



## Framing Ethnic Conflict and the State in Southeast Asia

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper presents a critical review of the concept of ethnicity as an important variable in the study of conflict and other power arrangements in Southeast Asia. It relates ethnicity with organizing concepts such as culture and nation. Afterwards, it looks into how ethnicity is perceived in various spaces of contestation in the region. It specifically focuses on how state action serves to strengthen or weaken, delay or hasten, and contract or expand the range of effective influence of ethnic conflict in the region. The paper presents two models of political action that seeks to assist scholars and decision-makers gain a functional understanding of ethnic conflict accommodation. Finally, hotspots in the region are identified and studied in terms of the concepts and models presented earlier.

**KEYWORDS.** Southeast Asia · ethnic conflict · ethnicity · state violence

### INTRODUCTION

Ethnicity is often discussed in terms of a group's sense of belonging based on shared cultural traits such as a common language, religion, collective memory, among others. In contemporary research practice and academic discourse, the term ethnolinguistic group is commonly used to denote ethnicity. This usage tends to give emphasis on the shared variable of language in categorizing people into distinct groups. Language however is not the sole criterion in identifying ethnicity. For instance, Austrians and Germans share the same language but differ in many other cultural traits as well as collective memory. In the Philippines, the Samal and the Badjaw peoples share the same language but are distinguished from each other through their respective land-based and sea-based lifestyles. In the cases just cited, it is quite clear that the groups themselves define, express and stress their distinction from other groups even though they have the same language.

When discussing ethnic conflict, one is almost invariably drawn into a discussion of other related concepts such as ethnocentrism, culture, nation, and race. W.G. Sumner (1906) first coined the concept of ethnocentrism in his work, *Folkways*. Ethnocentrism may

be defined as a person's inherent trait to judge the qualities and actions of other ethnic groups against one's own culture-specific traits and virtues (see Sumner 1906). This may take an extreme form such as the segregation practiced in the United States and South Africa in the relatively recent past and, to a certain degree, in Israel presently.

Ethnic conflict emerges more readily in conditions where ethnocentrism is rife up to the degree that institutions responsible for developing ethnocentric views on others are supported by state mechanism. However, it does not necessarily follow that those ethnocentric views, or the existence of a number of ethnically differentiated collectives in a given territory, will lead to ethnic conflict. The importance of "agency" or "enabling institution" therefore has to be emphasized. As presented in the brief survey of literature in this paper, state actions through social, economic and political elites seem to strongly influence the frequency (number of incidences given a period of time), intensity (degree of violence) and range (geographical reach or number of people affected) of ethnic conflict.

Culture is the all-encompassing variable used by ethnic groups and nations in their process of identifying self and others. It may be defined as "the set of learned beliefs, values, and behaviors (e.g. customs) generally shared by the members of a society. Anthropologists define 'society' as a group of people who occupy a particular territory and speak a common language which is not generally intelligible to neighboring peoples" (Ember and Ember 1973, 24). Another way of defining culture is to view it as a gallery of symbols and meanings consisting of artifacts that members of the group may identify with and relate to (Poole 1999, 12). It may also be seen as a process of artifact creation that links past to the present, and the present, projected into the future.

Nation, like ethnic group (or *ethnie*) also relies mostly on cultural markers or traits for identification. However, unlike the concept of ethnic group, nation is a highly political, while others say modern, term that is associated with self-determination or the eventual goal of achieving a certain degree of political autonomy or independence. Nations often seek to achieve nation-statehood. Furthermore, nations may not use cultural markers for identification at all. Adherence to principles such as *liberté, égalité, fraternité* among the French and the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as among Americans, are examples of these principles of state-centric principles of belongingness.

It should be noted that race is a politically and scientifically incorrect and outdated concept of classifying human populations based on some notions of physical differences. Despite this, it is still administratively used as a classifying tool in many countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. Racism can be viewed as an extreme form of negative nationalism. It is dangerous in its tendency to propagate conceptions of natural superiority and to seek some form of domination over other groups usually expressed through violent means.

With these definitions of significant concepts in the complex discourse, a brief discussion on the state will be presented to clarify its location in the *situs* of ethnic conflict and to underscore its significance as a producer of discourses.

## THE STATE AND ETHNIC CONFLICT

Ethnic conflict may transpire when real or perceived interests of two or more groups are threatened and acted upon. The operational range of ethnic conflict may vary from a condition where negative attitudes, perceptions or stereotypes—the unexpressed realm of consciousness—develop among members of a particular group to a condition characterized by organized violence—the realm of deliberate action—such as ethnic cleansing. Ethnic conflict, however, cannot be understood outside of specific contexts.

The state is often seen as the strongest social force within a defined territory. It is also the most effective, albeit to some scholars, increasingly less dominant actor in international relations. This view perhaps hold true in the sphere of commerce, finance, and trade, but may not be the case in the political arena. The ability of ethnic conflict to persist, to transport itself through time and across national borders constantly challenge the patience and intellectual skills of both scholars and policymakers. Recent events in Indonesia, Cambodia and Burma/Myanmar apparently present contradictory characterizations of the state in dealing with ethnic conflicts. In the age of globalization where ethnic conflicts seem to ignore state borders, the state is paradoxically strong and weak. It can be weak in controlling or even predicting the appearance of forces that it had unleashed through its own actions. The Indonesian government, for example, seems to be helpless in containing ethnic violence in Kalimantan, Ambon and Moluccas. On one hand, it had the strength to pursue policy initiatives that created conditions that led to ethnic uprisings. One of these policies was the depopulation

of densely populated regions by encouraging migration to less populated ones.

