CHAPTER NINE

Colonial monarchy and decolonisation in the French Empire: Bao Dai, Norodom Sihanouk and Mohammed V

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The Vietnamese emperor Bao Dai has gone down in history as a colonial puppet. He lies today beneath a black, nondescript tombstone in a Parisian cemetery. Meanwhile, millions of visitors stream through ornate monuments in Rabat and Phnom Penh to pay homage to the fathers of the Moroccan and Cambodian nations, Mohammed V and Norodom Sihanouk. The French had crowned them all as their colonial monarchs during the colonial period, but only two became the national icons of their post-colonial states. This raises the simple question at the heart of this essay: why did some colonially conceived monarchs survive decolonisation while others did not? To answer that question, I use a comparative framework to consider four main factors: the nature of French colonial monarchy in each of these protectorates; the specific local, national and international circumstances; the individual personalities of each sovereign; and the strategies they used. I proceed in three separate acts, one for each monarch, before returning to Bao Dai to conclude.

Act I. Bao Dai

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the French conquered and colonised the Vietnamese kingdom ruled by the Nguyen dynasty since 1802.[1] By the turn of the twentieth century, they had divided the country into three parts, a colony in the south, Cochinchina, and two protectorates located to the north, one in the central part of the country, Annam, the other covering the Red River delta, Tonkin. This truncated Vietnam was in turn part of a wider colonial state known as French Indochina, which also included Laotian and Cambodian monarchies. In theory, as a protected state, the Nguyen monarchy would continue to administer local affairs from its imperial capital in Hue while the French would take care

of diplomatic, security and military matters. In practice, however, French Residents held the real power.[2]

The French may have taken control of the Nguyen monarchy, but they never trusted their kings.[3] When, in 1888, they captured the young emperor, Ham Nghi, who had been escorted by his protectors to the nearby hills to rally the people to the anti-colonialist cause, they quickly exiled him to Algeria and appointed a new, docile emperor to take his place. The French still worried that their monarchs would turn on them and, thanks to a Confucian-based administration premised on loyalty to the emperor, mobilise the people against the foreign invaders. More than one French administrator at the time spoke admiringly of a deep-seated royalist patriotism in Vietnam. Fears were rekindled in 1907, when Emperor Thanh Thai, and then his son Duy Tan a decade later, tried to escape the French to join anti-colonialists circulating outside Indochina. The French captured both, deposed them, and shipped them off to La Réunion.[4]

Paradoxically, this simultaneous distrust and respect for the Vietnamese royalty proved seductive – so much so that a core group of influential colonial administrators in charge of the Annam and Tonkin protectorates came to believe deeply that precisely because the Confucian monarchy retained its patriotic force, it and its living emperor, if handled adeptly, could serve as a powerful instrument for ruling the 'masses'. Several administrators who had arrived in the protectorates at the turn of the twentieth century immersed themselves in the history, language, culture and traditions of 'ancient Annam', and became some of Indochina's most adamant royalists. They included such men as Pierre Pasquier, Léon Sogny, Eugène Charles and Jean Cousseau. The first three had personally witnessed the Thanh Thai and Duy Tan revolts. Their long service in Vietnam and work with the monarchy in Hue and its mandarins made them indispensable advisers to governors general.

It was in this context that the Governor General during the 1910s, Albert Sarraut, joined forces with Pierre Pasquier and Eugène Charles to fashion the crown prince Bao Dai and the throne into reliable instruments of indirect rule.[5] Together, they convinced their latest emperor, Khai Dinh, to entrust his nine-year-old boy to them. He did. The idea was then to mould the prince into a tame monarch from a young age, to educate him directly so that he would be able to understand the French and their ways, all the while remaining rooted in his own royalist 'tradition'. As Residents to Annam, Pasquier and Charles were particularly influential. Pasquier was an erudite man who knew the protectorate and the monarchy on which it turned in minute detail. In 1907, he published *L'Annam d'autrefois*, an erudite history

of the Vietnamese monarchy. He also worked closely with Annam and Tonkin's mandarins and was always keen to use them to rule more effectively. In 1907, after having led a special delegation of mandarins to France, he advised the government to introduce these Vietnamese elites to 'progress' by sending more of them to study in France, for 'they will thereafter be able to grasp our thinking, the meaning of our acts. They will be useful auxiliaries between the thinking of the popular masses and the directing idea of our Protectorate'.[6] He also insisted that French administrators had to immerse themselves in Vietnamese culture, tradition and language (and Jean Cousseau did precisely that). Charles had also served as Resident to Annam and knew the monarchy intimately.

With nationalism and communism on the rise after the First World War, Sarraut, Pasquier and Charles went to work. This meant removing the crown prince from his imperial household and entrusting him to the Charles family for his Franco-Vietnamese upbringing. In 1922, Pasquier issued instructions that would serve as the blueprint for the future emperor's education:

> He must acquire during the five or six years he will spend abroad, not only a purely bourgeois edification but in particular an *education* leading him to understand and to feel all that is harmoniously civilized in French society and its traditions – all that is artistic, beautiful in all domains, in all the arts, this 'gentle country that is France'. Let him be caressed by the elegant breezes of the Ile de France, but that he not have the time to drink too long from the overly strong air of liberty. We must have the prince acquire a sense of French politeness in our ways and spirit, by bringing him into contact with young people who have maintained the ways that have always made us in the eyes of foreigners the most polite people of the world … and make of Vinh Thuy [Bao Dai] an elegant, gracious, prince, gifted in the arts, and understanding of the French soul, speaking our language clearly, capable of understanding our civilization but also for the same reason incapable of rejecting his own past. As such he will be tomorrow the sovereign who will move the evolution of his country in the French direction. This is the goal to attain.[7]

And so it was. Under Pasquier and Sarraut's careful guidance, the Charles family raised Bao Dai in the finest aristocratic ways, first in Hue, then in Paris. They initiated him into modern sports, including horse-riding and football, all the while steering him away from dangerous 'isms' in his studies. Except for a brief return to Hue to be crowned emperor in 1926 following his father's death, Bao Dai spent the most formative years of his life in France – in the Charles family under the watchful eye of his colonial minders. He soon spoke French

with a perfect accent and frequented elite Parisian circles. Sarraut and Pasquier's trust in their new colonial monarch was such that in 1931 they seated him at the centre of the opening ceremony of the famous International Colonial Exhibition at Vincennes. Bao Dai did not speak that day; he had no subjects. He was the symbol of the French Empire on display for all the French to see (Figure 9.1).

