

Gifts from Juan Linz

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I learned many important things from Juan Linz in the twenty-four years I had the privilege to know him as a mentor, friend, and collaborator. Perhaps the most valuable gift from Juan concerns how the simple act of an admired elder taking a young person seriously can have a transformative impact on their self-confidence, aspirations, and lives. Juan was a kind and much-admired elder who always took good students seriously by making time for them. He had a keen ability to see your potential, even when you doubted it yourself, and he helped you grow by generously sharing his knowledge and wisdom. Because of Juan I am not just a better scholar, but also a better person.

I was never formally Juan's student, but that did not matter to him.¹ What mattered was that I was a serious and promising student. In the late 1980, as an undergraduate in the Social Studies Concentration at Harvard, the closest thing I know to a prep school for social science PhDs, I stumbled onto the topic of personalistic dictatorships and the contrasting fortunes of these regimes. At the time, I was strongly influenced by the work of Theda Skocpol on social revolutions, in the fall of my senior year I enrolled in the graduate sociology seminar she was teaching on "Analytic Approaches to the State." One of Skocpol's top doctoral students, Jeff Goodwin, served as advisor for my senior honors thesis. Skocpol had famously argued that patrimonial agrarian monarchies were especially susceptible to revolutionary overthrow, and I was puzzled by the contrasting fortunes of "neopatrimonial" dictatorships of the modern era.² Some of these regimes were indeed toppled by revolutionary movements, including the Shah of Iran, Somoza in Nicaragua, and the Batista in Cuba. Yet other prominent examples of neopatrimonial dictatorships, for example, Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines, and the Duvaliers of Haiti, had not been toppled by revolutions but had been forced from power in other ways, including by military coups and transitions to electoral democracy. As an undergraduate at Harvard, I had taken a stimulating course on political development by Juan's former student, Houchang Chehabi. Houchang had a strong personal interest in the case of Iran and, more generally, in the Weberian concept of sultanistic rule, and served as one of the two readers for my thesis.³ He forwarded my completed honors thesis to Juan and informed me

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¹ Because I had been introduced to Juan through his former student, Houchang Chehabi, and was good friends with another Linz student, Robert Fishman, Juan sometimes referred to me as his "grandchild."

² Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

³ Richard Snyder, "A Comparative Analysis of the Vulnerability of Sultanistic Regimes to Revolution," Senior Honors Thesis, Committee on Degrees in Social Studies, March 1989. A spin-off article from

that Juan had liked it, which I was, of course, pleased to know. Being a naïve young student, I was clueless about what to do with this good news that a famous professor at Yale had liked my work. In fact, I might never have met Juan had I not shared this information with an astute friend who was a doctoral student in Sociology at Harvard and knew of my plans to apply to doctoral programs: he said, “Juan Linz likes your work! Don’t be an idiot. Get in touch with him and ask if he will write you a letter of recommendation!” Luckily for me, I did.

In the fall of 1989, having just graduated from Harvard College the previous Spring, I was visiting friends in Cambridge, MA, and knew that I would soon be driving back to my parents’ house in the suburbs of Washington, DC, a route that would take me through New Haven, CT. I asked Houchang for Juan’s telephone number. I remember nervously calling this famous Yale professor to see if he might be able to allow me 10 or 15 minutes of his time so that I could stop by his office to meet him. To my surprise, he proposed that I stop by his house in Hamden instead and proceeded to give me driving directions over the telephone. But there was a glitch: his driving directions were totally incomprehensible. The only thing I managed to grasp was something about making a turn near a Red Lobster restaurant! I overcame my embarrassment at this awkward situation and said that I was very sorry but I was unable to understand his directions. Fortunately, Juan handed the phone over to a far more effective navigator, his wife, Rocío, who quickly and clearly explained how to get there.⁴

When I arrived, I expected to greet Professor Linz, chat for 5 or 10 minutes, and then be quickly on my way. To my surprise, Juan warmly invited me in and asked me to sit down in the living room, which was full of books. He asked how I had become interested in studying sultanistic regimes, and I blushed when I had to admit that I had no personal connection to or deep intrinsic interest in these regimes. Instead I had been drawn to study them mainly by the compelling analytical puzzle posed by their contrasting fortunes, a puzzle that my thesis adviser, Jeff Goodwin, had helped me see. Then Juan began handing me books published by his former students as well as copies of recently completed dissertations. He showed me several volumes that he had recently co-edited with Larry Diamond and Seymour Martin Lipset.⁵ Soon, a heavy, tall, and teetering pile of books had accumulated on my lap, threatening to topple onto the floor at any moment! I vividly remember Juan handing me a pamphlet containing the speech by Adolfo Suárez, Spain’s first democratically elected Prime Minister after the dictatorship of Franco, in which he announced his important decision to legalize the Spanish communist party. Juan told me that Suárez had recently visited Yale and, in fact, had sat in the very chair in which I was then seated. Although I had never heard of Suárez before, the enthusiasm with which Juan spoke about him, and his evident admiration for the positive role that his good political judgment

the thesis was published as Richard Snyder, “Explaining Transitions from Neopatrimonial Dictatorships,” *Comparative Politics* 24:4 (July 1992): 379-99.