State actions, deliberate or otherwise, can pose new problems in the course of solving existing ones. And even under the best conditions, i.e. ethnic harmony, nondiscrimination, equal treatment and access, etc., self-determination can still be legitimately invoked, to separate and establish one's own nation-state can still be pursued. The state's ability to influence the process of creating ethnic discourses and the nature of ethnic conflict and accommodation will be illustrated through a brief examination of Southeast Asian countries belonging to different overlapping types of institutional arrangements. In this article, discourses are presented as ways of viewing reality that make other ways of viewing nearly impossible (Thomas 1994). It can be likened to a perception paradigm that is difficult to dispose and exhibiting autonomous development even from its creators. In this vein, examining embedded discourse in state action provides a map of possibilities and impossibilities. The following overlapping modes of state action are seen in Southeast Asian states with varying degrees of intensity and salience: internal colonization, ethnocentric state, neopatrimonial state (Brown, 1994) unequal/coercive consociation (Mauzy 1993), theocratic or religion-dominated, family state construction (Abe, Muneyuki, and Sadafumi 1994, Pyle 1996), and administrative state (Chan 1975).

### **Internal colonization**

Internal colonization as a concept owes much to the dependency theory which traces its roots to Marx and Lenin and articulated by contemporary theorists such as Immanuel Wallerstein. The vocabulary of core (as dominant) and periphery (as dominated) introduced by Wallerstein in *The Capitalist World Economy* (1979) is adapted but modified in this article. In the discussion involving Southeast Asian cases, a core or dominant collective is identified and examined in terms of how it defines its relationship with the peripheral (or marginalized) collectives, usually in the regions, through specific sets of institutional arrangements.

A territorially defined core, with its own distinct ethnic group, develops at the expense of others. Exploitative relations of colonial rule are extended by postcolonial regimes, thereby continuing a process of political, economic and social oppression. Patterns of centralization are maintained from the past. Ethnic consciousness

starts from a perception of being in a disadvantaged position leading to the eventual demand for autonomy or secession. To a certain degree, all Southeast Asian states exhibit this mode of arrangement. It is pronounced in the Philippines where Metro Manila has evolved into an overwhelmingly dominant center of power. This is despite the fact that Manila's elite group was not largely Manileño or Tagalog. Instead, it was composed of personalities who did well in the national arena of politics, industry and professional practice. It could be surmised that many of these families transformed themselves into Manila residents, first by maintaining a residence in the capital, and eventually raising their families in Manila. In more recent times, the aspect of identifying provincial roots has become more symbolic. It may be observed that many of the children of the elite eventually have lost command of their "native language" with many of them unable to relate to provincial culture. Many of the children of provincial elite have embraced the Manileño lifestyle as they grew up and underwent processes of socialization completely detached from their provincial and ethnic origins.

However, political expediency may force them to reconnect—or perhaps, connect—with their provincial and ethnic roots. During the 2004 presidential election, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, to solicit votes in her home province of Pampanga, had to project herself being a Pampagueña by speaking primarily in Kapampangan in her campaign sorties in the area. Given the presently large number of "nominal ethnics," or provincials by lineage who were born and grew up in Manila, it is not illogical to confer upon them the status and a unique label of ethnicity.

Another case in this mode is Thailand. Although never formally colonized by foreign powers, this country exhibits the same pattern of internal colonization with Bangkok as the core city established through the long reign of Chakri kings. Persisting collective memory of premodern kingdoms in the peripheral regions challenges the notion of cultural homogeneity expressed in the national slogan of "nation, religion and king." This is particularly problematic in the southern border. Conflict in the three predominantly Moslem provinces in southern Thailand, including the infamous case of Pattani, is the latest tragic example of center-periphery collision where a growing perception of injustice and repression among Malay peoples is slowly being linked to notions of "irreconcilable differences" based on ethnicity. This case strongly indicates that the memory of an old kingdom can be conveniently tapped as a symbolic resource for creating a sense of otherhood that may then be used in mobilizing support for systemic

reforms, concessions, autonomy, or even secession using the principle of the right to “self-determination.”

### **Ethnocentric state**

The ethnocentric state may be observed in settings that overwhelmingly favor one group over the other in determining national identity, the distribution of responsibility, and therefore, power in the government hierarchy and social regulation. In varying degrees, this mode seems to be most prevalent in continental Southeast Asia, especially in Burma/Myanmar (Brown 1994). Burma/Myanmar—now with a less ethnocentric name, Burma/Myanmar—privileges the Burmese. Slogans in the 1950s declare the decidedly ethnocentric view of the state in very direct terms, “to be a Burmese is to be a Buddhist,” or “the Burmese way to Socialism.” This myopic view of the state as the property of one ethnic group effectively alienated the Karen and the Shan who compose “major minorities” in outlying regions. Large minorities in the periphery and one majority in the center, Rangoon, divide the country into blocs of power definable in ethnic terms and with very little empathy or understanding for each other. The educational system is employed to extol the core and denigrate local sensibilities. Ironically, the state—the Burma/Myanmar core—is keenly felt through regular intrusions of the military which is not regulated by the will of strongmen but by the passage of the monsoon season.

The ethnocentric state also prevails in many states in Southeast Asia. In Cambodia, discriminatory practices against ethnic Vietnamese have been regularly observed. Hill tribes in Vietnam are largely marginalized. In Thailand other “lesser Thai” such as the Lao people of Northeast Thailand and the Moslem peoples of the southern provinces are subjected to marginalizing and assimilating processes of universal education, employment or industry penetration, or drawn to the bright lights of big cities like Bangkok. Nonetheless, special recognition and cultural concessions are accorded to subcultures. This is best operationalized by the existence of four centers of traditional culture—in Bangkok, Chang Mai and Eastern and Southern Thailand, all integrated in a system of royal patronage.