A year later, as nationalist and communist revolts rocked Tonkin and Annam, the French rushed the young emperor back to Indochina to accomplish the most important part of what Sarraut called the Bao Dai 'experiment'. This meant taking over the throne and winning over the support of the people tempted by new leaders and novel forms of socio-political organisations. The young emperor had only to leave the palace, his colonial handlers said. He had to tour the countryside in order to establish contact with his subjects. Pasquier's team duly presided over a series of imperial tours sending Bao Dai into the countryside between 1932 and 1934.

Figure 9.1 Former Emperor Bao Dai of Vietnam at the Elysée Palace, Paris, 1948

Like his counterpart in Morocco, Bao Dai was willing to work with the French. But in exchange for his collaboration, the modernist-minded emperor expected the French to make good on reform promises and respect the protectorate treaty. This meant returning a certain number of governing powers to the monarchy, promoting the economic development and modernisation of the country and improving the well-being of the people in these troubled times. Confident that their sovereign would toe the line and under pressure to make concessions in light of the revolts of the early 1930s, Pasquier allowed Bao Dai to form a government in the imperial capital of Hue, propose several policy measures, and recruit promising elites like the Catholic reformer and nationalist Ngo Dinh Diem. However, when the monarch's desire for change appeared to infringe on colonial rule, Pasquier immediately backtracked. Diem resigned, the reforms failed and with it the chance to transform the protectorate into an autonomous form of local government.

Bao Dai could have rebelled at this point, like others in his family had before him. He withdrew instead into a world of solitude, taking long hunting trips in the central highlands and flying his airplane into the blue skies. Introverted, the emperor hated public speaking. And when he did, he was always more at ease speaking in French than in Vietnamese. The idea of walking among crowds intimidated him. Unlike his counterparts in Morocco and Cambodia, who embraced Islam and Buddhism as essential parts of their nationalist transformations, Bao Dai was reluctant to play the part of a Confucian Son of Heaven. Well aware of what the French were doing, he preferred to resist passively. He stopped signing papers or let others do it for him. His withdrawal from 'public affairs' continued under Vichy's rule of Indochina during the Second World War. He carefully avoided the royalist-minded governor general, Jean Decoux, who wanted to use the crown, imperial tours and Confucian tradition against the Japanese, as well as Vietnamese nationalists and communists.

But when the Japanese overthrew the French in Indochina in March 1945, before surrendering to the Allies a few months later, Bao Dai acted. While he never thought of leading an independence crusade, he did something just as significant: he abdicated, and in so doing finished off the centuries-old Vietnamese monarchy. To the ire of the French, he turned over the dynasty's ceremonial seal to the Republic forming rapidly around the person of Ho Chi Minh and then became a private 'citizen' and a 'supreme adviser' to the nationalist government. This was in stark contrast to Norodom Sihanouk, who never dreamed of giving up his throne.

Act II. Sihanouk[8]

With the outbreak of the Second World War, the French needed to expand their colonial monarchy beyond its Franco-Vietnamese mould. Worried by the Japanese occupation of all of Indochina starting in 1940, followed by the Japanese-backed Thai annexations of western Cambodia and Laos a year later, Vichy's governor general, Jean Decoux, incorporated Lao and Cambodian kings into what became for the first time a truly Franco-Indochinese monarchical project: 'The need to use in every way possible the royal instrument wherever present', he later wrote, 'revealed itself to me imperatively.' In perfect continuity with his predecessors working on Bao Dai earlier, Decoux ordered his men to build up the 'prestige' of the Cambodian and Lao monarchs.[9]

Docility was always the essential prerequisite for becoming a colonial king. If Bao Dai had been *gentil* ('nice') for Sarraut, Decoux saw in Sihanouk, as he wrote later, his 'prince charmant'.[10] In 1941, in an elaborately organised coronation, weaving the French into the sacred royal temples of Angkor Wat and Phnom Penh, Decoux crowned Sihanouk the new King of Cambodia. Sihanouk soon embarked on imperial tours, lit the torch in Angkor Wat for the Indochinese cycling race of 1943, sang the praises of Franco-Khmer collaboration, and warned of the dangers of Thai expansionism. Unlike Bao Dai, who was more at ease in French than in Vietnamese, Sihanouk had grown up speaking Khmer and had not been subjected to the same level of colonial re-programming as had his Vietnamese counterpart in Paris. Sihanouk was at ease performing royal rituals, switching into traditional costume and embodying the sacred role of a Buddhist king. He was much more extroverted, animated and jovial by nature than his Vietnamese and Moroccan counterparts. The latter were certainly modern, to be sure, but Sihanouk had an extraordinary passion for things related to public speaking, entertainment and the media. Bursting with energy, the young Khmer king was always on the move. He loved jazz and played the saxophone. His passion for cinema was real. For the first time in Indochina, arguably in the history of the French Empire, colonial king-makers had wrapped up in one royal being their 'tame', 'modern', 'mobile', 'human' yet equally 'divine' monarch (Figure 9.2).

With the Thais playing up the racial and religious unity of Laos, Cambodia and Thailand, Decoux used inter-royal travel to consolidate closer links among France's three Indochinese monarchies in Laos (Sisavang Vong), Cambodia (Sihanouk) and Annam (Bao Dai). Sihanouk visited his counterpart in Hue before moving on to see Tonkin for the first time. He was a favourite in the Lao court in Luang Prabang, and the Lao king visited his counterpart in Phnom

Figure 9.2 King Sihanouk of Cambodia, *c.* 1949

Penh. Like Pasquier working with Bao Dai, Decoux saw in Sihanouk a precious intermediary through which the French could ensure the loyalty of the Cambodian peasant majority. In charge of the monarchy was a tightly knit group of French administrators with long service in the protectorate. The Resident, Georges Gauthier, accompanied Sihanouk on his travels across the protectorate, putting modern

communications and media technologies at the sovereign's disposal. Moving from provincial capitals to remote villages by car, Sihanouk presided over sacred rituals and ceremonies in provincial and district capitals. He took to public speaking in Khmer with self-confidence, addressing peasants in ways unprecedented for any Indochinese king of the time. During trips to small villages, he distributed rice, salt, clothing and medicines. Leaving the palace and walking among his subjects came to him naturally. As he later told a French journalist:

> The Gauthier plan allowed me to present myself to those of my compatriots located in faraway regions, who, of their own admission, had never seen the king. They knew that their country was a monarchy but they confessed to me that never had a sovereign visited their districts and villages. To reach these remote places, I had to use cars, boats, oxen-drawn carts, horses and elephants … In villages and hamlets lost in distant valleys, I handed out rice, salt, cloths, and medicines. The people, very poor but very dignified, showered me with prayers and brought me wild fruits, the only gifts they could offer me. These are unforgettable and moving memories.[11]

But unlike Bao Dai and Mohammed V, it never occurred to Sihanouk, as French Indochina crumbled in mid-1945, that he might find himself on the wrong side of the colonial–national divide. He collaborated closely with Vichy's Jean Decoux until the Japanese overthrew the French in March 1945. On Japanese orders, he declared Cambodia's independence like Bao Dai did, but he never thought of opposing the re-establishment of the French protectorate when the Japanese capitulated a few months later. Instead, Sihanouk welcomed de Gaulle's commander-in-chief to Phnom Penh in October 1945 and his High Commissioner to Indochina. In early 1946, he was the first of the Indochinese leaders to sign a *modus vivendi* making Cambodia part of the Indochinese Federation and a member of the emerging French Union.

Sihanouk had competition, however, from one of Cambodia's first modern nationalists, Son Ngoc Thanh. Born in the Vietnamese Mekong Delta, this motivated Khmer man did so well in school that he won a scholarship to study in France in the early 1930s. He returned to Indochina in 1933, completed his law degree, moved to Phnom Penh and joined the colonial civil service. He helped reform the Buddhist church, schools and teachings. He worked closely with French Buddhist specialists at the *Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient* who opposed Thai attempts to draw Khmer monks to Bangkok. He joined the French in creating the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh in 1931. He also helped run Cambodia's first modern newspaper of nationalist design, the *Nagara Vatta*.[12]

Print media, Buddhist connections and excellent speaking skills made Thanh an influential nationalist leader. In 1942, the French cracked down on a demonstration he and his associates had organised. The Japanese protected Thanh from colonial arrest, but returned him to Phnom Penh following the March coup of 1945 which overthrew the French. Thanh then established Cambodia's first nationalist party and served as the country's prime minister until the French returned and exiled him to France. However, for many students, monks, peasants and even several anti-colonialist royalists, Son Ngoc Thanh had come to symbolise the father of a future, independent Cambodian nation. Sihanouk had competition for the hearts and minds of the 'masses'.

Relations between Sihanouk and the nationalists deteriorated in the post-war years as the king turned to the French to help him curb the rise of political liberalism. Cambodia's first constitution of 1946, to which he initially agreed, allowed for the formation of political parties and the creation of a National Assembly based on universal male suffrage. It also guaranteed the right of assembly and freedom of speech. Spared the colonial and civil conflicts tearing Vietnam apart, Cambodian nationalists, mainly civil servants, teachers and students, but also Buddhist monks and a few members of the royal family, formed the Democrat Party. Its members vowed to serve the king and the people, but a growing number of its members increasingly wanted to empower the National Assembly, the people it represented, and push for full national independence. The Democrats established party chapters at the provincial and district levels, working with urban elites and monks. The party nominated candidates with real support in the countryside to run for Assembly positions. In the first election of 1946, the Democrats won fifty of the sixty-seven available seats. The rise of parliamentary republicanism in Cambodia was real. The French could live with such colonial democracy as long as the protectorate remained a part of the French Union.

But things began to change as the Democrat Party increased in popularity, further developed its national organisation and advanced its call for full independence. In so doing, the Democrats challenged French efforts at the imperial level to hold the French Union together and reinforced an already close alliance between French authorities and their Cambodian monarch, each of whom saw their interests coming under threat from the Democrats. Unlike their negotiations with Bao Dai, the French easily convinced Sihanouk to sign off on the creation of the Associated State of Cambodia within the French Union in 1949. However, an increasing number of Democrats refused 'Indochinese Association', knowing that it and the imperial Union it preserved put a brake on full Cambodian independence. So it did.

The French decision to allow Son Ngoc Thanh to return to Cambodia in 1951 put Sihanouk in a particularly difficult position concerning the question of independence. The French returned this famous nationalist on the apparent understanding that he would help build up support for the Cambodian Associated State against the communist threat, including the parallel set of associated states Ho Chi Minh had just created for Laos (the Pathet Lao) and Cambodia (the Khmer Issarak). The plan backfired, however, when it became clear that Thanh remained a formidable political threat not just to Ho's communist-minded allies in Cambodia, but also to the French hold on Cambodia and its king. Waiting to meet Thanh at the airport was an estimated crowd of twenty thousand people, many of whom called him a 'national hero'. They included enthusiastic civil servants, teachers, students and monks. Also present were many of the Democrat Party's leaders, who increasingly worried Sihanouk. The monarch was further shocked when Thanh made a spectacular nationalist tour of the countryside, travelling from the temples of Angkor Wat to Phnom Penh, speaking favourably of full Cambodian independence and implicitly casting the king as a colonial creature. Several hundred thousand people lined the roads, raising banners proclaiming him 'our hope' and 'national hero'. Although the Democrats had tried to tone down the tour, knowing that it could provoke Sihanouk's jealousy and potentially hurt their cause, Thanh marched to his own drum. A few months later, he went into opposition along the Thai border.

Thanh's popularity and the rise of the Democrats nevertheless convinced Sihanouk that he was in trouble. He also realised that the Democrats were not the only ones pushing the French to let go of the French Union and its 'Associated States' in favour of a commonwealth of fully independent nation-states based on the British model. By the early 1950s, resistance to the French Union had emerged from French Indochina to North Africa as Tunisians, Moroccans, Vietnamese and, increasingly, Laotians pushed for complete independence. This is why, starting in 1952 and not before, Sihanouk began to backpedal fast on his earlier support of the 'Associated State' and started making plans to recast himself as a nationalist king, the enemy of Indochinese 'association' and of the French Union.

