of Gellner, Hobsbawm, and Smith, from the standpoint of Jakarta and Bangkok, they seemed irremediably Eurocentric. Gellner had indeed done research in the Maghreb, but Edward Said was probably right in attacking him for ignorance of Arabic – though the general acrimony of their exchange was far from elevating.³ The problem was how to sail between the Scylla of nineteenth-century

3. Kedourie surely was familiar with Arabic, but his work does not show it very prominently. His 1970 book is mainly an anthology of texts by nationalist intellectuals in Asia and Africa, with an extensive, acerbic introduction of his own.

European-derived romantic fantasies about umpteen thousand years of Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, etc. nationhood, and the Charybdis of Partha Chatterjee's splendidly indignant later indictment of all anticolonial nationalisms outside Europe as 'derivative discourses.' Facing this quandary, the multiple national states created in South and Central America over the period 1810–1838 came to my rescue (even if, in 1983, I could read neither Spanish nor Portuguese). The multiplicity was as crucial as the world-historical early dates. The US and Haitian 'revolutions' preceded the nationalist movements in Spanish America, and national Brazil emerged much later, but each of these had the apparent advantage of idiosyncrasy. (A few days ago, my local newspaper in Bangkok sarcastically referred to the USA as the Land of the Free[ly Self-Centred]). But Spanish America was eminently comparable and, just as important, fought over many bloody years for multiple republican independences, while sharing language and religion with imperial Spain – long before Magyars, Czechs, Norwegians, Scots, and Italians got into the act.

Spanish America offered perfect arguments against both national incomparability and Eurocentrism. It allowed me to think about the early USA, in the Pan-American context, as just another creole-led revolutionary state, and furthermore in some respects more reactionary than its Southern sisters. (Unlike Washington, the Liberator put a step-by-step end to slavery, and unlike Jefferson, San Martín did not speak of the original inhabitants of his country as savages, but invited them to become Peruvians). My impression is that this de-Europeanization did not in fact leave much impression in Europe itself, but may have made *IC* more attractive to readers in the Global South.

A final polemical target was the United States. It was not simply a matter of hostility to bloody American imperialist interventions in Latin America, Asia and Africa. Nor was it primarily a reaction to the weird fact that when *Imagined Communities* was about to be published there were virtually no courses taught on nationalism in American universities – let alone on American nationalism, which was taken as a late nineteenth-century 'Manifest Destiny' aberration. Rather it was the remarkable solipsism, still highly visible today even in the liberal *New York Times*, and the 'big country' bias plain to readers of the *New York Review of Books*. (Later on, I found the same provincialism in the other 'big countries' – India, China, Russia, Indonesia, and Brazil). Karl Deutsch's cynical aphorism 'Power is

not having to listen,' rang in my ears. Hence *IC*'s polemical strategy of foregrounding 'small countries' – Hungary, Thailand, Switzerland, Vietnam, Scotland, and the Philippines.

For the reasons indicated above, as well as others, the original version, published simultaneously in London and New York, had completely different receptions in the two countries. In those distant days, the UK still had a 'quality press,' and *IC* was almost immediately reviewed by Edmund Leach, Conor Cruise O'Brien, Neal Ascherson, and the Jamaican Marxist Winston James. In the US, which has never had a 'quality press,' it was scarcely noticed. The academic journals were no different. It was only in the early 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the violent breakup of Yugoslavia, and the rapid rise of identity politics on the domestic front, that this situation changed.

The first foreign version of *IC* appeared in Tokyo, in 1987, as *Sozo no kyodotai*. The translation was the work of two gifted former students of mine, Takashi and Saya Shirashi, who believed it could help in the enduring paedagogical struggle against Japanese insularity, and the conservative doxa that the country's history and culture made comparisons with other countries impossible or irrelevant. The translation was itself novel, in that it kept to the polemical thrust of the London version rather than to its letter. Many of the original's references to, or quotations from, English literature, were ingeniously replaced by Japanese 'counterparts.' For example, the lengthy quotation from *Urne-Buriall* gave way to one from *The Tale of Heike*. As for the Tokyo publisher, Libroport, which was a bit left of centre, Takashi recently wrote to me: 'The company's owner, Tsutsumi, was the son of a tycoon, who rebelled against his father, and chose a career as a poet and writer, only to find himself inheriting part of his father's business when the father died. So he told his editors to publish good books without worrying about profit . . . This is why the firm went bankrupt in the 1990s.' But it survived long enough to see *Imagined Communities* become a standard textbook for advanced courses on nationalism in most of Japan's better universities.

During the four years remaining before a revised and substantially enlarged edition of *IC* was issued by Verso, translations appeared in German, Portuguese, and Serbo-Croat. The excellent German version (*Die Erfindung der Nation*) was published in 1988 in Frankfurt, with a striking cover featuring