In the case of internal colonization, an ethnic group—not necessarily a majority—becomes dominant by wresting control of socioeconomic and political institutions that exist in the capital city (the geographically-defined core). This ability to wrest control is usually bestowed by a twist of events in history that made such places the core of western

colonial rule. The ability to wrest control is usually premised on the condition that this particular ethnic group is where the colonial administrators have drawn the local governing elite. When the colonial rulers left, this particular ethnic group is in the most strategic position to grab the center of power. Control of the capital city translates into control of peripheral regions. On the other hand, ethnocentric states develop in conditions where a majority group—usually a clear or significant majority—establishes a constitutional order that overwhelmingly favors its culture and cosmology. As an extension, national life is defined by the norms and values of this ethnic group.

### **Neopatrimonial state**

This mode “improves” upon the more simple patrimonial state or politics of patronage by expanding the range of action—clearly national and crosses ethnolinguistic borders and strategies—involving the use of public resources of government as well as semipublic resources that merge the interests of government and industry as seen in the foundations of so-called movements (Brown 1994). In the dispensation of public largesse, national organizations or so-called movements are organized around a charismatic leader such as Marcos who established the *Kilusang Bagong Lipunan* [New Society Movement] and Suharto’s initiation of *Golkar* (*Golongan Karya* [Functional Groups]). “Nonpolitical” foundations for various social causes are also established and tied to these national organizations. Both national organization and foundation serve as the personal network of the strong man. Government resources, in this mode, are seen as private entitlements of a leader who is eventually seen as a “father of the nation.” Other figures referred to as “fathers” of their respective nations are Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, Mohammed Mahathir of Malaysia, Sukarno of Indonesia and King Bhumibol of Thailand. This portrayal is replete with meaning because in the Asian context, the father is an authoritarian figure. Tragically when applied to governance of the liberal democratic type, the father is allowed to have favorites. The principle of divide and rule as well as the generous application of the carrot-and-stick methods often lead to marginalization of ethnic groups or deepen already serious cleavages within groups.

The case of Muslim Mindanao in the Philippines is a useful illustration (see Majul 1973, Tan 1977, and Jocano 1983). Marcos leaned on the likes of Ali Dimaporo, a regional strongman who could deliver solid support for his regime. Unfortunately, the elevation of

Dimaporo, seen more as a Maranao than as a fellow Muslim by other groups, resulted in some degree of resentment among the Tausugs and Maguindanaoans, the two other ethnic groups that figure prominently in the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the secessionist movement founded during Marcos rule. Later on, a splinter group emerged and became more prominent, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a group with a largely Maguindanaoan following which continued the *bangsamoro* struggle even as Tausug Misuari of MNLF opted for peace with the Ramos government.

The Aceh problem of Indonesia can also be framed in the neopatrimonial model (see Brown 1994, Vatikiotis 1993). However, it must be noted that whereas the politics of the center in Indonesia is primarily seen as a Javanese shadow play with the *kraton* of Jogjakarta as its symbolic center, the Acehnese look towards peninsular Malaysia in terms of cultural affinity and formulation of ideals, which is a more Islamic (some proponents say truer Islam) and less syncretic (with Hindu-Buddhist and indigenous mystical elements). Using this framework, the failure of Southern Philippine Muslim and Acehnese elites to effectively penetrate the neopatrimonial network of *gratis et amore* led them to look to other models of political action, eventually opting to define their collective struggle as one of national self-determination.

### **Unequal consociation**

This mode is a variant of consociation where responsibilities and entitlements associated with control over government is mediated through an “ethnic equation” or consensual agreement by the affected parties. Ethnic division of functions as what happened in Lebanon—with Orthodox president and Muslim prime minister—may emerge. A system of quotas that determines the distribution of ethnic groups in civil service or some other part of government may also be observed.

The case of Malaysia is described as that of an unequal consociation. This state of affairs is enshrined in the constitution where special privileges are accorded to “Malays and other *bumiputra* (collective label to refer to indigenous peoples which literally means sons of the earth).” Sultans, in federal states where premodern monarchies existed, retain some “residual sovereignty” especially in the area of religion and culture. A king is selected among the sultans through a system of rotation. Malaysia’s complicating variable in its ethnic equation is found in the large communities of Chinese and Indians brought into

the territory by the British during their rule. Malays were left with farming or fishing in their *kampung* under their traditional rulers, the Chinese worked in the urban areas and their presence felt strongly in colonial civil service while the Indians worked in the rubber plantations.

The postcolonial era left Malaysia with an economy observing an ethnic division of labor. The imbalance was felt and expressed by key leaders of the Malays. It was acted upon, first, through a negotiation of special rights in exchange for recognition of citizenship of the migrant populations, and secondly, through the establishment of affirmative action projects under the New Economic Policy or the *bumiputra* policy now renamed and continued as the New Development policy. Coercive consociation, in Mauzy's (1993) historical reconstruction of political events, started with a political compromise assuring citizenship to non-Malays in exchange for the recognition of Malay special rights and privileges. The initial political order arrangement was therefore characterized by a consociational arrangement that was nearly "equal." As the young nation-state emerged from violent ethnic riots in the late 1960s, a new order was established which increasingly favored the Malays and other *bumiputras* through an "affirmative action" type of economic package that sought to increase their income to the level of the Chinese, to erase inequalities through reserved quotas in education and public service, and to increase their level of participation in the nation's economic life through subsidies and aid, and to assure political stability through a national alliance with the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) taking the lead. The result is an increasingly unequal consociation possessing some elements of coercion. Mauzy attributes part of the success of Malaysia's leadership in preventing the return of ethnic conflict in May 1969 to the moderating variable of economic expansion. The expansion of the economic pie coupled with political stability compensated for inequality.

### **Religion-dominated or states with theocratic tendencies**

This mode affirms the union of state and religion. As such, social virtues and notions of governance are subject to the strong influence of a specific religious organization. Political and institutional arrangements privilege a certain religious practice or persuasion. Several subtypes may be observed. One subtype vests authority on the paramount religious leader as may be seen in the case of Iran or Tibet before it was annexed by China. Another subtype accords a monarch

or some other traditional leader an important role in defending the faith or bestows a title of leadership on the monarch with corresponding duties as may be seen in the case of the reigning monarch of England who serves as titular head of the Church of England and the King of Thailand as a patron of the Buddhist faith. Another variant bestows authority on an absolute monarch whose actions are guided or checked by a hierarchy of religious leaders as in the cases of Morocco, Saudi Arabia and many other Middle Eastern Islamic states. Another variant may be described as a form of majority abuse. The religion of the majority is favored despite the absence of constitutional bases.

