Vale Doug Miles

Our friend, teacher and colleague, Douglas Miles, passed away in Canberra on 2 September 2013. After an adventurous life that included fieldwork in Borneo, North Thailand, Bali, Jakarta and even the logging communities on the NSW South Coast, Doug and his wife Toi returned to Canberra where he suffered a long illness prior to his death. Doug was a pioneer of the Anthropology of Indonesia in Australia, studying Indonesian and Anthropology at the University of Sydney in the 1950s. He was also a founder of Thai studies including serving as president of the International Yao Studies Association. His adventurous spirit and gregarious personality took him to Borneo in the 1960’s and he then returned to conduct the MA research that was published as his first book, *Cutlass and Crescent Moon* (1969) which had profound insights into religion and identity in Indonesia. His doctoral research was conducted among the Yao in North Thailand where he met his wife Toi and daughter Jai. Doug was my teacher when I was an undergraduate at University of Sydney in the 1970s and he captured our imagination with his iconoclastic approach–anthropology had no boundaries. We leaned to interpret classical Javanese theatre through the lens of Marshall McLuhan; our political engagements were not to be held aloof from, but were deeply imbricated in anthropological understandings. His traumatic experience as a researcher in Northern Thailand, when his research village was bombed by the Thai air force, cemented his commitment to politically engaged anthropology.

Doug supported dissident Indonesian poets and musicians during the Suharto years. He ‘invented’ the multimedia presentation as the vehicle for his passion for theatre and performance which he found fit subjects for the anthropological gaze, bringing along his own ‘beat box’ and other paraphenalia to stage one of his spectaculars at an AAS conference in Adelaide. But Doug was also a bearer of tradition. He practiced what we understood to be the ‘Hogbin legacy’ of meticulous supervision where he discussed our fledgling academic writings, line by line. For many years, my son had a phone call with Santa Claus ‘aka Doug Miles’ to discuss his Christmas wish list.

Doug has left a legacy of innovative and creative research--Yao rituals and prophylactic medicine; his ‘Ockham’s razor’ solution to the Southeast Asian love of the finger knife for rice harvesting are but two of the papers that have provided foundational insights. There is also his legacy of political commitment, in his support for political dissidents and for critical publishing like the magazine *Inside Indonesia*. His quirky view of the world gave rise to a treasure trove of stories which all who knew him carry with us. One of my (many) favorites involved Doug travelling to Cooma to meet the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation to discuss a consulting opportunity on a dam project in Asia. Doug showed them the dissident 1980s Thai film, *Tong Pan*, a poignant account of poor rural farmers whose livelihoods are destroyed by dam construction. Doug didn’t get the job. He had an indefatigable zest for living. In his final home, a Canberra nursing home, he took up his beloved pastime of singing in the local church choir, and felt the presence of blonde angels in red t-shirts who he felt were accompanying him on his next /last journey.

*Kathryn Robinson, ANU*