the Black Forest's colossal, kitschy Hermannsdenkmal, a nineteenth-century monument celebrating Arminius, 'Germanic' military tormentor of Roman emperors Augustus and Tiberius. The independent publisher, Campus Verlag, founded in 1975, had quickly developed a fine reputation for its serious books on history and politics. It is likely that one reason that a German translation appeared so early is that the 'quality' *Frankfurter Zeitung* kept a close watch on the book reviews in the 'quality press' of the UK.⁴ As for the 1989 Portuguese translation (*Nação y consciência nacional*), it was published not in Lisbon, but in São Paulo, by Ática. This institution has an unusually interesting history. According to its current website, it had its origins in 1956, when the *Curso de Madureza* [Adult Education] Santa Inês was established at the initiative of a group of progressive intellectuals and scholars, among them Anderson Fernandes Dias, Vasco Fernandes Dias Filho and Antonio Narvaes Filho. This was a time of great optimism and creativity in Brazilian political and cultural life – the era of bossa nova, the Cinema Novo, and the first Biennale in Brasilia. By 1962, massive increases in enrolments at the *Curso* and the wide intellectual influence of its professors led to the creation of the Sociedade Editora do Santa Inês. Two years later, close to the time of the military coup against President Goulart, it was decided, at the initiative of Anderson Fernandes Dias, to create a professionally managed, critical publishing house, named after Attica, the cradle of ancient Greek civilization. In 1965, Ática published its first books, and somehow managed to survive two decades of repressive military dictatorship. In 1999, it was bought jointly by the twin-souled Brazilian conglomerate Editora Abril and the French conglomerate Vivendi; five years later, after a lengthy struggle, Abril – original importer of Disney comics, now publisher of Brazil's versions of *Time* and *Playboy* – became the majority shareholder. But Ática still seems to have a certain autonomy.

In the summer of 1989 I was invited by Ivo Banac of Yale University to serve as a 'comparativist' commentator for a conference in Dubrovnik on the subject of nationalism in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. There I

4. In 1998, Campusverlag issued a new edition, which replaced the Hermannsdenkmal with a lurid print of a popular riot: houses in flames, panicked people, incendiaries. In 2005, the publisher decided to reissue the book in its 'Classics' series, with a suitably severe, featureless cover. This edition has a lengthy Nachwort by Thomas Mergel, part of which is devoted to reflections on the reception of *IC*, and includes some alarming material on its afterlife in cyberspace.

met, and had animated discussions with, Silva Mezneric, who subsequently was primarily responsible for the Serbo-Croat translation of 1990 (*Nacija: Zamišljena zajednica*), for which she wrote a special introduction. Educated at the Law School of Zagreb University, and at the University of Chicago, she obtained her doctorate in sociology in 1984 at the University of Ljubljana; she had also been a Woodrow Wilson Center fellow that same year, where she may have come across *IC* for the first time. She recently wrote to me that she then believed that a translation of the book would be helpful in fighting the rising tide of Croatian and Serbian jingoism and mythomania – and thus in keeping Yugoslavia together. Alas, this hope disappeared in the spring of the following year. The publisher Školska knjiga was then a large state-owned publisher of textbooks. After the collapse of Yugoslavia, it was privatized and quite recently, *horribile dictu*, it bought the largest Serbian textbook publisher.⁵

Although the enlarged edition of *IC* was published in 1991, the following year the Korean publisher Naman put out a pirated translation (*Sang Sang Ui Kongdong Che*) based on the original 1983 text. Naman was established in 1979 by Cho Sangho, who, if not an activist himself, came from the ‘dissident’ province of Kwangju, which has produced many Leftist intellectuals. During the 1980s and early 1990s, Naman prospered as a publisher of the more ‘popular’ left-leaning social-science texts; thereafter, following market trends, it shifted to neoliberal and conservative books. *IC* seems to have survived the new tide, since the company issued in 2002 (i.e. ten years later) an unpirated version, based on the enlarged edition of 1991. (Characteristically, perhaps, the cover for this version is a colourful photograph of a mass of flag-waving young people, probably supporters of the astonishingly successful Korean football team in the World Cup competition held in June 2002). For many serious writers and publishers, Naman has a reputation for mass production and rapid output, sometimes-poor editing and clumsy translation jobs. It is also notorious for not paying many of its authors.⁶

5. Mezneric went on to found and manage, between 1992 and 1996, the Humanitarian Expert Group Project on Forced Migration; today she is on the faculty of the University of Ljubljana and serves as Senior Counselor to Zagreb’s Institute for Migration and Ethnicity Research.

6. My thanks to Choi Sung-eun for the above information. Her father had the unlucky experience of having two of his books put out by Naman.

That the now-conservative Naman produced its new version can probably be explained by awareness of the commercial success of the Shiraishi's Japanese translation. By chance, during a brief visit to Seoul in 2005, I met the charming and modest Professor Yun Hyung-sook who was the translator. She apologized profusely for the quality of the pirated edition, saying she had had to work against brutal deadlines.

If the pattern of translations up to 1992 seems geographically random – Tokyo, Frankfurt, São Paulo, Zagreb, and Seoul – this is not at all the case for the rest of the decade. Of the fifteen translations involved, eleven were produced in Europe between 1995 and 1999. But first came Ciudad México (*Comunidades imaginadas*) and Istanbul (*Hayali Cemaatler*), in 1993.