Strictly, there are no examples of “theocratic states” like that of former Taliban regime in Afghanistan or the present Iranian state. It should however be noted that approximate arrangements do exist. Suffice to say, religion-dominated or states that exhibit theocratic tendencies are states where religious organizations play a crucial role in stirring if not defining public policy.

The Islamic state is one example of the religion-dominated state where *shari’a* laws are executed and complemented with contemporary legislation. *Shari’a* applies to all in the territory including indigenous groups with their own belief systems antedating the arrival of Islam as well as casual visitors. This conflict of normative structures can be found in some of the more conservative states of Malaysia where the *orang asli* or native peoples are forced to comply with Islamic strictures. In this case, minority-majority relations need to be reviewed and the rights of indigenous groups need to be defined and protected.

While contemporary Islamic states clearly define the religious character of governance, other models of “religious state modes” also exist in the region. Clearly, the Thai and Cambodian cases both espouse the national slogan of “nation, religion and king” exhibiting how a state can apparently favor one type of religion. What constitutes a source of alienation to other groups would be the execution of the day-to-day affairs of the state which are steeped in the religious language, expression and symbols of the dominant group. The case is perhaps more apparent in constitutionally secular Philippines where Catholic symbols are to be found even in state schools where Muslim populations constitute the majority, where national shrines are appropriated by religious organizations (the site of EDSA revolution is now a Catholic shrine), and where Catholic icons are displayed prominently in government offices.

### **Family state construction**

This mode is similar to the neo-patrimonial mode. It may be viewed as a literal and extreme model of political arrangement approaching a “racist state” arrangement. Prewar Japan is of this mold where the emperor was declared sacred and inviolable, a direct descendant of the sun goddess Amaterasu. By extension, and through the conceptual construction of the emperor as father of the people, the Japanese people become sacred and superior. Atrocities experienced in World War II may be attributed to this construction of a superior status. This construct makes the “disposal” of inferior others possible. Unlike the neopatrimonial model, the family state construction relies on a figure, usually a monarch, as its symbolic center. The symbolic center links the present nation to a past era of achievement, a golden age that is used to further galvanize regime support. In this manner, the symbolic center is manipulated to create a mindset among the people which in turn is used to achieve specific political goals (see Abe, Muneyuki, and Sadafumi 1994, Wakabayashi 1998, Pyle 1996 and Gluck 1985). The family state mode disallows the recognition of internal others. In Japan, minorities are caught between social discrimination and nonrecognition by government. Japan officially recognizes only one existing language, Japanese, despite the well-documented presence of Ainu and Okinawan languages which are conveniently placed under “dialects.” The Ainu, through state action (or nonaction) are not recognized as an indigenous group due to the small number of its “pure” population. This outlook compounds the inability to think Japan in multicultural terms, an inability cultivated by the family state construction.

In Southeast Asia, Cambodia and, to a lesser degree, Thailand exhibit qualities of the family state construction. These countries are mostly homogenous, with a significant number of minorities with relatively small populations thinly distributed in isolated communities throughout their territories. In both countries, the monarch is revered and is beyond reproach. In Cambodia, along with an impressive range of expressive and iconic classical art, the persona of the king is a direct link to the mighty Angkorean Empire. A study of cultural artifacts such as place names which are sanctioned by the state is quite revealing. The province where Angkor is located is named Siem Reap, or Siam defeated. The territory that now belongs to Vietnam where Saigon is located is referred to as Kampuchea Krom or lower Cambodia. Ethnic Vietnamese communities known to have been in existence in Cambodia

for more than a millennium are not recognized as Cambodian citizens. They are reportedly subjected to harassment by different armed groups including the military. The Thais, as the year 2003's spree of violence in Phnom Penh illustrates, are also seen as "natural enemies." The emergence of this type of cosmology can only be understood in the context of a long history of alternate occupation and suzerainty by Siam and Vietnam. Ethnic violence, in this case, can be seen as a function of a collective memory of hatred cultivated and maintained through many instruments of indoctrination. This constructed memory, based on transmitted events not experienced by the present generation, is both real and realized. Memory is therefore an important venue of contestation that defines the extent of possible conflict (see Thion 1993).

### **Administrative state**

This mode affirms rationality in thought and action through the administrative structure of government (based on Brown 1994, Chan 1975). All problems, therefore, have administrative solutions. Ethnic conflict can be managed, contained, if not eliminated all together. The administrative state relies on a pool of human talent that does not only pursue its interests through their effective and efficient execution of assigned tasks but also through its ability to expand the state's jurisdiction. The state continuously permeates society through a proactive civil service which derives its legitimacy from a meritocratic system of selection and promotion. Socialization through proper training in schools as well as on the job assures loyalty. Also, a system of compensation assures that only the best and the brightest enter the government ranks. Ethnicity, like all other areas of government concern is treated as a policy problem. The bureaucratic mind of this type learns to define the problem in terms that make policy intervention possible, always guided by rationality—anticipating complications, identifying possible alternatives by ranking them according to predetermined equations of costs and benefits, to arrive at the best possible solution and means of execution.

Singapore—as a microstate which emerged from a racially-defined divorce from Malaysia—more than any other state in the region, has embraced this approach with clearly "successful results." First, one line of communication or channel of demand and supply among ethnic groups is recognized. This corporatist approach eliminated contending views and forced all players to course issues through an organization

which pre-processes demands. Equal access to all individuals regardless of ethnicity was pursued and achieved through the civil service which, naturally, was the biggest employer in the island-state. This culture of meritocracy is supposed to have spilled over to other organizations, both public and private, making it the effective paradigm of professional interaction. Singapore is probably the best example of good governance and its resulting economic gains, with emphasis on importance of equality of access.