While Sihanouk could not know at the outset where his Royal Crusade for Independence would take him, by 1952 he was determined to seize the nationalist mantle. He would have to stop the Democrats, frustrate their negotiations with the French and transform himself into the defender of Cambodian independence before the Democrats did and before they might put a republic in the monarchy's place. Unlike in Morocco, there would be no anti-colonialist alliance between the

king and nationalists. In 1952, Sihanouk began preparing a de facto *coup d'état* against the Democrats in favour of creating something closer to an absolute monarchy. In order to get rid of his republican rivals, however, the king still needed the French. (The French, at war with Ho Chi Minh, ran the army.) Unaware of what Sihanouk's ultimate intentions were, the French supported his coup against the Democrats, happy to stop Cambodia's nationalists from destroying 'association' and possibly bringing down the French Union by setting off a chain reaction. On 15 June 1952, the French deployed Moroccan troops to take control of Phnom Penh as Sihanouk dismissed the Democrat cabinet, began dismantling the party and arrested its leaders. He named his own prime minister as French Union troops surrounded the National Assembly and French 'tanks rumbled up and down Phnom Penh's principal streets'.[13] As one French official commented, 'we must move rapidly for all Cambodians want true independence'.[14]

What the French did not see coming was Sihanouk's immediate transformation into *the* defender of Cambodian independence. In early 1953, with the Democrats out of the way and having consolidated his internal hold on power, the king immediately launched his independence crusade by casting himself as a fierce opponent of the 'Associated State' and of Cambodia's continued membership in the French Union. In February, he travelled to Paris, where he asked to meet President Vincent Auriol to discuss the Union and begin negotiations to secure full Cambodian independence. Deeply involved in building the Associated States and holding the French Union together against a wider assault coming from other parts of Indochina and the Maghreb, Auriol listened politely, but gave a non-committal promise to look into matters. Sihanouk interpreted this (correctly) as a 'no' and took his crusade to the other side of the Atlantic. However, his desire to pressure the French from Ottawa and Washington proved just as unsuccessful. John Foster Dulles wondered why he was pressing the French on independence now – he never had before – when the real problem was the communist threat to Southeast Asia and his own country as Ho Chi Minh's divisions struck deep into Laos.

When Paris and Washington failed to support his cause, Sihanouk took his crusade back home, not to Phnom Penh, but to the ancient temples of Angkor Wat. This was the heart of Khmer civilisation, home to the first great kings of the Angkorian Empire, the source of all that was 'Cambodian'. To force the French hand, Sihanouk began mobilising popular support in the countryside. His team mobilised modern media, radios, microphones and pamphlets. The king mobilised all of his communication skills. Photographs and portraits of him popped up everywhere. In late June, he and his allies called upon

former scouts, youth, peasants and soldiers to join royalist militias. Sihanouk walked among his subjects, all the while presenting himself as the defender of the Buddhist faith and, above all, the defender of national independence. He bound the two together in his royal person. He turned on the coloniser all that they had taught him about the power of modern kingship.

Popular support for Sihanouk was real and deserves more treatment than I can give in a comparative essay. International factors also worked in his favour. First, Sihanouk was anything but alone in his crusade against the French Union in 1953. A wide range of Indochinese and North African anti-colonialists in favour of full independence had already been attacking the French Union. Ngo Dinh Diem from Vietnam and Habib ben ali Bourguiba from Tunisia were two examples among several Indo-Maghrebin ones. Second, the movement of Ho Chi Minh's troops into Laos in 1953 and soon into northeastern Cambodia convinced French strategists that they could ill afford to alienate Sihanouk at this critical juncture in their war against Ho's already independent Vietnam. Moreover, by mid-1953 the French had already agreed that once they scored a major battle victory against Ho's army, they could negotiate a favourable end to the war. This is why in October and November 1953, as the battle of Dien Bien Phu shaped up, the French gave in to most of Sihanouk's demands. However Machiavellian he was, Sihanouk had nonetheless engineered one of the most rapid transformations of a colonial monarch into a defender of the nation in the history of the French Empire. And in so doing, he had also struck a devastating blow against Cambodian republicanism and sent many young nationalists down even more radical roads than republicanism.[15] French colonialists looked on in dismay as the empire's most loyal monarch recast himself as the father of Cambodia's independence. 'Messieurs, the King is a madman', said the commanding officer of French troops in Cambodia, 'but he's a brilliant one!'[16]

Act III. Mohammed V[17]

Mohammed V may have presided over a very similar royalist crusade in Morocco, culminating in the country's full independence in 1956, but his transformation into a nationalist monarch occurred over a longer period of time and did so in ways very different to what had occurred in Cambodia. Like Bao Dai and Sihanouk, nothing at the outset indicated that this pious man would topple the French protectorate established over Morocco in 1912. By all accounts, the future Mohammed V was, in his youth, introverted, frail, shy, even something of a loner. As a boy, he apparently roamed the streets of Rabat, unsupervised and

unrecognised. His dress was always simple. His Arabic was fluent. He went about unnoticed, content to do so.

That changed, however, upon his father's death in 1927, when the French saw in the seventeen-year-old Sidi Mohammed ben Yusef the required passivity they needed to continue operating the protectorate on their terms. Finding a malleable monarch was all the more important given that the French had just helped the Spanish smash the rebel Rif Republic in northern Morocco in 1925 and arrest its legendary leader Abd el-Krim (the Spanish had maintained control of northern Morocco, including Rif, after 1912). This charismatic man had called upon Muslims to rise up and implored the Sultan of Morocco to join the struggle. Hubert Lyautey, one of the main architects of the Vietnamese and Moroccan protectorates and the man who stood next to Bao Dai during the opening ceremony of the colonial exhibition of 1931, agreed with the French Resident in Morocco that Sidi Mohammed ben Yusef was the right man to be their colonial monarch. The French duly made him Sultan in 1927 and, following a rain-soaked coronation with few present, sent him on his way to the Grand Palace in Rabat where one Resident after another tended to his education, movements and daily schedule.

