

# H-Diplo ESSAY 203

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*When Berkeley was "Berkeley": Learning That One's Grad Studies Are Never Outside of History*

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It was an ordinary noontime at Berkeley in September 1964. The morning fog had burned off, so the sun was shining as we set up our modest bridge tables on the sidewalk just outside the entrance to the University of California campus. There were half a dozen of us at little tables there that day, each handing out leaflets for various causes and groups. I had volunteered to leaflet that noontime for a new play reading-aloud group that met across the street at the YWCA. Our next gathering was to read aloud a play by Kierkegaard. During my years in grad school I tried to mix my studies of politics with concerts, play readings and even field hockey.

Setting up his spindly table next to mine that sunny day was a biology grad student leafleting for a socialist student group. Only later would I learn his name, Mario Savio. As students streamed down Telegraph Avenue and onto campus for their classes, we each tried to attract their interest in our own activities. As I recall, there also were several evangelical missionaries milling nearby. Berkeley seemed to draw them. We clearly were souls in need of saving.

There now are multiple memoirs and historical accounts describing what happened next. I remember a messenger sent out from the Dean's office (in Sproul Hall, just inside the campus arched gateway, on whose steps a few weeks later the young Joan Baez would strum her guitar and sing) approaching us leafleters to instruct us to fold up our bridge tables; we were breaking an obscure, not-until-then enforced city law that prohibited political activity on Berkeley's sidewalks. The Dean's announcement seemed petty. It also, we thought, violated students' free speech. What would soon come to be heralded as Berkeley's "Free Speech Movement" had begun. With it, University of California at Berkeley would come to be known nationally as "Berkeley," a symbol of not just quality public education, but of intense student activism.

I hadn't chosen to pursue my Ph.D. in Political Science at "Berkeley," however. In 1961, I had decided to apply to UC Berkeley because I had learned of the positive reputation of its Political Science department's faculty. After graduating from Connecticut College (then "for Women"), I had taken a low-level job in New York at McGraw Hill, the large publisher; I was assigned to its textbook department, the company's cash cow. When the economist Paul Samuelson, whose introductory economics textbook was a best seller, visited the company's office, his mere presence set off a collective buzz.

My job at McGraw Hill was to gauge the potential sales of proposed college textbooks. I spent hours on my hands and knees going through the shelves of U.S. college catalogues, guesstimating how many intro texts in microbiology or sociology McGraw could sell. I learned to think of professors chiefly as the authors and of Michigan, the Bay Area and New York as regions rich in both textbook adoption markets and potential authors. That year on my knees in the textbook division demystified publishing. It also taught me to see any published book as the product of a collective effort by its author, editor, designer, copyeditor, and marketers.

I loved living in New York. My two roommates and I made full use of the city's cultural riches. Yet at lunchtime, I would take my paperback copy of *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* to lunch with me at the New York Times building's

cafeteria.<sup>1</sup> It was the first book by then-Harvard assistant professor of Government, Henry Kissinger. I underlined sentences and wrote in the margins. Gradually, I realized that I wanted to return to school. With all the shelves of college catalogues within arm's reach, I began to research political science departments. I also asked my editor for his choices for the country's best political science departments. My mother was a native Californian (Mills College, class of 1928), so moving across country for this next phase in my life was appealing.

While I had always loved school, I really didn't have a clue what it meant to be a grad student. When I arrived in Berkeley in September 1961, I imagined I would go for my MA, then return East to teach in a secondary school. In that first, confusing Berkeley semester, I took a seminar with Guy Pauker, the department's sole Southeast Asia specialist. During the summer between my junior and senior years at Connecticut I had been an intern in Washington. I was assigned to be a go-fer in the Department of Agriculture's overseas training program. The men for whom I made coffee and copied reports were from Ghana, Turkey and Indonesia. The Indonesian fisheries specialist, Gelar Wiratmaja, was dismayed that I, a college undergraduate, had never even heard of his country's revolution against the Dutch colonizers. He set about educating me. It was thanks to Gelar's tutoring that in my first Berkeley semester I signed up for a Southeast Asian politics seminar. Soon, I was defining myself as a Comparative Politics/Southeast Asia specialist. My best friends in grad school became students studying the politics of Japan, Sierra Leone, Vietnam and the Philippines.