The Fondo de Cultura Económica was established in 1934 by the economist and diplomat Daniel Cosío Villegas, initially to provide Spanish-language texts for the recently founded National School of Economics, but soon broadening out to cover history, culture, literature, and so on. State-run from the outset, it remained a part of the official cultural bureaucracy (in the 1990s it was headed by ex-president Miguel de la Madrid). After World War II, it expanded its 'empire' to Argentina (1945), Chile (1954), Mother Spain (1963), and later to Brazil, Colombia, the US (San Diego), Guatemala, Peru, and Venezuela. Its production was also vast in the 1990s: 2,300 new titles and 5,000 reprints. It seems likely that the stimulus for this translation came from among the large number of Mexican scholars and intellectuals who studied or taught at American universities, in which *IC* was by this time widely used as a sort of textbook in departments of history, anthropology, sociology, and comparative literature. In 1986, I was invited to a huge conference on Mexican nationalism in Zamora, and was startled that the only other obviously foreign attendee was David Brading, the magisterial historian of Mexico and Peru, and, later, Spanish America in general. Although very embarrassed to be the only participant who could speak no Spanish, I was taken under the kindly wing of Enrique Krauze, the young, virtually bilingual, right-hand man of Octavio Paz, who had long been the dominant intellectual influence at the Fondo.

Nothing could be more different than Istanbul's Metis Yayınları. What would become Metis was originally set up in 1983 by Müge

Gürsoy Sökmen, Verso's 'agent' in Turkey, together with a few Leftist friends. In order to avoid the risk of having the whole staff arrested, Metis was registered legally under the name of a single individual, who would serve any prison time meted out by the regime. From this uncertain start, the company became very successful in the more open 1990s, publishing Turkish and translated fiction (from Tolkien to Perec), philosophy (Adorno, Benjamin, Lukács), political and feminist theory (Badiou, Arrighi, MacKinnon), current affairs (Oliver Roy), and most recently texts on the anti-globalization and anti-Iraq war movements. The success of Metis seems to have derived from three independent factors; the country's young, increasingly well-educated population, many of them supporters of Ankara's drive for EC membership; the company's long-standing friendly relations with the Islamicists; and the cultural policies of the major banks, who judge the performance of publishers whom they support by the reviews their books receive rather than by their profit margins, and are content if the cost of running the companies is less than what advertising would demand.⁷ Perhaps it is worth adding that during the later 1990s I would occasionally run into students from the ex-Soviet Turkic-speaking republics, who reported that they read *IC* first in Metis's translation.

Then Europe proper. Sweden (1993); The Netherlands (1995); Norway, France and Italy (1996); Greece and Poland (1997); Bulgaria, Slovenia, Macedonia and Serbia (1998). The Swedish translation (*Den föreställda gemen-skapen*) was published in Göteborg by Daidalos. Founded in 1982, Daidalos is a rather small, but well-respected, independent left publisher, emerging originally from the student movement; it is a serious house, which also publishes dissertations (with state funding). It has a strong philosophical profile – from the classics to Arendt, Gadamer, Habermas, Heidegger, Rawls, and Taylor. On history and social analysis it has published Marx, Bauman, Bourdieu, Castells, and Giddens.⁸

The Dutch translation (*Verbeeldde gemeenschappen*) is interesting for two quite different reasons. Until 1995, the covers of the translations were generally plain, not to say nondescript. (Only the Japanese translation

7. My thanks to Tony Wood for this history of Metis.

8. My thanks to Göran Therborn for this description.

used the colonial-era Indonesian trick-photograph that I imposed upon Verso.) The solitary exception was Campusverlag's Hermannsdenkmal, which was surely intended ironically. But from then on the trend was to create 'nationalist' covers – the later Dutch cover, for example, being a fine reproduction of a woodcut showing the interior of an early Dutch printery. The second curiosity is the way the translation came into being. At some point in the 1970s I began a regular correspondence with Soerjono, a tough, witty, and eccentric old Indonesian Communist then resident in Moscow. He had been active during his country's Revolution (1945–49), and after independence was achieved, worked for the Party's newspaper, *Harian Rakjat* [People's Daily]. Perhaps because of his strong individualism, perhaps on account of some sexual peccadillo, he was gradually sidelined. But he was lucky enough to be on a visit to China when the 'attempted coup' of October 1, 1965 occurred, after which the Party was destroyed, with hundreds of thousands of its members either massacred or imprisoned for many years without trial. Disliking what he saw of Mao's Cultural Revolution, and annoyed by the factional infighting among the Indonesian communist exiles, he found a way to move to Moscow, where for years he was employed as a translator. Eventually he fell foul of a clique of exiles sponsored and managed by the KGB, had a massive stroke from which he never fully recovered, and spent a long time in gloomy veterans' hospitals outside Moscow. Eventually, he was rescued by a small group of Dutch Leftists with connections in the Soviet capital, and brought to Amsterdam. He lodged in an old people's home near the city limits, where I visited him on a number of occasions. I met the independent publisher Jan Mets, also a regular visitor, because of our common friendship with the invalid, who toughed it out with an unbroken spirit till he died. The decision to translate *IC* was not, however, a sentimental gesture. Mets was quite aware of the book's relative commercial success in London. The Dutch translation was my first experience of direct involvement in the translation process. Because I read Dutch pretty well, I had insisted that I inspect the translation before it went to press. Grudgingly the publisher agreed, while warning me that the translator's English was far better than my Dutch. On the first page, I found that in the sentence 'But, having traced the nationalist explosions that destroyed the vast polyglot and polyethnic realms which

were ruled from Vienna, London, Constantinople, Paris, and Madrid, I could not see that the train was laid at least far as Moscow' – 'train' (i.e. 'fuse') was unintelligibly translated as 'railway-line.' Some, if not all, of my corrections were eventually, unenthusiastically, accepted.