However, the authoritarian tendencies of government and rigid control of social relations is another issue. Many Singaporean intellectuals are greatly concerned with the limited freedom of expression. Setting aside the issue, it must be noted that great pains have been taken by the government to achieve a society that recognizes diversity. Although Malay, surprisingly, is still the national language, a historically-based technicality owing to the fact that the Sultan of Johore once owned the whole territory, other languages such as Fookien, Mandarin and Tamil are officially recognized and used. Although Singapore uses "race" in many of its official documents. Its usage seems to indicate an operational definition quite synonymous to "ethnicity." Whereas Malaysia has decided to take the path of affirmative action based on ethnic entitlement, Singapore chose to pursue the path of equal access to all in pursuit of prosperity. Still, some critical points on government action will have to be examined. As earlier mentioned, ethnicity is seen as a policy problem to be solved rationally. Ethnicity as a problem is anticipated and nipped at its bud. The state's policy on housing is rationally brilliant in terms of political foresight and social engineering. By setting quotas on government housing, the government has effectively controlled the formation of ethnically defined electoral districts, forced the development of multiethnic neighborhoods that encouraged contact and tolerance through individual-level transactions, and developed a database on its citizens. The resulting society—praised as the cleanest, most efficient, and "finest" in the region—is indeed impressive. Critics of the Singaporean model point to its out-migration rate, the highest in the region, as an indicator of some failure. Managed ethnicity perhaps produces beautiful yet artificial communities lacking the vitality and dynamism of those that naturally emerge through unregulated engagements. One can say that ultrarationality in Singapore has effectively eradicated ethnicity its warts as well as it allure.

The modes presented above are not absolute or exclusive. Overlaps occur and other models may be observed in the future or outside the

region. However, these state-centric modes are the ones most clearly observed by scholars of Southeast Asia. Owing to limitations in space and time, other-centered modes could not be included in this paper. Their existence however should be noted.

### **STATE TYPES AND MODES OF ACTION: AN ATTEMPT AT METHODOLOGICAL SYNCRETISM**

Table 1 presents the general behavioral tendencies of the different state types in an attempt to gain further understanding of ethnic conflict especially in Southeast Asia through a syncretization of models. The different state types already discussed in preceding sections can be examined in terms of how dominant ethnic groups that have “captured” the state machinery conduct relations with other ethnic groups.

The first column seeks to depict behavior in the area of social concerns or intergroup communication. Extremes or polar opposites may be defined. On one end of the scale, state behavior may encourage the development or maintenance of contact at the highest degree in frequency among members of ethnic groups (contact pole). On the other end, it may pursue total isolation among them (isolation pole). The second column seeks to portray tendencies toward joint action in solving shared problems and/or the use of a common resource (cooperation pole) or tendencies toward destructive, injurious or exclusively self-serving actions aimed at eliminating the other groups or effectively marginalizing them (conflict/competition pole). The third column to illustrate degrees of tolerance in the areas of norms, mores, and folkways as reflected in customs, laws and strictures that regulate social action and preserve some form of order. State behavior may tend towards a tolerant stance through a process of recognizing cases of exemption to socially constructed rules (accommodation pole). On the other hand, it may tend towards a strict insistence or non-negotiable stance on their devices of social regulation stance (rigidity pole).

A fourth column may be added in order to integrate the behavioral tendencies and other salient qualities of ethnic groups into this model of ethnic conflict. This fourth column corresponds to a reworking of Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba's work on political culture (1963). This reworking essentially extends the Almond and Verba valuation by including the possibility of zero and negative levels of knowledge and participation. It also introduces the third variable that portrays either a commitment to peaceful means versus a tendency towards violent

means of political change. Positive knowledge therefore corresponds to a high level of social and political literacy. Zero knowledge is a theoretical possibility limited to mentally-challenged individuals, infants, very young children, elderly afflicted with senile dementia and perhaps even to those who suffer from apathy. Negative knowledge corresponds to counterproductive levels of social and political literacy. It rests precariously on false assumptions, faulty deductions, sweeping generalizations, fraudulent information or invented data which constitute fertile ground for ethnic violence.

Participation here refers to levels of functional (as opposed to symbolic) engagement in the political life of the nation. High levels of engagement in political decision making among all ethnic groups tend to promote a sense of ownership over the system, a secure familiarity with other stakeholders, and open channels for constructive exchange of opinions. Effective symbiosis evolves from a high degree of participation with other groups which in time help develops both formal and informal institutions of conflict resolution. Zero participation is a syndrome of aloofness or helplessness. In either of these types, nonparticipation is an act of abdication, a cutting of ties with national life, and a surrender of autonomy in determining individual destiny within the collective. Negative participation involves actions that clearly violate declared national virtues through actions that threaten the legal or constitutional order. Coup d'état, treason, subversive activities and secession fall in the negative part of this polar scale. Instances of negative participation when left unchecked or unpunished may lead to repeated attempts or habitual breaking of the order.

The peace-violence variable distinguishes "legitimate" forms of negative participation such as peaceful mass rallies or civil disobedience that call for change from "illegitimate" forms such as armed revolt or coups. This polar scale is occupied by the commitment to peaceful means on one end and the willingness to use violence on the other end. The third dimension culls lessons from the many examples of the tragedy of established patterns or cycles of ethnic violence that seem easy to start and impossible to stop. This variable effectively differentiates armed revolts from acts of civil disobedience.