Because there was such a paucity of political science faculty specializing in Southeast Asia, I took courses with Chalmers Johnson on Chinese revolutionary politics and Robert Scalapino on Japanese politics. They stood me in good stead, deepening my comparative analytical and geographic reaches. For years after Berkeley, I taught courses on Japanese politics, and both Japanese and Chinese feminist history and current activism continue to figure in my writings.

By the time I was handing out leaflets for the play-reading group that fateful 1964 noontime, I had received my Masters (writing a too-long thesis comparing political parties in Malaya and Burma, having done much of the research for it amidst colonial archives stored in the bowels of Stanford's Hoover Institution). I also had been persuaded by David Apter, then a rising star in comparative politics, not to stop at an MA, but to continue on at Berkeley for a doctorate.

Women as political actors were made completely invisible on all of these political landscapes. The only time I remember a woman being taken seriously as a political thinker or actor was when political theorist Sheldon Wolin, whose classes I found exciting, plunged us into the dense ideas of Hannah Arendt. In the 1960s Arendt was a regular contributor to both *The New Yorker* and *The New York Review of Books*. So, as Sheldon Wolin was lecturing on campus about Arendt's *The Human Condition*, I was picking up her hot-off-the-press writings on revolution, lying, Brecht, and Rosa Luxemburg at my favorite source of magazines and journals, Cody's Books on Telegraph Avenue.<sup>2</sup>

In the allegedly radical 1960s, Berkeley's political science department's large faculty was all-white and all-male. Not a single woman held a tenure-track post (Hannah Pitkin, the now-esteemed political theorist, was hired for a tenure-track post only in the late 1960s). To my shame, the faculty seemed so diverse in their approaches, interests and personalities that I scarcely noticed its wall-to-wall masculinity. When Sarah Schumer and I were jointly appointed Head TAs for the young Aaron Wildavky's 300-student 'Intro to U.S. Politics' course, it was deemed somewhat of a milestone. The political science faculty never before had chosen women grad students to serve as Head TAs.

Any 'first' should spark questions: 'Why now? Why not earlier? Will it happen again?' I don't recall having asked any of these necessary questions.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper, 1957).

<sup>2</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

I spent 1965-66 conducting my dissertation research in Malaysia. There on a Fulbright grant, I was attached to the University of Malaya's Department of History. It was a heady time for the country's historians. Wang Gung Wu, the esteemed Chinese Malaysian historian, had been appointed chair. He de-colonized the university's history department by hiring young male and female Malaysians returning home from Britain and Australia with new Ph.D.s and fresh questions to pose about Malaysia's historical experiences and their implications for their newly independent country. In the mid-1960s the university still had no autonomous political science department, so I was fortunate to spend my year amidst young historians.

Having chosen to become a Comparative Politics specialist with an 'area studies' focus on Southeast Asia, I was already comfortable in the company of historians. One of the great advantages of being an American trying to become a non-U.S. area specialist was that one knew one didn't know anything. I assumed that one had to develop an historicized curiosity—for instance, about British versus Dutch colonizing strategies, about disparate pre-colonial political structures, about different histories of migrant labor, as well as about why some colonized societies galvanized insurgencies to throw off colonial rule, while others pursued negotiated paths to independence. Malaysia clearly was not Indonesia; neither of them were Thailand or the Philippines.

I had decided to make the ethnic politics of education the topic for my dissertation exploration. It was ethnic politics I was interested in, but because ethnicity was so politically sensitive in 1960s Malaysian political life (it still is), I framed my research more blandly as "education and development." The legacy of British primary and secondary education models still shaped the independent government's schooling policies. In addition, though, there was competition between Malay, Chinese, and Tamil language curricula, plus the post-colonial prestige accorded to English language schools (regardless of their ethnic loyalties and public advocacies, every Malaysian elite family seemed to want their own children to attend the country's exclusive English-language schools). I learned how these contradictions between personal aspirations and national policy goals dove-tailed with – and fueled – Malaysia's intensely ethnicized political party competition.