As in Indochina, the crowning of the new sultan coincided with the rise of modern nationalism in North Africa. Though captured and exiled to La Réunion, Abd el-Krim's protracted battle against the 'infidel Christians' in the Rif had captured the imagination of the Muslim faithful and budding Moroccan nationalists. Significantly, many of them began to see their sultan less as a colonial collaborator than as prisoner of Christian foreigners. Efforts by French missionaries, sometimes with official support, to convert tribes to Christianity only reinforced the connection between a nationalist idea of Morocco based on Islam, its law, and the sultan as its protector. It helped that the young sultan was a deeply religious man. He attended Friday prayers, maintained close relations with the *ulamas*, who, like the Buddhist monks in charge of pagodas in Cambodia, marshalled an impressive religious network of mosques and Quranic schools. He embraced his role as the defender of the Islamic faith, as did Sihanouk the Buddhist one.

Moreover, French Morocco was not the territorially unified national body we recognise today; its northern and southern tips had remained under Spanish control. French efforts to administer non-Arab tribal groups independently of the protected monarch and Islamic law further irritated Moroccan nationalists and religious leaders intent on creating a territorially bounded nation with the sultan at its centre and in charge of the tribal lands. Unsurprisingly, nationalist-minded

elites started to use the word *Marocains* for the first time to describe this new national body,[18] just as their counterparts in Annam began to use the words 'Vietnamese' to capture a unified Vietnam uniting Cochinchina, Annam and Tonkin into one 'Vietnam'.

In the early 1930s, Mohammed V got his first real taste of change as these nationalist winds swirled. In May 1930, the French Resident had the sultan sign a decree or *dahir,* protecting customary law codes for the non-Arab, Berber tribes. This move was in part designed to tame their unruly areas, but it also allowed the French to remove these areas from pre-existing Islamic sharia codes that had placed them under the sultan and *ulama* administration. Controlling the 'tribes' would also help the French check the rise of Moroccan nationalism and pan-Arabism in the wake of the Rif War. Naively, Mohammed V signed the *dahir*, triggering an outcry from nationalists opposed to this French attempt to administer these territories independently of the protectorate and, more importantly, the Moroccan nation and central government they were imagining. Nationalist leaders such as Mohammed Allal el-Fassi criticised the king for signing this document, leading the French to remove el-Fassi from his teaching position in a Quranic school. In what became a pattern, the sultan bowed to French pressure but received nationalists in private audiences to reassure them of his sympathy. In a meeting with el-Fassi, the sultan recognised his error, saying: 'I will relinquish no more of our country's rights.'[19] He did not necessarily mean political independence, but rather that he would fight to consolidate all 'Moroccan' territory in the form of the protectorate.

Mohammed V remained committed to the protectorate. He joined colonial authorities to make imperial tours across the country, singing the praises of French deeds and modernity. But here again, nationalists knocked on the sultan's door. In May 1934, on his way to participate in holy prayers in Fès, the ancient royal capital and home of Moroccan nationalism since the Rif War, dozens of young nationalists greeted him in the street, hailing him with the words 'Yehia *el-Malik*', meaning 'god-King' in Arabic. Although such royalist sympathies moved him, like Bao Dai and Sihanouk, Mohammed V let others take the nationalist lead. The first modern political party came to life as such in 1934, the Comité d'action marocaine led by el-Fassi and others. This party forced the French to backtrack on the infamous *dahir* of 1930. Its leaders elaborated a series of reforms they submitted to the protectorate authorities at exactly the same time as Ngo Dinh Diem joined Bao Dai's reformist-minded protectorate government. The sultan supported these projects designed to promote economic modernisation, restore and modernise Muslim institutions, and push back against de facto direct colonial rule in favour of increased local rule.

But the reforms went no further than in Vietnam. The French still ran the show.

Mohammed V was not necessarily unhappy to see his nationalist competitors forced into exile in the 1930s. Like Sihanouk in Cambodia, the sultan was wary of the rise of political republicanism in North Africa, especially during the Popular Front period. In 1936, for example, el-Fassi created the Moroccan National Party, while Mohammed V continued to collaborate with his Resident. He did nothing when the French dissolved the Comité d'action marocaine in 1937 and exiled el-Fassi. However, during the 1930s, Mohammed V did something Bao Dai avoided: the *malik* slowly but surely consolidated his throne and its control over tribal lands in favour of an inclusive, unified Moroccan territorial unity. He pushed back against local powerholders, whereas Bao Dai did nothing to stop the French from administering the central highland peoples separately from the protectorate. The arrival of General Charles Noguès as Resident in 1936 and this man's commitment to the protectorate dovetailed with the sultan's plans to increase his prestige and control over Moroccan territory via this colonial entity.

As in Indochina, the Second World War profoundly changed Mohammed V and his relationship with nationalist elites. Until 1940, the sultan had been quite content to work with Noguès. When war broke out in 1939, many Moroccans joined the French army, including nationalists. Mohammed V pledged his loyalty to the Third Republic in its hour of greatest need and he kept that promise. When forced to choose, he chose the Allied cause in 1942, whereas the Resident, Noguès, opposed the Allied landing in North Africa. Ludicrous charges that the sultan went over to the Germans never stuck. As a result, Mohammed V's prestige emerged greatly strengthened from choices he made of his own volition during the war. Neither Bao Dai nor Sihanouk ever stood up like this to Vichy authorities in Indochina.

Particularly important, the war reshaped the balance of power in the Maghreb as in Indochina. The Allied liberation of North Africa, and the presence of their armies and leaders, opened up new contacts and possibilities for Moroccans. In what would have been unthinkable only a few years earlier, Mohammed V personally dined with President Franklin D. Roosevelt in early 1943 in Casablanca as his exiting Vichy and newly arriving Gaullist advisers watched from the side lines. For the first time, the sultan interacted with a foreign head of state as if he were one himself. Roosevelt's vision of a post-colonial world and economic modernisation tantalised. An avid follower of world events, Mohammed V was well aware of the Atlantic Charter and its mention of self-determination. A few months later,

Charles de Gaulle met the Moroccan king as he set up his own government in exile in Algiers:

> This young, proud, personal sovereign did not hide his desire to be at the head of his country as it marched towards progress and, one day, independence. On seeing and listening to him, sometimes ardent, sometimes prudent but always adept, one felt that he was ready to get along with anyone who would help him play this role and capable of deploying a great deal of stubbornness against those who would oppose him on that count.[20]

These monarchs were not the only ones taking advantage of the changes generated by the global war. Just as Ho Chi Minh in 1941 created the Vietnamese Independence League, the Viet Minh, Moroccan nationalists established in 1943 the Hizh al-Istiqlal or Independence Party. Significantly, Moroccan nationalists looked to the monarch to help lead the independence movement. Never, to my knowledge, did Ho Chi Minh entertain such an alliance. In January 1944, a group of nationalists including el-Fassi submitted an independence manifesto to the sultan which Mohammed V intentionally forwarded to the new Resident with the monarch's implicit approbation. To no avail. The 'new French' had no intention of decolonising. The protectorate remained in force. Mohammed V deferred again and called on nationalists to avoid pronouncing the word 'independence' for the time being. He also looked the other way as the French clamped down on the Istiqlal. The sultan was no more ready to lead an independence crusade in 1944–45 than Bao Dai or Sihanouk. Nor did he take to the *maquis*. However, like Sihanouk, and unlike Bao Dai, he never considered abdicating his throne.