The Norwegian translation (*Forestilte fellesskap*) may have come out of my friendship with Professor Harald Böckman, a distinguished Sinologist specializing on the CPR's minorities along the border with Southeast Asia, who spent a couple of years as a visiting fellow at Cornell University. He is a man with a great sense of humour, and an admirably calm, unsentimental attitude towards the Maoist regime and its successors. In any event, the book was published by Spartacus Vorlag, a small (20–30 titles a year) company founded in 1989, with which Böckman had good personal relations. The cover design showed the new trend: a pretty and colourful representation of Norway's national holiday parade featuring cute small children in national costumes. When I asked Böckman why a Norse edition was needed – in a country with a small population, most of whom would have no trouble reading the Swedish translation – he laughed and said: 'You know how we feel about the Swedes and Swedish. We'd rather read the English original than the Swedish version. But best of all would be one in our own national language.'

As for the Italian translation (*Comunità immaginate*), it is probable that it emerged from a chance meeting with Marco d'Eramo in Chicago, where I had been invited to give a series of lectures. A distinguished Roman intellectual and journalist with *Il Manifesto*, Italy's quality radical-left newspaper (the last in Europe?), he was on leave at the University of Chicago to write a history of the city, which Verso published in 2002. We became good friends in a very short time. Hence the Italian *IC* was published in Rome by Manifestolibri, founded by the Feltrinelli-associated newspaper in 1991. The company puts out only about 40 titles a year, but its emphasis on quality and support for talented young writers has ensured that its books are widely used for university teaching. The cheerful cover looks as if it was taken from a late Fellini film. It could be taken as 'nationalist,' but I prefer to think of it as ironical in the spirit of the Hermannsdenkmal cover.

The French translation (*L'imaginaire national*) was put out by La Découverte, directed by François Gèze, a medium-sized 'independent Left' publisher (80–100 titles annually) with a serious interest in transla-

tions. La Découverte came out of the famous Éditions François Maspero, established in 1959. When Maspero handed the reins over to Gèze in 1983, he asked that the enterprise's name be changed as well. In 1996, just as the French *IC* appeared, the company merged with Éditions Syros, founded in 1974 and an active player in the struggle for the political and social renovation of the French Left. The cover for the book is a severe picture of a fragment of a Parisian neo-classical building, looking very much as if it has just been cleaned by Malraux. Irony? Probably, but delicate French irony. For the first and only time, I was involved directly, and wholly pleasurable, with the translation as it proceeded. Pierre-Emmanuel Dauzat, one of France's best translators, not only produced a text that in many places is an improvement over the original English, but checked all the French references, and brought several errors to my attention. Thanks to him, I made an interesting discovery. When I expressed my reservations about the title, *L'imaginaire nationale*, he replied that the French language has no equivalent to the English 'community,' with its overtones of social warmth and solidarity. 'Communauté' (as in Communauté Européenne) has an unavoidably cold, bureaucratic feel to it. (Marco d'Eramo later laughingly wrote to me that the Italian 'comunità' commonly means a drug-addicts' halfway house.)

Translations into Polish (*Współotny wyobrażone*) and Greek appeared in 1997. The Polish version was published in Kraków (not Warsaw) by the Spoleczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak. About this Institute I have learned little beyond the fact that it is a well-regarded publisher both of scholarly studies and of fiction.

The Greek version (*Phantasiakés Koinótites*) is, however, another matter. The publishing house Nepheli was set up a few years after the fall of the Papadopoulos-Ioannides military regime, i.e. after 1974, by the late Yannis Douvitsas, an intellectual of the liberal Left. A small but distinguished publisher, it has specialized mainly in fiction and carefully done translations of works in the humanities and social sciences. Besides books, it also publishes three journals, *Poiesis* (Poetry), *Cogito* (Philosophy) and *Historein* (*History, A Review of the Past and Other Stories!* – printed in English). The guiding spirit of *Historein* has been Professor Antonis Liakos of the University of Athens, who was trained in Salonika, then in Rome (where he did research on Italian reunification) and finally in Birmingham circa 1989, where he joined the

Historical Materialism Group. By this time, the study of nationalism was on the Group's agenda because of the successes of Thatcherism. Nepheli also published Carlo Ginzburg, Natalie Zemon Davis, and others. The main target of these books has been students and young scholars in the humanities and social sciences. But *Historein*, as its sardonic subtitle suggests, had a clear political objective as well, to 'trouble the well-established ideology of the 3,000 years of the Greek nation.'⁹

According to the translator, Pothiti Hantzaroula,¹⁰ the idea of translating *IC* came at the time of the nationalist marches in the early 1990s, which claimed the name of Macedonia for Greece. The publication was meant to establish a dissenting voice and an alternative way of thinking about the way in which the nation was made. While the book catered to the general public, it was mainly aimed at students in universities where the history curriculum was still strongly influenced by nineteenth-century romanticism.¹¹

It is instructive that what *Historein* had in its sights was not the traditional Greek Right, but the main parties of the Left, which from at least the early 1990s increasingly advertised themselves as defenders of the '3,000-year old' Greek nation, and even of Orthodoxy. Professor Liakos notes that in the specific case of *IC*, *Historein* was accused of promoting, publishing, and teaching a book full of inaccurate information on Greek history, and of idealist tendencies, not giving enough room to the economic transformations that have produced the modern nation.¹²

One might say that with this Greek translation one 'era' closed and a new one opened. In the mid-1990s George Soros brought together a panel of scholars and librarians, and asked them to draw up a list of the 100 most significant (fairly recent) books in the humanities and social sciences.¹³ (Fortunately or unfortunately, *IC* was among the final

9. My thanks to Antonis Liakos for this background.

10. Liakos described her to me as a 'fine scholar, having written a not yet published book, in English, on The Making of Subordination, Domestic Servants in Greece, 1900–1950.'