### **HOT SPOTS: SOME OBSERVATIONS**

Upon considering the behavioral tendencies of state types as well as the compound variables of political culture in the preceding section, an

Table 1: State-behavior syncretic model of ethnic conflict*		
Behavior	State type	
	<i>Internal colonization</i>	<i>Ethnocentric state</i>
<i>Contact-isolation</i>	Isolation may not be an option. Contact as a form of conquest is pursued to forcibly integrate other collectives.	Contact is allowed only when seen as absolutely necessary. Isolation of the center from the other collectives as well as among collectives may actually be perceived as desirable. Dominance of one ethnolinguistic group is often maintained through the classic strategy of divide and rule.
<i>Cooperation-conflict</i>	Being extractive, regulative, and exploitative in nature, state action in this model tends towards conflict. The collectives that in turn view themselves as the aggrieved parties may perceive the state as the "aggressor."	Cooperation, in a real or technical sense may not be possible in this sub-universe of actors of disparate sizes and unequal capacities. Cases of individual cooperation may be labeled as collaboration, treason, or betrayal among members of marginalized collectives.
<i>Accommodation-rigidity</i>	As the center links the regions to itself through coercive integration, it imposes its normative structure, among others, as the dominant mode of interaction. Rigidity may therefore prevail and intolerance for minority practices and customs may eventually develop.	Accommodation is a rare possibility. It is, however, limited to territorially defined spaces, and therefore may not be part of national life or the political discourse of the state. It is not uniformly applied.

\*In reality, state types overlap and make categorization difficult. The three-scales of behavioral tendencies presented here allows for observation, both qualitative and quantitative, to be done with more focus and in greater detail.

attempt to identify so-called hot spots may be done, albeit with some degree of caution. The identification of hot spots is more of description and less of a prediction. It describes and explains a ranking order. Its predictive capability is only a function of the stability of this order of ranking. Within a limited period of time, one can expect more conflict coming from the country that occupies the worst position. It should be noted that not all variables and their respective weights can be factored in an assessment. Due to the very complexity of the phenomenon under consideration, a qualified forecast (also referred to as an

Table 1 (continuation): State-behavior syncretic model of ethnic conflict*		
Behavior	Family state	State type <i>Unequal consociation (UC)</i>
<i>Contact-isolation</i>	Isolation may be pursued to maintain "purity." Contact, although unrecognized officially, aims to extinguish "minority bloodlines."	Resembling the corporatist model in this realm of action, UC tends to encourage contact albeit through single controlled channels, i.e. only one organization may represent one sort of collective. Contact in this manner becomes an instrument of power.
<i>Cooperation-conflict</i>	Targeted for elimination yet at the same time unrecognized, marginalized collectives may be placed in ambiguous labels of otherness. This silent form of conflict bestows no role, no status... no existence for the "othered" collective.	Cooperation may often be a stated goal but regulated by a dominant collective. Cooperation is more a matter of form since implied threat maintains a conflicted status quo. Cooperation, in terms of maintaining social isolation, is possible. On the other hand, conflict in terms of forced assimilation may also be also possible.
<i>Accommodation-rigidity</i>	Bereft of official existence, the "othered" collective may in effect be rigidly unaccommodated (since there is technically no subject of accommodation or rigidity for that matter).	Accommodation may come in the form of entitlement such as specific recognition of certain customs, or concessions such as specific goods and services. Both forms are limited in scope, group-specific, and more importantly, not extended universally.

\*In reality, state types overlap and make categorization difficult. The three-scales of behavioral tendencies presented here allows for observation, both qualitative and quantitative, to be done with more focus and in greater detail.

informed guess) may be the best output offered to the policy specialist, scholar or concerned leader. The descriptive function of this model is however deemed useful in comparative studies where the relative weakness or strength of variables become observable through longitudinal and crossnational analyses.

A historical survey of Southeast Asian nation-states would seem to support the idea that ethnic conflict is a phenomenon exacerbated by

Table 1 (continuation): State-behavior syncretic model of ethnic conflict*		
Behavior	State type	
	<i>Theocratic State</i>	<i>Neopatrimonial State</i>
<i>Contact-isolation</i>	This model may tend to extreme isolationism, purporting to preserve a certain religious order. "Impure, degenerate or impious ideas and practices" are subjected to social quarantine. It may also tend towards extreme contact as in the case of coercive assimilation.	Contact or isolation is a function of the character of national leadership. Some collectives are deemed to be closely linked to the national leadership, while others are deemed distant.
<i>Cooperation-conflict</i>	Cooperation, in terms of maintaining communal boundaries may be possible. On the other hand, conflict in the form of forced conversion may also be possible.	Cooperation may depend on levels of personal contact between the elite of the central and the elite of the peripheral collectives, as well as levels of personal contact among the elite peripheral collectives. The condition of isolation is seen mainly as a function of elite capability to connect.
<i>Accommodation-rigidity</i>	Accommodation may be possible through managed isolation, e.g. the reservation or autonomous region type of model. Rigidity, however, is more commonly observed.	Accommodation may likewise be a function of access to the neo-patrimonial leader, and thus, uneven degrees of accommodation and rigidity may be seen across groups.

\*In reality, state types overlap and make categorization difficult. The three-scales of behavioral tendencies presented here allows for observation, both qualitative and quantitative, to be done with more focus and in greater detail.

actions of the colonial state and/or by the postcolonial state. Traditional indigenous polities, simple communities of distinct identities and loose alliances covering vast areas of land and sea were too weak or too limited in terms of reach to develop ethnic consciousness. Premodern monarchies are admittedly not part of this order. Premodern monarchies in Indochina, for instance, seemed to have reached that level of penetration into life at all levels from the village up. Wars were already framed in ethnic terms complete with derisive language and, interestingly like an American period Philippine editorial cartoon depiction of the Japanese as enemies, distorted and "disaestheticized" or "uglified" images of the deplorable others (see Rivera 1999). The portrayal of the feared Cham warriors seen in bas-relief at Angkor Wat is a case in point.