During that year in Malaysia I lived in a neighborhood of two-story cement apartment blocks carved out of a rubber plantation. Petaling Jaya was one of Kuala Lumpur's first suburbs. Most of my neighbors were ethnic Chinese and Indians. "PJ" was open to new housing development only after the government had quelled the two-decade long Communist-led anti-government local guerrilla insurgency in the early 1960s, made famous by Han Suyin's novel *And Rain for My Drink*.<sup>3</sup> I liked standing on my little back balcony early each morning to watch Tamil rubber tappers collect the coconut shell bowls into which the slender trees dripped their valuable white liquid latex. Although I was researching education policy, watching the tappers at work prompted me to think about the ethnicized post-colonial political economies of globalized rubber – and tin and palm oil.

It was not until twenty years later, when I began to think seriously about the gendered international political economies of plantation crops – bananas, coffee, tea, pineapples, palm oil, sugar, rubber – that I reflected again on those (male) tappers I had watched at sunrise as they collected latex from the slender rubber trees. Only then, belatedly, did I start wondering how Dunlop tires were gendered, how Chiquita bananas were gendered, Bookers sugar was gendered, how Lipton tea and Starbucks coffee were gendered.

In those years of dissertation research I did not think much about the Malaysian military. I did read extensively the early studies that were being published in the 1960s (mainly by British authors) on how the British military conducted its counter-insurgency against Malaysia's Communist-led (mainly ethnic Chinese) rebels.<sup>4</sup> I delved into their strategic attempts to create intelligence networks and construct 'pacified villages.' This piqued my curiosity about what became the

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<sup>3</sup> Han Suyin, *And Rain for My Drink* (London: Penguin, 1961).

<sup>4</sup> Among the influential analyses at the time were: Richard Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War: The Emergency in Malaya 1948-1960* (London: Cassell, 1967).

internationalized trade in counter-insurgency tactics, as schemes and the presumptions behind them migrated from Malaysia to the Philippines to Vietnam.

Back then, I knew that most rank and file soldiers in the Malaysian army were young ethnic Malay men, but I didn't give it much thought. I also was in Malaysia's Borneo states of Sarawak and Sabah doing interviews during the flare-up of Malaysian-Indonesian militarized border tensions and witnessed the government's forced movement of Borneo's nomadic minority groups into forlorn farming villages, in the dubious name of 'security.' Despite all these fragmentary noticings, I did not put either military politics or the politics of militarized political cultures on my intellectual radar.

My dissertation research methodology was woefully devoid of gender curiosity. While living in Kuala Lumpur, I read the novels of Somerset Maugham, Anthony Burgess and George Orwell to get at least some sense of how British white colonial male officers and planters saw themselves, their imperial mission, and the Malaysian and Burmese women and men they employed – and slept with. Yet I never thought to explore the ways in which education politics in a post-colonial, ethnically fragmented society were shaped by presumptions about, and the wieldings of, masculinity. I did not investigate whether mothers and fathers within Malaysia's elite families had equal influence over school choices for their sons and daughters. I did not interview a single Malaysian woman for my dissertation – not a single woman civil servant, not a single woman school principal, not a single woman active in a teachers association, not a single woman political party member. Men, and only men, seemed to me worthy of analytical attention. I naively imagined that in Malaysia's post-colonial politics, ethnicity and class would explain everything.

Back at Berkeley, my dissertation advisers, as supportive as they were, did not suggest I widen my analytically ungendered lens. Daniel Lev, the political science department's new Southeast Asia specialist (focused on Indonesia), agreed to chair my dissertation committee. He was attentive and thoughtful. My second reader was Chalmers Johnson, whose seminars and writings had had such an impact on my thinking about revolutions, nationalism and bureaucracies. Though neither suggested that I pose gender questions, both pushed me - and all of the comparative analysts of politics - to consider cultural politics, historically charted. Both eschewed the then-still-common notion that doing Comparative Politics meant putting Britain, the U.S. and France at the center of one's analytical universe.