11. My thanks to Pothiti Hantzaroula for this account.

12. Paraphrased from a letter recently received from Liakos.

13. I have only a partial list of these titles. What is interesting is that books by Americans are not at all dominant. German authors are the most numerous, followed by French and Americans, then a handful of UK-ers, and here and there an Italian, a Slovenian, a Belgian, and so on.

selections.) His plan was to offer partial subsidization of translations of these works to publishers in the former Communist states of Eastern Europe, and the republics that came into existence with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Out of this massively funded transnational effort came the *IC* translations into Slovenian (*Zamišljene skupnosti*), Macedonian (*Zamisleni zayednisti*), Serbian (*Natsia: zamislenja zayednitsa*), and Bulgarian (*Vobrazenije obshchnosti*) in 1998, Romanian (*Comunități imaginate*), Russian (*Voobrazhayemie soobshchestva*), and Ukrainian (*Uyavleni spilnoti*) in 2001, and Lithuanian (*Isivaizduojamos bendruomenės*) in 2002.

The stretch of this endeavour is such that it warrants a break with the strictly chronological ordering so far employed.

As luck would have it, the translations project officer for Soros' Open Society Institute has been Yana Genova, who herself translated *IC* into Bulgarian. Recently, she was kind enough to relate to me that:

The OSI's Translation Project . . . started around 1994 with the aim to make available in the local languages of Eastern Europe at least the minimum of basic texts in the social sciences needed to renew higher education and to sustain informed public discussion of social and political issues. The first grant competitions were held in 1995 in Romania and Bulgaria, quickly followed by other countries in the years that followed. OSI has spent approximately \$5,000,000 for nearly 2,000 editions. The list of recommended titles . . . was intended as a point of reference to publishers, but they could also offer other titles in the humanities . . . Grants covered from 30 per cent to 80 per cent of the total publishing costs depending on the country. The impact of the project has varied from country to country as the number of titles published varies a lot and it was not very well managed everywhere. But I can say with full confidence that the project has had an enormous effect on the way that the humanities and social sciences have been, and are now being taught in the region. For example, translations supported by the project form 40 per cent of all titles on the reading lists of eleven disciplines in major universities in Bulgaria and the Ukraine . . . All the publishers [of your book] were established in the early 1990s as small (2–10

employees), independent companies. They publish academic books and survive mostly on grants by private donors such as Soros, foreign government agencies such as the French Cultural Institute and – more recently – EU cultural programs.

On most of these editions I have obtained little information beyond what Yana Genova has generously furnished. The Slovenian publisher was Studia Humanitatis, the Macedonian Kultura, the Serbian Biblioteka Episteme Plato, the Bulgarian Kritika i Humanizm, the Romanian Integral, the Russian Kanon-Press, the Ukrainian Kritika, and the Lithuanian Baltos Lankos. About these publishers I have only a little information. Kritika i Humanizm was established in Sofia in 1991 as an independent company, which has become the only Bulgarian publisher specializing in the humanities and social sciences. Its main target is the publication of many translations (primarily of French authors, it would seem) in order to support a ‘pluralist climate in these sciences.’ Since the Serbian version is clearly an extension, in Cyrillic script, of the 1990 Serbo-Croat translation published in Zagreb, there may be some financial or other connection between the two publishers. The Russian translation has a curious history. A very bad, and probably pirated, version was actually issued by Kanon in 1998, as part of a series called *Conditio Humana* set up by the Centre for Fundamental Sociology in Moscow, which also published texts by Montesquieu, Burke, Marx, Weber, Bergson, and Schmitt. It was then completely and professionally retranslated, and legally published in 2001 by Kanon ‘with the support of the Open Society Institute within the framework of the “Pushkin Library” megaproject.’ It is worth adding that the covers of all these ‘Soros’ translations are plain and simple, without any concessions to commercial marketing or blatant nationalist imagery.

At the same time, in Western Europe, the early twenty-first century produced some interesting variations. In 2001, a Danish translation (*Forestillede fællesskaber*) appeared at the hand of the Roskilde Universitetsforlag, with an engagingly enigmatic, ‘post-modern’ cover. This was the first translation of *IC* published by a university press. When I asked the translator, the energetic young professor Lars Jensen, why a Danish version was needed, given the existence of both Norwegian and Swedish versions, he replied more or less as Harald Bockman had

done earlier. In effect, ‘Yes, we can read these translations, but we should have our national own.’ In 2003, Miroslav Hroch included Czech translations of *IC*’s first two chapters in his textbook compendium *Pohledy na narod a nacionálismus* [Views of Nation and Nationalism], published in Prague by the ‘sociological’ house of Plon. In 2005, a Catalan version appeared (*Comunitats imaginades*), published by Editorial Afers in collaboration with the University of Valencia. The same year, in Lisbon, Edições 70 published an excellent translation, sixteen years after the first, not very good, Portuguese version produced in São Paulo. But Brazil’s mindless tariff policy on ‘foreign’ books makes this new edition available to Brazilians only at an enormously inflated price. Most recently, in 2007, Joel Kuortti’s Finnish translation, *Kuvitellut Yhteisöt*, was issued by the independent intellectual publishing house Vastapaino.