The sultan remained committed to the French and welcomed the arrival of the Fourth Republic's reformist-minded Resident, Erik Labonne, in 1946. The Moroccan leader was still hopeful that reforms, including eventual independence, could be achieved via a partnership and peacefully. That said, Mohammed V resumed his efforts to build up his power at the expense of those regional and tribal leaders who opposed the throne's more centralised control. He sought to affirm the unity of the country and let it be known that he considered the southern and northern strips, administered by the Spanish until 1956, to be a part of his Morocco. In his famous imperial tour of Tangiers in 1947, the sultan wanted to demonstrate his internal supremacy and proposed to make an important speech to mark the occasion. Labonne liked the idea. An imperial tour would respect the protectorate and strengthen the prestige of the king who would help the French to rule more effectively, as in the past. It would also send the right signal to

Spain. The sultan promised to show his texts to the French before going public, including the required mention of good French deeds (*bienfaits*), the signifier of the king's loyalty to the French. Labonne agreed, but things took an unexpected turn when Senegalese troops fired on civilians and set off violent protests. Passions suddenly ran high as newspaper front pages and radio bulletins beamed the news across the country. The sultan, upset, decided to omit the promised phrase thanking the French. But what made Tangiers unique compared to Bao Dai's tours in the early 1930s was that the Istiqlal was secretly working the crowds, labour unions, scouting organisations, student associations and religious halls in Tangiers. When the sultan appeared to speak, a flood of people met him with cries of joy and pleas for action. In the heat of the moment, the monarch embraced the crowds, approved their calls for independence, evoked a glorious Moroccan past, applauded pan-Arabism and endorsed the unification of the country, though he carefully pulled back from saying 'independence'.

For the French, however, Mohammed V had crossed a line. The Tangiers speech cost Labonne his job and set reformism back as hardliner settlers and colonial administrators came together to call for a military man to take over, someone who would not be afraid to move against the sultan and the nationalists if need be. Agreed, Paris sent General Alphonse Juin to Rabat in 1947 and gave him orders very similar to those sent to Indochina: there could be reforms, but there could be no independence within the confines of the French Union established by the 1946 constitution. French legal experts entered into complicated legal arguments in the Maghreb, as in Indochina, over how *not* to say 'independence'. 'Inter-independence' became the preferred term in Morocco, while 'association' was the buzzword in Indochina. Pushed by nationalists and aware of similar anti-colonial opposition in the French Empire, Mohammed V became increasingly involved in negotiations over the French Union and his country's position in it.

French settler hostility to the sultan grew, pushing him into an ever closer alliance with the anti-colonialists. So, too, did French support for tribal leaders, most notably the Pacha Glaoui (the chief of the Glawa tribe in southern Morocco). The latter saw an opportunity to use French settler and colonial anger at the sultan to promote his own local interests and territorial autonomy instead of having to incorporate his lands into a potential Moroccan nation-state run by the sultan. That a stand-off was in the making was clear when the Glaoui felt safe enough to tell the sultan famously to his face: 'You [*tu*] are no longer the sultan of Morocco, you are the sultanate of the atheistic, communist Istiqlal.'[21] The sultan dug in his heels and, as he did, nationalist support coalesced around him. In turn, French opposition to his rule

only increased. This was clear when Juin made his famous threat to Mohammed V in terms as threatening as those of the Glaoui: 'Either you disown the Istiqlal or you abdicate. If not, I will depose you myself. I'm leaving now for Washington. You have the time to think about what I have just asked of you. We will see what we will do upon my return!'[22] The problem was not communism; it was nationalism and the spectre of independence that troubled the Glaoui and the French Resident. When Juin threatened to depose Mohammed V if he did not sign the protocols of 1950 respecting continued French rule, the sultan signed but claimed he did so only to stop the bloodshed. Nationalists immediately closed ranks behind him. Nothing of the sort ever occurred in Vietnam. Nationalists led by Ho Chi Minh saw in Bao Dai a colonial puppet.

After Juin came another general as Resident, Augustin Guillaume, brandishing the same threats. The situation worsened dramatically in the early 1950s as verbal French insults, humiliations and thinly veiled insinuations rained down on the sultan as he refused to budge. Mohammed V sent his colonial handlers into rages. Present in several meetings between the French and the sultan, the sympathetic French journalist Jean Lacouture described the sultan's passive resistance memorably: 'With a beard working his face, black sunglasses hiding his face, a folded hood over his forehead, it was a ritual of sovereign antipathy, symbolic of the aversion that would have delighted a specialist of court intrigues and royal moods like [the Duc de] Saint Simon (in the court of Louis XIV).'[23] Mohammed V, almost in spite of himself, came to embody nationalist unity, pushed as much by the Istiqlal in this direction as by French and tribal leaders terrified that he was indeed a nationalist monarch, when, in fact, that was arguably not yet the case. But when French settlers, administrators and the Glaoui began to attack Mohammed V with an avalanche of insults and crude humiliations, they forgot how Moroccan nationalist and religious minds might interpret these affronts. They certainly underestimated how their assault on the royal person could telescope a range of social, nationalist, religious and even feminist frustrations into massive support for the sultan. It did.