As I was writing up my dissertation, I was supported by another TA-ship, teaching sections on 'Intro to American Politics.' In the late 1960s I found, and still today find, teaching to be the most exciting part of academic life. For a comparativist teaching and writing in the U.S. for mostly American readers and students, it was especially valuable, I think, to have had that chance to teach U.S. politics. When one is offering a course entitled "Intro to Comparative Politics," or "Politics of Japan," or "The Comparative Politics of Women" (among the courses I've regularly taught) at a U.S. university, the majority of the students are likely to be Americans; in their heads will be American presumptions and American experiences. To entice these students to think clearly about political lives lived in other countries, about Japanese elections or British feminist movements, one needs to bring those American presumptions up to the surface and explicitly address them. Teaching those U.S. politics courses as a grad student helped me do that.

During my final year at Berkeley, the U.S. military involvement in Vietnam was escalating. Even before I set out for Malaysia, however, I had attended the 1964 Vietnam War teach-in in Washington. It was my first Washington protest. Many of us at Berkeley who traveled east for the teach-in were studying Southeast Asia. I think we felt especially responsible for making our voices heard in criticism of the Johnson administration's rapidly expanding intervention in Vietnam. In little groups of three or four, we went from office to office in the Congressional office buildings, earnestly trying to persuade elected representatives. Usually we got only as far as their staff people.

There were no courses on Vietnamese politics or history offered at Berkeley in those years. Even those of us who specialized in Southeast Asian politics were pretty ignorant. I was lucky to have a Vietnamese grad student friend who – just as Gelar had earlier – tried to educate me. The French scholar Paul Mus, teaching then at Yale, was the premier scholar on Vietnam in the United States. The first full-length account I ever read about Vietnamese political history was Frances Fitzgerald's stunning series of articles published in the *New Yorker* in 1971 which in 1972 was published as a book, *Fire in the Lake*.

Fitzgerald dedicated the book to her Yale professor, Paul Mus. I started assigning *Fire in the Lake* to undergraduate students as soon as it came out in paperback. I still have my original yellow-jacketed paperback copy.<sup>5</sup> The glue has dried up and the pages are falling out of the binding. I like opening my copy randomly to see what I thought was worth underlining back in 1973: for instance, on page 193, I underscored, “Ngo Dinh Diem and his American advisers, however, did not, or could not, learn from the French example. Following the same centralized strategy for modernization, they continued to develop the cities, the army, and the bureaucracy, while leaving the villages to rot.”

Even though most of us doing graduate political science studies at Berkeley in the late 1960’s were embarrassingly untutored in Vietnamese (and Cambodian and Laotian) politics, we did question the chief rationale for military intervention that was being articulated by officials and representatives in Washington. For us, it smacked of not only a Cold War internationalized ‘us vs. them’ over-simplification, but also of a dangerous unwillingness to take seriously the post-colonial aspirations of local nationalists.

In the late 1960s, it was George Kahin of Cornell who especially influenced our thinking about revolution and nationalism. Kahin was another of that era’s Indonesia specialists. His early book *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* had helped make Cornell the go-to place to study Southeast Asian politics, history and culture.<sup>6</sup> Kahin’s scholarship, as well as his subsequent outspoken criticism of US foreign policy, deepened our own misgivings about framing the Vietnamese insurgency solely in Cold War terms.

Today, I approach any nationalist movement with caution. Too many nationalists in too many countries have mobilized women for their cause, while hanging on to their patriarchal commitments to women’s domesticity as central to realizing their dream of the new nation. But in 1967, I was not yet a feminist and thus scrutinized nationalism less carefully. I joined many of my fellow grad students in seeing local nationalist movements as the chief antidote to Cold Warriorism.

I was on the job market in 1967. During campus visits to Rutgers, Swarthmore, and Ohio’s Miami University, I was treated somewhat as a reporter just returned from a war zone. Faculty and students at each were eager to hear what was going on at Berkeley. Berkeley had become *Berkeley*.

I later learned that on the brink of making their job offer (which I found particularly appealing), the political science faculty and my future colleagues at Miami phoned Bob Scalapino, one of my Berkeley letter writers. They were nervous. They had never before had a woman as their faculty colleague. Would I, they asked, cause “trouble”? To my everlasting disappointment, Bob Scalapino reassuringly answered, “No.”

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<sup>5</sup> Frances Fitzgerald, *Fire in the Lake* (New York: Vintage, 1973).

<sup>6</sup> George Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952).

Lifetime Achievement Award and was selected for inclusion on the Gender Justice Wall installed at the International Crimes Court in The Hague.