Table 1 (continuation): State-behavior syncretic model of ethnic conflict*	
Behavior	State type
	<i>Administrative State</i>
<i>Contact-isolation</i>	Contact may be pursued as a virtue and to prevent ethnic conflict. This model assumes a rational choice approach to social problems wherein information is made available to the decision-maker with of a certain degree of autonomous thinking and action.
<i>Cooperation-conflict</i>	Cooperation is proactively encouraged with clearly defined roles given to participating collectives and the existence of clearly articulated goals.
<i>Accommodation-rigidity</i>	Accommodation and rigidity may be placed in the context of legality, rationality, and meritocracy.

\*In reality, state types overlap and make categorization difficult. The three-scales of behavioral tendencies presented here allows for observation, both qualitative and quantitative, to be done with more focus and in greater detail.

Still, this pattern became more frequent upon the introduction of firearms and other technologies of war from Western sources which eventually led to some kind of arms race and the hiring of Western mercenaries and military experts in the last two centuries.

The entry of the colonial state into the multiethnic environment of Southeast Asian states seemed to have displaced some groups as it favored others, caused significant internal migration, disrupted traditional institutions or processes of conflict resolution, magnified formerly insignificant or nonsalient differences even more dangerously, thereby only to find them developing into uncontrollable patterns of hate and violence with lives of their own upon the retreat of the colonial states. Postcolonial regimes have unfortunately inherited these problems and in most cases have continued to maintain displacement, marginalization, forced assimilation and many other policies started during the period of colonial rule. The rise and expansion of the absolute state with its unprecedented reach and ability to disrupt traditional life seems to be the most convincing context for the study of ethnic conflict. With this in mind, solutions must obviously start with a rectification of state action. How this

rectification is to be achieved depends much on the ability of affected populations, leaders, scholars and other actors or stakeholders to identify prevailing discourses that consequently determine state action and which in turn determine the nature and extent of ethnic conflict.

Global forces such as the rise of terror networks, the increasing integration of relatively isolated locales to the world economy, the easy access to information undoubtedly affect ethnic relations in any given national territory. However, the state is still the dominant force that can subvert or use force to its advantage either through concerted efforts within its legal jurisdiction or through some form of multilateral cooperation.

Using the “syncretic model of ethnic conflict” presented in Table 1 with the addition of political culture variables, three nation states in Southeast Asia may be identified as hot spots of ethnic conflict. Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia, and Indonesia presented in the order of potential crisis defined by proximity in terms of time, extent of geographical influence and costs, are the three countries falling under this delicate category. All of these countries have extremely politicized armed forces which have already experienced violent confrontation with marginalized ethnic communities. Social order in the three countries seem to have been achieved more through coercion, primarily the use of force by the state, than through some system of accommodation or the establishment of some form of *modus vivendi* among ethnic groups. Civil society or some other social force that could mediate differences outside the structure of government also does not seem to exist or is currently weak or ineffective.

### **Burma/Myanmar**

Burma/Myanmar’s condition is most precarious because of a serious lack of contact among the warring forces given an effective state of war in the peripheral regions. Contact between the Burma/Myanmar center and the marginalized peripheral collectives, notably “the Karen and the Shan states,” as the two relatively large minority populations are often called, is done only in the context of war. The state of civil war in the margins of the territory, interrupted only by the inconvenience of the rainy season may be viewed as the highest form of ethnic conflict in the region. The protracted nature of domestic strife can be seen as an indicator of extreme rigidity, perhaps attributable to both the government and the marginalized groups. Their apparent failure in coming to terms with each other either through some form of code of

Table 2: Hot Spots—The Synchronic Model Applied

Country and their tendencies	Contact/isolation	Behavior Cooperation-conflict	Accommodation-rigidity	Political culture variables
<i>Burma/Myanmar</i> (-2)	(-2) contact only in the context of war notably with Karen and Shans	(-2) state of civil war as highest form of conflict	(-2) rigid views on each other as a prerequisite of war	(-2) highly negative knowledge, (-2) very negative participation, (-2) very violent action pattern
<i>Cambodia</i> (-1)	(-1) contact with most of the groups negated by non-recognition of ethnic Vietnamese	(-1) likewise, cooperation with most groups but violent conflict with ethnic Vietnamese	(-2) the idea of "ethnic Vietnamese Cambodian" seem to be unacceptable	(-1) negative knowledge, (0) zero participation, (-2) very violent action pattern
<i>Indonesia</i> (0,33)	(+1) contact maintained by government, isolation as function of geographical distance	(-1) though no uniform pattern... government seemed to have dealt with several militant collectives quite violently	(-1) discussions on bestowing high degrees of autonomy seems to be out of the question	(+1) positive knowledge albeit low end, (-1) several instances of negative participation (-1) several instances of violent action

\*The numbers in this table are not absolute values from the field, rather they are the writer's estimate (thus, valuation) obtained from observations in the field, interview and written sources. Again, the model serves as a series of guideposts rather than as a definitive map to ethnic conflict.

conduct (perhaps the lowest level of accommodation) or to enlist third party mediation further underscores the depth of rigidity. Relatively large minority populations that have for some decades been subjected to a culture of conflict and to a certain degree of lack information about each other due to isolation may be sources of ethnic conflict of a type and degree not yet known to the region in case of a free for all power grab. This scenario may become possible during regime change, an interregnum or a transition from its current authoritarian regime to a more democratic regime or order. The paradox of democracy becomes surreal when its arrival potentially unleashes (as realized in Bosnia) hitherto unknown forces. Using this syncretic model as a guidepost, Burma/Myanmar scores the lowest with a mean of -2.