And the sultan did act. He increasingly welcomed alliances with newly formed workers' unions. He told the Communist Party that he embraced all social classes into the larger Moroccan family, based on greater democracy. He visited industrial establishments and renewed his visits to popular quarters of Rabat and elsewhere. Like Sihanouk, he was at ease walking among large crowds. He touched his people and allowed himself to be approached by them. He visited the families who had lost loved ones during the violence in Casablanca, Fès

and Rabat. His confidence grew rapidly and, as it did, he warmed to public speaking. In his speeches, he carefully wove together the fabric of the nation into his person as the king and defender of the country's religion, Islam.[24]

In 1952, overcoming the timidity Bao Dai never conquered, Mohammed V went on the offensive. He overtly associated his monarchy and his royal being with the nationalists and the people. He condemned the French state of siege, and the attack on workers, and called for negotiations over the future of the French Union. During his visit to Casablanca that year, thousands of people came out to welcome him, greeting him with cries of '*malik*'. During his speeches, microphones were carefully placed to make him heard, and portraits were distributed at every gathering. Nationalists and settlers inevitably clashed as the monarch called the colonial order into question. The resulting violence further charged the atmosphere as the French prepared to move against their very royalist creation. The growing Moroccan crisis came to a head in February 1953 – just as Sihanouk prepared to launch his crusade to free Cambodia. Desperate, the French Resident, settlers and officials agreed to bring a new collaborator to power in Morocco and depose the existing sultan in order to do so. Morocco had to remain in the imperial hold even if it meant that Mohammed V had to go.

It was a fateful decision. On 20 August 1953, French tanks, jeeps mounted with machine guns, and security officers entered the palace compound as troops took up their positions. A few minutes later, General Guillaume arrived in the sultan's quarters and told him either to abdicate or leave. The sultan refused. Guillaume's men forcibly escorted the monarch out of the country with his two sons and exiled them all to Madagascar. In so doing, the French action triggered a nationalist outcry. Although they were hardly monarchists, el-Fassi and other nationalists threw their support behind Mohammed V and the common struggle for the complete independence of Morocco.

Thinking they were saving their protectorate and preserving the Union, the French only accelerated the decline of both. The new French-backed sultan certainly enjoyed the support of the tribal leaders, but that support did not go much further. There was no popular acclaim for the new sultan when he entered Rabat – just silence, except for the settler press and the tribal troops whom the French had brought in, who hailed him as a saviour. Meanwhile, people in the streets said that they had seen Mohammed V in the stars. Religious leaders and increasing numbers of Muslims interpreted the French action as sacrilege and an offence against Islam. As even a settler in Casablanca recognised at the time: 'The Sultan has emerged from this trial with added greatness, and more than ever worthy of the attachment of his people. He has

remained their sovereign and supreme Imam, in whose name they will continue, in their innermost hearts, to recite their prayers.'[25] Despite being outlawed, Moroccans placed portraits of the legitimate sultan in their homes as signs of defiance. In many ways, in forced colonial exile, Mohammed V assumed nationalist powers, which he had never previously possessed. In the end, the French had no choice but to return the exiled sultan to calm the situation or undertake violent repression and risk war. As in Cambodia, they capitulated, and on 16 November 1955 Mohammed V made his triumphant return to Rabat before hundreds of thousands of Moroccans who poured into the streets to welcome him. There was no going back now. Mohammed V was no longer a colonial king. By deposing and exiling the sovereign, the French had made a nationalist martyr of him. His return was the turning point at which this initially timid man finally transformed himself into a national monarch and the defender of Moroccan independence, formally acquired in 1956.

Bao Dai: The failed decolonisation of a colonial monarch

But why does Bao Dai rest in a Parisian cemetery and not in Vietnam today? To a considerable extent, the answer to that question lies in the very different nature of Vietnamese decolonisation and the international context in which it occurred. Let us pick up on Bao Dai's case where we left it, after 1945. In early 1946, worried by the communist hue of Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam and convinced that the French had no intention of letting go of Vietnam, Bao Dai went into self-exile in Hong Kong and began working with fellow non-communist nationalists to carve out a third way between the 'French colonialists' and the 'Vietnamese communists'. From his position of exile, Bao Dai gambled that he could rally non-communist nationalists around the prestige of his person, garner American support in light of their growing anti-communism, and play the Vietnamese 'communists' against the French 'colonialists' in order to win the independence Ho had failed to achieve when full-scale war broke out in late 1946.

The High Commissioner for Indochina in the late 1940s, Léon Pignon, saw things differently. He was convinced that the French could win the emperor back and, as in the past, use him and his royal person to keep an associated state of Vietnam within the French Union, all the while drawing support away from Ho's Vietnam. Not only had Pignon started his career as an administrator under Pierre Pasquier in the early 1930s, but he was also working with many of the same men who had been involved in Sarraut and Pasquier's first Bao Dai 'experiment', in

particular Jean Cousseau. In 1947, Pignon sent Cousseau to Hong Kong to meet with Bao Dai. Arduous negotiations followed over the nature of a future Vietnamese state and its position within the Union. Bao Dai wanted independence but the French argued in favour of 'association' in order to keep Vietnam within the wider French Union. In the end, Bao Dai got little further in his negotiations than Ho had before him, other than the fact that the French finally agreed to allow the unification of Cochinchina with the two northern protectorates to form the 'Associated State of Vietnam' in 1949.

Unlike the situation in the Maghreb, international changes in 1949–50 greatly weakened Bao Dai's hand, in particular the Chinese communist victory in 1949 and Mao Zedong's decision to recognise and support Ho's Vietnam. The French, however, saw in the Chinese communist victory an opportunity to convince the heretofore-reluctant Americans to support them in Indochina as part of Washington's attempt to contain the spread of communism any further into Asia. The French would stay in the war for the anti-communist cause but they expected American military assistance as well as support for the 'Bao Dai solution'. It worked. Instead of pushing the French to decolonise as they did in Indonesia, the Americans supported French efforts to build a less than independent, non-communist Vietnamese state around Bao Dai in order to contain what they perceived as the greater Sino-Soviet communist threat to Southeast Asia via Ho Chi Minh's Vietnam. The French thus accepted the unification of Vietnam under the ex-emperor, but, in exchange, Bao Dai had to join the French Union and return to Vietnam. He did both things in 1949 but it cost him dearly. He lost his leverage.