It remains only to discuss briefly the story of seven translations published east of Europe after 1998. In 1999, editions appeared in Taipei, Tel Aviv and Cairo. The translator of the Taipei version (*Hsiang-hsiang ti kung-tung ti*) was Wu Rwei-ren, a young hero of the struggle against the Kuomintang dictatorship, a strong, but open-minded Taiwanese nationalist, and the author of a brilliant, iconoclastic University of Chicago dissertation on the complex origins and development of Taiwanese nationalism. The translator followed in the footsteps of the Shiraishis in transforming the original ‘UK polemic’ into something relevant for young Taiwanese today, by adding numerous explanatory footnotes and a lengthy academic introduction. The publisher, China Times, is the largest commercial publisher in Taiwan, but alas, as we shall see, without a shred of Rwei-ren’s integrity and political commitment.

The Hebrew translation (*Qehilot madumaynot*) came out under the auspices of the Open University of Israel, and was intended as a critical intervention against prevailing Zionist-Likudist orthodoxy. It included an introduction by Azmi Bishara, the foremost Palestinian Israeli politician, and a scholar of Marx and Hegel who completed his PhD at the University of Jena when the DDR state still existed. Curiously enough, the cover design looks like a scene in snowy Vermont at Christmas time. The Arabic version (*AlJama’at Al Khayaliah*), however, had a completely different origin and intent. In 1995, perhaps in response to UN reports that the ‘Arab World’ produced far fewer

translations of foreign language works than any other major region on the planet, the Majlis al-'Ala lil-Thaqafah (Supreme Council of Culture), an adjunct of Egypt's Ministry of Education, launched a massive Translation Project under the direction of Dr Gaber Asfour. Over the following decade the Project published no less than one thousand translations (usually in runs of 1,000 copies), including works by, or on, Neruda, Rousseau, Trotsky, Pessoa, Kafka, Eliot, Hegel, Sartre, Woolf, Foucault, Cavafy, Chomsky, and Freud. Most of the early titles were pirated, including *IC* (No. 81). The books are sold at low, subsidized prices, and are distributed almost entirely in Egypt. The Project has been successful enough that it is likely soon to become a permanent subsection of the Supreme Council of Culture.

After the fall of the interminable Suharto regime in Indonesia (May 1998), censorship was largely abolished. Dozens of good and bad publishing houses mushroomed into existence, many devoted to the republication of books long banned or deliberately allowed to go out of print. Soon after I was allowed back into Indonesia for the first time in twenty-seven years, I discovered that a pirated translation of *IC* had been rushed out by Pustaka Pelajar, a notoriously unscrupulous publisher in Jogjakarta preying on the curiosity, and ignorance, of students in this university city. I was able to force the withdrawal of the book, not for monetary reasons, but because of the truly terrible quality of the translation. With the help of various former students of mine, and a subsidy from the Ford Foundation office in Jakarta, a substantially new edition (*Komunitas-Komunitas Terbayang*) was finally published in 2001. Taking a cue from Wu Rwei-ren, I added many supplementary footnotes in colloquial Indonesian to help students understand the book's many allusions and references that English readers took entirely in their stride. The publisher this time was INSIST, a progressive NGO specializing on freedom of information – today, alas, moribund on account of internal factional conflicts.

It is indicative that when I offered to do the same thing for the cheap English-language edition put out in the Philippines in 2003 by Anvil, Manila's best popular imprint, the offer was indignantly rejected. Of course, the Filipino students, schooled in English, would get all the references!

Finally two very idiosyncratic versions, one published in Shanghai in 2003, and the other due out in Bangkok in late 2006. The publisher in the CPR was The Shanghai People's Publishing House, a huge state-owned

conglomerate. It turned out that this edition of *IC* was the result of a secret deal with Taipei's China Times, which not only colluded with what was essentially negative piracy, but also permitted its Shanghai confederate to censor Wu Rwei-ren's text as it saw fit. One notable result was the deletion of the entirety of Chapter 9, which included some ironical remarks about the Great Helmsman and the Party's recent investment in a Machiavellian 'official nationalism.' 'You should take it as a compliment,' said a Chinese friend with a mischievous smile, 'they almost never delete whole chapters of a book they intend to publish. Look at Hillary Clinton's book, for example – the deletions are only sentences here and there!' Rwei-ren's introduction too was deleted without his knowledge or consent, even though it was a careful and scholarly account of my personal background, the political and intellectual context in which *IC* was written, its main features compared with the books of Gellner and Smith, and the criticisms of Sinologist Prasenjit Duara and of Partha Chatterjee. Perhaps its conclusion, an invocation of Taiwan as 'the beautiful but vulgar, passionate but anti-intellectual' island whose future remains so uncertain, doomed it with Peking's censors.¹⁴

The Thai version now close to completion in manuscript form has been prepared by a team of progressive, critical professors, several among them former students of mine. Going over the draft chapters I was very surprised by one thing. The aura of the Thai monarchy is such that I expected the translators to use the special 'feudal' vocabulary required when describing any activity by Thai kings present and past. What I did not expect was that the same special vocabulary was applied to all foreign monarchs as well, including such unlovely figures as London's William the Conqueror, Paris's François I, Vienna's Franz II, Berlin's Wilhelm II, and so on. When I objected that the entire spirit of *IC* is republican, and almost all monarchs are handled with irony or hostility, the objection was quickly brushed aside. 'You don't understand our traditions and our situation.' With a mixture of laughter and apprehension I look forward to what may be taken as *IC*'s first 'royalist' translation!