⁴ I later learned that Juan very rarely drove and this partly explained his difficulty giving clear driving directions to others.

⁵ Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Democracy in Developing Countries* 3 vols. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989).

in this instance had played in the transition to democracy in Spain, sparked my curiosity.⁶ Juan understood that simply sharing one's genuine passion for knowledge and learning was in itself a powerful pedagogical device.

Before I knew it, several hours had passed, and Juan and Rocío invited me to stay for dinner. Then, because the weather was inclement and Rocío worried that it would be unsafe for me to drive that night, I was invited to sleep over so that I could come to Juan's graduate seminar the next morning and meet some of the graduate students. I suppose Juan was trying to "recruit" me to Yale's PhD program, yet he happily offered to write me letters of recommendation for the other programs to which I was applying, and he supported my eventual decision to study at Berkeley. For a twenty-two year old student, it was both thrilling and humbling to have this great professor take an interest in me, open up his home and scholarly sanctum, and invite me to join the community of students and scholars. That wonderful day in Hamden was a very special moment in my career and life: a meeting I expected to last five minutes turned into a treasured relationship of twenty-four years.

Writing this essay stirs up many other fond memories of Juan. In the fall of 1990, I was invited by Juan and Houchang to fly back to Harvard from Berkeley to participate in a conference they were organizing on sultanistic regimes. I was a first-year graduate student, and this was my very first professional conference. It was a heady and intimidating experience taking a seat at the table with famous senior scholars like Jorge Domínguez, Theda Skocpol, and, of course, Juan. In addition to Houchang, three other former Linz students, Robert Fishman, Mark Thompson and Jonathan Hartlyn, also attended. Juan had flown in from Berlin, where he was spending a year visiting at the *Wissenschaftskolleg*. In a striking illustration of the depth of Juan's commitment to Max Weber, he proudly carried with him from Berlin *the source*, that is, the original German version of Weber's delineation of the concept *sultanism*, which he read aloud to us and simultaneously translated into English at the conference table!

I was fortunate to contribute to the book that he and Houchang edited on sultanistic regimes.⁷ My comparative chapter highlighted the utility of the concept of sultanism for understanding the dynamics and paths out of political systems in a broad range of cases across the world, from Haiti, to the Philippines, to Zaire, to Romania. The theoretical framework for explaining transitions away from sultanistic regimes that I developed in that chapter, which

⁶ I later realized that Suárez was an important example for Juan of how key figures of the old, non-democratic regime could play positive and productive roles in bringing about a transition to democracy: Suárez had served in Franco's government. Hence, the blanket demonization of people linked to the old non-democratic regime was both simplistic and potentially dangerous for democracy.

⁷ Richard Snyder, "Paths out of Sultanistic Regimes: Combining Structural and Voluntarist Perspectives," in H.E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz, eds., *Sultanistic Regimes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp. 49-81. Persian translation of the whole volume published in 2001. Spanish translation of my chapter published as "Vías de salida de los regímenes sultánicos. Una combinación de perspectivas estructurales y voluntaristas," *Araucaria: Revista Iberoamericana de Filosofía, Política y Humanidades* (Spain) 4(7) (2002), pp. 48-94.

aimed to combine structural and voluntarist explanations for regime change, was inspired by the fact that both Linz and Skocpol, two quite different scholars with very different theoretical approaches and styles, converged in their shared interest in sultanistic regimes. Skocpol was a scholar known for her “structural” anti-voluntarist perspective on political change, a position signaled by her approving quotation of the abolitionist Wendell Phillips, who she says correctly delineated the causes of historical social revolutions when he stated: “Revolutions are not made; they come.”⁸ Yet she was sitting at the same small conference table with Juan, a scholar equally well known for his emphasis on political leadership and the role of contingency in political change: for Juan, macropolitical and social transformations were most definitely “made,” as illustrated by his admiration for the work of the Yale historian Henry Ashby Turner, who provided a detailed account of the thirty days before Hitler came to power, zooming in on the very small group of individuals who had an influence on Hindenburg’s decisions, a group of people who were not acting in any meaningful way as representatives of larger social forces, but rather were driven by particularistic, even petty, motives.⁹ What was it about the topic of sultanistic regimes that brought together senior scholars with such different perspectives? My aim was to try to bridge these two distinct perspectives. I had even used the title, “Linz Meets Skocpol,” on an early draft of the paper: when I showed this to Juan’s friend, the Berkeley political scientist, Giuseppe Di Palma, he quipped, “That sounds like the cartoon ‘Bambi Meets Godzilla.’” I soon decided to change the title. In the initial stages of writing my chapter for the sultanism volume I explained to Juan that my point of entry for the theoretical framework I hoped to develop was my effort to pin down why sultanistic regimes commanded both his and Skocpol’s attention, despite their sharply contrasting theoretical orientations, he said, approvingly, “That’s an interesting way to pose the problem.” I was thrilled.