Sihanouk and Mohammed V never faced combined Franco-American pressure the way Bao Dai did. Nor did they have to compete with a nationalist state at war with them and their association with the colonisers. The Istiqlal party in Morocco was independence-minded, but it was *not* run by communists or supported by Mao. As long as the French remained committed to fighting the Indochina War, the Americans were reluctant to push them too hard on independence, as they did the Dutch over Indonesia. The French successfully used American fears of communism to maintain their colonial hold on Indochina and thwart efforts by Bao Dai, Ngo Dinh Diem and others to free a non-communist Vietnam from the French Union like Morocco's Mohammed V and Cambodia's Sihanouk did. When Bao Dai returned to Vietnam in 1949, the High Commissioner, Léon Pignon, flatly refused to turn over to him the governor's palace in Saigon, the seat of power of Vietnam. Bao Dai could have done in 1949 what Mohammed V and Sihanouk would do a few years later – he could have

turned the monarchy on the French to force decolonisation. He could have transformed the largely French-invented Confucian 'tradition' and the imperial tour into a modern crusade for national independence before Ho turned his guerrilla forces into a seven-division-strong professional army capable of bringing down the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Bui Diem, a famous non-communist nationalist, recalled his efforts to win over Bao Dai in 1949:

> We realized that there was one way to break the French lock step, and that was for Bao Dai to turn on them. If the emperor would not ask but demand the immediate implementation of French promises, the colonialists would be in a dangerous dilemma themselves. They badly needed the Bao Dai government to provide a Vietnamese alternative to the Vietminh and to marshal all the anti-Communist sentiment he could. But just as they were using Bao Dai, there was no reason he could not use them.[26]

But Bao Dai did not have it in him. In the end, he let events and others push him to the side lines. Passive resistance was not enough. Ultimately, the Vietnamese nationalist who had refused to sign off on the 'associated states' arrangement in 1949 and who travelled to France in 1953 and the United States to push for Vietnam's exit from the French Union was none other than Ngo Dinh Diem. This was the man with whom Bao Dai had collaborated briefly in the early 1930s. He was also the one – not Ho Chi Minh – who would run the last emperor out of Vietnam in 1955 for good in order to create the Republic of Vietnam. This is how the last emperor of Vietnam came to rest in a Parisian cemetery, while the tombs of Sihanouk and Mohammed V still attract millions of visitors each year as the men who secured Cambodian and Moroccan independence, the fathers of their nations.

Notes

All translations by the author, Christopher Goscha.

1 For general histories of colonised Vietnam, see Christopher Goscha, *The Penguin History of Modern Vietnam* (Milton Keynes: Allen Lane, 2016); Ben Kiernan, *Viet Nam: A History from Earliest Times to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); and Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858–1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

2 The Resident-General (often referred to as the Resident) was the senior French administrative official in the protectorates, such as Vietnam and Morocco.

3 See Nguyen Thé Anh, *Monarchie et fait colonial au Viet-nam (1875–1925): le crépuscule d'un ordre traditionnel* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992); Bruce Lockhart, *The End of the Vietnamese Monarchy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993); and Oscar Chapuis, *The Last Emperors of Vietnam: From Tu Duc to Bao Dai* (New York: Praeger, 2000).

4 On the exile of colonial monarchs, see Robert Aldrich, *Banished Potentates: Dethroning and Exiling Indigenous Monarchs under British and French Colonial*

Rule, 1815–1955 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018); see in particular ch. 4: '"Dragons of Annam": the French and three emperors in Vietnam', pp. 117–77.

5 The emperor's autobiography gives his own perspective: Bao Dai, *Le Dragon d'Annam* (Paris: Plon, 1980).

6 Archives nationales d'outre-mer (ANOM), Indochine nouveau fonds 27, 'Pierre Pasquier au résident supérieur d'Annam', Hanoi, 16 January 1907, p. 5. My thanks to Charles Keith for sharing this reference.

7 ANOM, dossier 2326, box 858, fonds AFOM, nouveau fonds, 'Note au sujet de l'éducation en France du Prince Vinh Thuy', Hue, 18 February 1922, signed by Pierre Pasquier.

8 I rely, in this section, on the following: David Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War, and Revolution Since 1945* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997); Milton Osborne, *Sihanouk: Prince of Light, Prince of Darkness* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994); Nasir Abdoul-Carime, 'Le verbe sihanoukien', *Péninsule*, 2 (1995), 79–98; Norodom Sihanouk, *La Monarchie cambodgienne et la croisade royale pour l'indépendance*, Phnom Penh, Ministère de l'éducation nationale, n.d. For the earlier reign of King Sisowath and his relations with the French, see John Tully, *Cambodia under the Tricolour: King Sisowath and the 'Mission Civilisatrice', 1904–1927* (Clayton, Vic.: Monash University Press, 1996).

9 Jean Decoux, *À la Barre de l'Indochine, 1940–1945* (Paris: Plon, 1949), pp. 270, 274.

10 *Ibid*., p. 287.

11 Sihanouk, *Souvenirs doux et amers* (Paris: Hachette, 1981), pp. 87–8.

12 Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860–1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).

13 Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History*, p. 61.

14 *Ibid*., p. 63.

15 *Ibid*., p. 72.

16 Norodom Sihanouk, *L'Indochine vue de Pékin* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1972), p. 54.

17 I rely, in this section, on Daniel Rivet, *Le Maroc de Lyautey À Mohammed V, Le Double visage du protectorat* (Paris: Denoël, 1999); Daniel Rivet, *Le Maghreb À l'épreuve de la colonisation* (Paris: Hachette, 2002); Jean Lacouture, *Cinq hommes et la France* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1961); Rom Landau, *Moroccan Drama, 1900–1955* (San Francisco: American Academy of Asian Studies, 1956); on the dethroning and exile of Mohammed V and other Moroccan sultans, see Aldrich, *Banished Potentates*, pp. 255–60 and 265–71.

18 Charles-André Julien, *L'Afrique du Nord en marche*, 3rd edn (Paris: René Julliard, 1972), p. 135.

19 Lacouture, *Cinq hommes et la France*, p. 187.

20 *Ibid*., p. 193.

21 *Ibid*., p. 211.

22 *Ibid*., pp. 211–12.

23 *Ibid*., p. 205.

24 Rivet, *Le Maroc de Lyautey À Mohammed V*, ch. 11.

25 Landau, *Moroccan Drama*, pp. 324–5.

26 Bui Diem, *In the Jaws of History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 67–8.