On the basis of this rather fragmentary evidence, what kinds of preliminary conclusions seem warranted?

14. My thanks to Wang Chao-hua for this account of the introduction.

Geographical distribution. With the exception of the OSI's coordinated translation programmes for Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, launched in the second half of the 1990s, there is little evidence for a graded time-hierarchy originating in 'The West,' and ending, later on, in the *ci-devant* Third World. In the first decade after *IC*'s original publication, one finds two Western European versions (German and Swedish), one Eastern European (Yugoslav), two Latin American (Brazilian and Mexican), two Asian (Japanese and Korean), and one Near Eastern (Turkish). The big surge in European language translations only began in the second half of the 1990s. So far as I can tell, all the translations have been based on the original English, not on previous translations in the languages of regional or colonial hegemons, showing English's extraordinary global ascendancy.

At the same time, there are conspicuous absences, if one thinks of languages with large numbers of speakers and, to a varying, lesser extent, readers. The most obvious example is the 'Subcontinent,' which contains millions of people reading in Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, and so on. The reason for this lacuna must be the British colonial heritage, which, perhaps surprisingly, helped make English even today the dominant language of 'national level' education and intellectual discourse. The second is Africa (if one cares to locate Egypt in the Near East). No translations exist into, say, Swahili, Amharic, Wolof, or Hausa. One might try to explain this by adducing the status of the former colonial languages (French, English, and Portuguese) as languages of state and higher education in much of Africa. But this dominance requires its own explanation in the troubled economic, social, and political conditions of the continent after the achievement of national independences. The absence of a Vietnamese edition may be a temporary matter, as the rapidly developing country emerges from the relative intellectual isolation imposed by three decades of terrible warfare. The strangest case is Mother Spain, which has yet to emulate Portugal's decision to catch up with its gigantic American colony after waiting fifteen years. On the other hand, Spain is the one country where a translation into a 'sub-national' language (Catalan) has occurred.

Publishers and readers. The incomplete data available to me reveal some very striking patterns. In the first place, only one publishing house

(Mexico's Fondo) has a history beginning before World War II, and the vast majority were founded during the past three decades or, perhaps better put, in the aftermath of the world-turbulent 'long 1960s.' In the second place, a clear majority of these publishing houses have been small to medium in size, and to various degrees independent in character. This independence has to be seen from three angles. Only in the cases of Mexico, Yugoslavia, Egypt, and the CPR (all authoritarian one-party states at the time of *IC*'s local publication) have the publishers been state institutions. On the other hand, only in the case of Taiwan does one see a very large private commercial publisher involved, and there are no cases of intervention by giant transnational conglomerates. Perhaps more surprisingly, given the nature of *IC*'s readership (on which more below), is the relative absence of university presses: those that are visible are only the Open University of Israel, Roskilde University, the University of Valencia, and perhaps Kraków's Znak. In the third place, the political orientations of the publishers, where identifiable, stretch primarily from liberal (in the political sense) to varying types of independent Left. One could say that, given Verso's political stance and my own political sympathies, this pattern is not surprising.

In its original form, as indicated earlier, *IC* was aimed at a general, well-educated public, primarily in the UK, and secondarily in the United States. It was not written out of, or on behalf of, my own academic discipline ('political science,' shall one say) or any other. I also tried hard to make sure it was free of academic jargon. The last thing that would then have occurred to me was that it would become a university-level textbook. But, on the whole, this has been its fate, in English and in translation. Yet this destiny should not be understood in too Anglo-Saxon a manner. In many parts of the world, students and their teachers have a much more significant political and social role than do their counterparts in the UK and the US, and it is characteristically oppositionist to some degree. But this role is of quite recent (early twentieth-century) origin – one reason why 'students' loom up only sporadically in *IC* itself.

In attempting to grasp why *IC* ended up being so widely, and fairly rapidly, translated in 'textbook' form, the likeliest answers are as follows.

In the first place, its polemical thrusts turned out to have an unexpectedly wide appeal. In the 1980s it was the only comparative

study of nationalism's history intended to combat Eurocentrism, and making use of non-European language sources. It was also the only one with a marked prejudice in favour of 'small countries' (in terms of geography, population, or world-political influence). In many parts of the world, faculty members and students, if they have political commitments at all, are Left, or liberal-left in their sympathies and are open to *IC*'s agenda. That the book, though written in English, was also partly aimed at British and American imperialism, may also have been a factor. In the second place, however, by proposing the concept of 'imagined community' *IC* juxtaposed paradoxically a kind of *gemeinschaft* attractive to all nationalists with something unsettling, neither 'imaginary' as in 'unicorn,' nor matter-of-factly 'real' as in 'TV set,' but rather something analogous to Madame Bovary and Queequeg, whose existence stemmed only from the moment Flaubert and Melville imagined them for us. This formulation opened the door wide for critical assessment of the kind of 'age-old' nationalism propagated in most contemporary states through the means of mass communications and state-controlled educational institutions. In the same paradoxical manner, *IC* was both visibly sympathetic to many forms of nationalism and yet deliberately interested less in the particular nationalist mythologies dear to nationalists' hearts, than in the general morphology of nationalist consciousness. Finally, the book attempted to combine a kind of historical materialism with what later on came to be called discourse analysis; Marxist modernism married to post-modernism *avant la lettre*. I think that this helps to explain the nationalist iconography on the covers of various translations of *IC* after 1995, which can usually be read as either naive or ironical (Norway versus Italy?).