Over the past twenty-five years, I was fortunate to have many wonderful visits to Hamden to see both Juan and Rocío. Rocío always kept us well supplied with coffee and Spanish delicacies, olives, *queso manchego*, *tortilla española*. I especially remember a summertime visit in the late 1990s, when Rocío was away in Spain. I arrived to the house in the late morning, and Juan and I spent several hours drinking coffee and discussing a paper I was writing on electoral malapportionment (i.e., a skewed relationship between the number of citizens and the number of elected representatives in electoral districts).¹⁰ Juan’s insightful comments helped me think about this arcane institutional phenomenon in broader, more dynamic terms by considering both its origins and the conditions under which it might evolve. Later, Juan

⁸ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, p. 17. Skocpol’s subsequent work on American politics and political development moved away from this “hard” structuralist position.

⁹ Henry Ashby Turner, *Hitler’s Thirty Days to Power: January 1933* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1996). For Linz’s discussion of Turner’s book, see Gerardo L. Munck and Richard Snyder, *Passion, Craft, and Method in Comparative Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), p. 165.

¹⁰ David Samuels and Richard Snyder, “The Value of a Vote: Malapportionment in Comparative Perspective,” *British Journal of Political Science* 31(4) (October 2001): 651-671.

and I continued our conversation in the kitchen, while he prepared *arroz negro*, a dish he said he had learned to cook when he was a young bachelor. This is a rice and squid dish from Valencia, in which the squid's ink is used to turn the rice black. I was so taken with this dish that I started preparing it myself at home, though I told Juan that I was unable to locate a crucial ingredient: Spanish squid *en su tinta*. Soon afterwards, I received a package in the mail from Juan containing several cans of Spanish *chipirones* – I still have the cardboard boxes.

This gift should be set in the context of the barter network which kept Juan steadily supplied with his beloved Spanish Ducados cigarettes, which were quite difficult to locate in the United States. When I told Juan in the early 1990s that I had decided to study Mexico for my doctoral dissertation, his eyes lit up: he knew that Ducados were sold in the Duty Free stores in the Mexico City airport. Juan gently asked if I might be able to bring him back a carton of Ducados. Of course, I did so dutifully over the years, always bringing several cartons of Ducados back from Mexico and mailing them to Juan. Although Juan would always send me a check to reimburse me for my purchases, I never cashed them. This was truly an “economy of affection.” When I mentioned at the Eulogy for Juan at the Yale University Chapel that I had often wondered who else formed part of the informal network that kept Juan supplied with Ducados, Arturo Valenzuela and Alfred Stepan both confessed to being fellow conspirators in this effort. I am certain there were others.

As I moved through the process of fieldwork and writing my dissertation at Berkeley, Juan was an important source of advice and intellectual support. I would have long phone conversations with Juan or receive lengthy letters from him with his comments on draft chapters. I still have a long letter from Juan – ten single-spaced pages – with comments on an early version of my dissertation prospectus where I made the claim that “clientelism provided the political stability necessary for development to proceed.” In a gentle and constructive way, Juan worked to disabuse me of this notion, which he considered misguided. In a Schumpeterian vein, he urged me to focus instead on the crucial, yet often unpredictable, role that entrepreneurs, not clientelist politicians, play in explaining why some countries are more developed than others. He asked “Why did Italy produce an entrepreneur like Olivetti whereas Argentina did not?” At this stage of my training, I was especially grateful for Juan's utter lack of interest in matters of academic style: substance and depth were what mattered. His strong preference for substance over style and form made it easier for me to send rough drafts from the field or long disorganized papers with promising but half-baked ideas. With Juan I did not have to wait to have a polished piece of work before seeking comments and guidance. Not only was Juan unfazed by the messiness and loose ends of disorganized work in progress, he celebrated the richness that can characterize this material and was suspicious of work that was too tidy and elegant.¹¹

I also benefitted enormously from Juan's emphasis on the importance of empathic understanding, or *verstehen*, in the social sciences as well as in life. One of my favorite examples of Juan's *verstehen*, which I often share with graduate students as an example of how to develop an eye for “telling details,” involves the failed coup against the government of

¹¹ My dissertation was later published as Richard Snyder, *Politics after Neoliberalism: Reregulation in Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991 in the U.S.S.R. I remember Juan explaining that he had watched the news reports about the events in the Soviet Union on television in his hotel room in Cochabamba, Bolivia. He knew that the coup would not succeed because he observed the *babushkas* in the crowds talking to the young troops who had been mobilized against them. Based on this astute long-distance observation, he inferred, correctly, that the soldiers would not fire on the crowds protesting against the coup and that, hence, the coup would not succeed.