A further paedagogical advantage in *IC* for teachers eager to develop students' civic consciousness in a progressive, critical manner, was simply the unusual style of the comparisons it drew: the US juxtaposed to Venezuela rather than Britain, Japan played off not against Confucian-Asian neighbours such as China, but to Tsarist Russia and Imperial Ukraine, Indonesia rubbing noses with Switzerland rather than with Malaysia. Such comparisons were useful for teachers concerned to break down naive national exceptionalism, as well as mendacious 'cultural-regional' clichés such as the notorious 'Asian Values.'

Stimuli. In a substantial number of cases, the original stimulus for translation is not easy to trace. What is clear is that Verso made no special effort to encourage translations, and that those done by former students of mine (Japanese, Indonesian, and Thai) were done on their initiative, not mine.

This pattern seems, in a small way, to be an endorsement of *IC*'s metaphorical use of 'piracy,' emphasizing local initiative, rather than external coercion or slavish imitation, to describe the processes of nationalism's rapid diffusion in different forms around the planet. But in cases where a clear stimulus can be detected, the Open Society Institute's broad campaign to transform the political cultures of Eastern Europe and the states of the former Soviet Union in a liberal and pluralist direction, is easily the most conspicuous. Teachers and students who spent time in the United States or the United Kingdom, where *IC* had been normalized as a textbook from the early 1990s, surely played a role. Yet the most instructive cases are those where translators and publishers had motives beyond the immediately paedagogic. The Serbo-Croat version of 1990 came from the hope of Silva Mezneric and her associates that it might help the struggle to save 'Yugoslavia' from bloody self-destruction. Wu Rwei-ren's version was meant to bolster the nerve of Taiwanese nationalism by explaining comparatively its late emergence, and by undermining Peking's claim to the island on the basis, not only of Chinese nationalism, but also 'ancestral tradition' inherited from Manchu dynasts. The Greek translation, as we have seen, was part of an endeavour to check mindless local chauvinism over 'Macedonia,' and to criticize the parties of the Left for craven or unscrupulous adoption of essentially right-wing nationalist positions. Similarly, The Open University of Israel's Hebrew translation, with an introduction by a well-known Palestinian Israeli, was part of an attempt to resist the long slide towards apartheid in the Likud-ruled state. Doubtless the Catalan version was also intended to help Catalonia achieve the maximum autonomy possible in what was once nicely called Las Españas.

Transformation. Proverbially, a writer loses his/her book at the moment that it is published and enters the public sphere. But to feel the full melancholy force of the adage, there is nothing like facing a translation of a book into a language the author does not understand. He, or she, can have little idea of what has happened to it: misunderstandings, distortions, word-by-word literalisms, additions, deletions, or: creative adaptations, seductive reread-

ings, changed emphases, and more beautiful prose than in the original. Hence, initially, I was miffed that neither the German nor the Mexican translator communicated with me at all, and that the Dutch translation was sent to me only at the last minute. I believed that the book was still ‘mine,’ and forgot the sardonic maxim *traduttori traditori*: translation is necessarily a useful treason. I learned a lesson in the course of a long and warm correspondence with Pierre-Emmanuel Dauzat. Despite the fact that England and France are very close neighbours, the difficulties of rendering French into English and vice versa are notorious. The French version contained elegancies of which I had not dreamed with reorderings which allowed me to see what I ‘really’ meant, but could not properly express. The correspondence was an education in itself, symbolized by the discovery that the Latinism of ‘community’ thinly concealed a filiation with the Germanic *gemeinschaft*, and that *imaginé* cannot convey the sombre possibilities of ‘imagined.’ The final lesson came with the pilfered initial translation into Indonesian, the one language other than English in which I am completely at home. Quickly finding that there were many passages of which I could make neither head nor tail, I put in two or three months of intensive work ‘correcting’ it line by line. The outcome was a version that is, I think, much easier for Indonesian students to understand conceptually; but it remains rather lifeless, because I was insufficiently treacherous towards the original. English’s elaborate and nuanced conjugational system for verbs, and its typical insistence on the active, ‘imperial’ voice, are foreign to elegant Indonesian, which prefers the passive voice, and is gifted with the untranslatable *ter-* verb-prefix, by which the agent versus object axis disappears in a connotational cloud whose silver lining is Chance. Fine Indonesian prose is still infused with an orality long vanished from formal English – which is why Anglicized Indonesian academic writing is, if possible, even more ugly than its UK or US counterparts. Hence, initially the pleasure of adding new explanatory footnotes in a quotidian idiom that engages, rather than annoying, befuddling, or terrorizing readers. Still, at the end I realized that I was impersonating an Indonesian, fighting off major ‘piracy’ with small-scale self-piracy, to no great avail. ‘I shouldn’t be doing this,’ I said to myself, ‘it’s just political ventriloquism, and a non-commercial defence of the ludicrous American insistence on “intellectual” (!) property rights.’ This is why, while inspecting the ‘royalist’ Thai translation of *IC*, I have decided to be a translational traitor. *IC* is not my book any more.

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