In 1999, my good friend and colleague at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Gerardo Munck, and I began discussing doing a collection of extended in-depth interviews with the best senior scholars about the craft of comparative research. One of our aims was to capture the experience of conversing with leading scholars like Juan, so that their wisdom about how to do good research and, more generally, about the purpose of social science, could be shared with others, especially graduate students. Juan was very supportive of this idea from the start, and he sent me a signed copy of a recently published book by Hans Daalder, *Comparative European Politics*, with an autobiographical essay by Juan, as well as essays by several of the other scholars we ended up including in our book.¹² This gift from Juan encouraged us to push ahead with our project. Juan believed in the project and was willing to be the “guinea pig” by sitting for the first interview, which I carried out at his home in April 2001. This pilot interview clocked in at more than twelve hours and resulted in a transcript of well over one hundred pages. Juan further supported the project by giving me helpful comments on the questionnaire we had prepared for the other interviews, and he urged me to include James Scott, one of his favorite Yale colleagues, in the book.

A few months later I sat down with our second interviewee, Samuel Huntington, whose succinct, even curt, verbal style stood in sharp contrast to Juan’s expansiveness.¹³ When I told Huntington that the initial interview for the project, with Juan, had stretched twelve hours over two days, he nearly fell out of his chair, especially because he had instructed his secretary to allot just 45 minutes for the interview!¹⁴ The resulting book, *Passion, Craft and Method in Comparative Politics*, ended up containing fifteen interviews with the leading scholars in comparative politics in the second half of the twentieth century, including two of Juan’s former students, Alfred Stepan and Guillermo O’Donnell, in addition to Gabriel Almond, Robert Dahl, Barrington Moore, Jr., Philippe Schmitter, Adam Przeworski, Arend Lijphart, David Laitin, Theda Skocpol, and James Scott, among others.¹⁵ The book, which includes the authors of much of the “canon” of modern comparative politics, has become a widely-used text in graduate seminars in the United States, Europe, and Latin America.

¹² Hans Daalder, ed., *Comparative European Politics: The Story of a Profession* (New York: Pinter, 1997).

¹³ In person, Huntington was surprisingly shy, especially compared to his bold and often provocative writing style.

¹⁴ I managed to record nearly three hours of material with Huntington in two meetings.

¹⁵ Gerardo L. Munck and Richard Snyder, *Passion, Craft, and Method in Comparative Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

Portions of my interview with Juan were subsequently published in French and Mexican social science journals, and a beautiful Spanish translation of the whole interview was prepared by Juan and Rocío's niece, Inés Toharia and published as the very last chapter in the seventh, and final, volume of the monumental *Obras Escogidas*, compiled and edited by Jeff Miley and José Ramón Montero.¹⁶ A “pirate” Spanish translation of the interview was produced by political science undergraduates in Peru, and a legitimate Spanish edition of the whole book is in progress. In 2012, the complete interview with Juan was also published in a three-volume Korean translation of the book.¹⁷ Juan's friend and co-author, Yogendra Yadav, was visiting Brown University in the Spring of 2013, and at the end of April we drove together from Providence, RI to visit Juan and Rocío for what turned out to be the last time.¹⁸ The accompanying photo of Rocío and Juan, taken in their living room during that visit, shows Juan holding the three volumes of the Korean edition; and the illustration of Juan, holding what is surely a lit Ducado cigarette in his upraised hand, is taken from that edition. When I explained that the Korean publisher had taken poetic license with the book's title, rendering “Passion, Craft and Method in Comparative Politics” as “How They Became the Best Political Scientists,” we all had a good laugh!

¹⁶ Richard Snyder, “Juan J. Linz: Regímenes Políticos, Democracia y la Búsqueda del Conocimiento,” in José Ramón Montero and Thomas Jeffrey Miley, eds., *Juan J. Linz: Obras Escogidas*, vol. 7, *Historia y sociedad en España* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, 2013), pp. 549-603; Richard Snyder, “Retour sur les travaux de Juan Linz et leur reception. Extrait de l'entretien avec Juan J. Linz,” *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée* (France) 13(1) (2006), pp 129-141; Gerardo L. Munck and Richard Snyder, “El pasado, presente y futuro de la política comparada: un simposio,” *Política y Gobierno* (Mexico) 12(1) (2005), pp. 127-156.

¹⁷ Seoul, Korea: Humanitas Publishing Co., 2012.

¹⁸ Alfred Stepan, Juan J. Linz, and Yogendra Yadav, *Crafting State-Nations: India and Other Multinational Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).