Ethnic conflict in Burma/Myanmar, although not problematized under the modern frame of nation or state, may be traced to its distant past. The territory, as archaeological and linguistic data confirm, is a witness to patterns of settlement and displacement or mass movement of populations, which continues to this very day. Historical narratives that explain ethnic conflict eventually point to the role of British colonial rule. The British apparently treated the Shan, Karen and other groups in the margins as “sovereign” and autonomous entities and focused its attention on the Burman core at the colonial capital. When the 1947 constitution took effect, matters were worsened by an unequal system of entitlement in what was purportedly a federal system of government. The Shan and the Karenni states were given the right to secede from what later became known as the Union of Burma. The Katchin state was not accorded this privilege and there was no provision for a Karen state. This legal framework set the tone for conflict. It was perceived to be more accommodative to some groups and less so to others. Its decidedly unequal provisions understandably fostered alienation among members of the less privileged groups. To make matters even worse, the emergence of a military junta that imposed the so-called “Burmese Way to Socialism” resulting in a centrally controlled economy further widened the psychological distance between the Burma/Myanmar core and the collectives in the margins. From then on, this paradoxical rule of “strongmen” gave way to a weak and insecure government challenged by insurgencies defined along ethnic lines (Documentation for Action Groups in Asia 2001).

The Burmese military rulers, ever since it successfully overthrew democratic government in 1962, has adopted an unabashedly assimilationist policy with a “nationalist cultural agenda that promotes the Burmese language and Buddhism at the expense of other languages

and religions.” It should however be noted that well-meaning democratic leaders in the past had already shown ethnocentric tendencies. U Nu, for instance, promised to make Buddhism the state religion during his 1960 election campaign, in effect, going against Aung San’s vision of a secular state (Fink 2001). This type of assimilation, indeed a forced one, may be seen as pro-active isolation. It does not only seek to isolate communities in a geographical and social sense. Rather, it also attempts to isolate members of these communities from their very sense of selves, their identity and their sources of collective memory.

The dominance of the Burmese in Burma/Myanmar’s national life indeed gives credence to Brown’s concept of ethnocentric state. However, Myanmar is not only an ethnocentric state, it is more precisely an ethnocentric state under what may describe as an intolerant military dictatorship. The character of the regime is therefore a powerful intervening variable in this particular case. This regime type, one led by people who are specially trained to kill and wage war, understandably has exacerbated ethnic conflict. The degree and geographical spread of violence in the territory appears to be related to this intervening variable. The Burmese do not simply dominate. As an ethnic core, they dominate through association with a Burmese military junta. (The Burmese are as much victims of this junta. And most unfortunately, the fact that the junta is Burmese remains).

State violence reaches new and shameful heights when state preservation is pursued by the Burmese core through the military junta led by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) above everything else and at the expense of whole communities. A report states that the Burmese military has “...forcibly depopulated areas by a large number of means, including suppression of language and culture, relocation to ill-supplied settlements adjacent to army bases, torture and killing. Thousands of Shan have retreated to the jungles of Shan State, or across the border to Thailand, at the rate of 1500-3000 a month (Peace Pledge Union 2001).

The other peoples of Burma/Myanmar also fall victim to political displacement. Some 250,000 Rohingya people from southeastern Burma/Myanmar are known to have fled to nearby Bangladesh since they were targeted in 1991, and thousands of Karen and Mon people have fled from eastern Burma/Myanmar to Thailand since military offensives intensified in 1994. Those who resist face threats of exile or annihilation. Those who collaborate are given incentives that with little doubt break Burma/Myanmar’s constitutional order as well as its ethical and legal responsibilities to the international community. The

armies of the Wa and Kokang communities are reported to have concluded agreements with the Burmese army that purportedly permitted them to cultivate opium and gave them the right to trade without interference in Burma/Myanmar. These concessions have been linked to a worldwide rise in heroin use and addiction (The Burma Project 2005).

Seemingly occupying a peripheral location in the discourse of ethnic conflict in Burma/Myanmar is the issue area of knowledge. First of all, knowledge about how the system works seems to be shared by the major actors in this drama. Their assessments regarding its utility however differ. A zero-sum game paradigm seems to be in place. One side vehemently imposes while the other vehemently opposes. This tit-for-tat is only interrupted by “peace talks” that exhibit the highly predictable regularity of collapse. The marginalized ethnic groups appear to be unanimous in their embrace of the idea of system failure, thus implying that only a new constitutional set-up can assure the beginning of a real process of reconciliation. Secondly, knowledge about the “other” ethnic groups also seems to be at a historical low. Centers of knowledge production such as universities in various points of time are either closed or nonfunctional. In this case, an academic community that can effectively perform mediating roles is in a near death situation.

The sad state of knowledge in general and cultural knowledge about other ethnic groups in particular was made clear to about 10,000 students and activists who fled to the border areas in 1988 when tensions with the military junta reached a high point. They were shocked to find out that many of the ethnic groups have never experienced Burmese rule and could not even speak Burmese (Fink 2001)

Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi appears to be well aware of the challenges that succeeding regimes need to overcome in order to stop the cycles of violence. In a letter published by the *Mainichi Daily News* in February 3, 1997, she wrote: “Our ethnic nationalists still harbor a deep feeling of mistrust of the majority Burmese, a mistrust natural to those who have not been accorded *justice and fair play*. In trying to build up a strong union, our greatest challenge will be to win the confidence of those who have *only known repression and discrimination*” (emphasis added) (quoted in Fink 2001, 13). Her statement implies the importance of positive participation that perhaps must take the form of affirmative action and the assurance of acceptable levels of self-rule. It also implies the importance of vigilance in working

for the growth of non-violent engagements among groups, an empirical foundation of cumulative confidence and lasting peace.

## **Cambodia**

Ethnic violence in Cambodia, most especially towards the ethnic Vietnamese communities, is well documented. Historically derived feelings of resentment seems to have been made worse by Vietnam's recent occupation and later installation of a Vietnam-friendly regime headed by the strongman, Prime Minister Hun Sen. Some statistics place the current number of Vietnamese in Cambodia at two million. This number is quite large compared to the total Cambodian population of 11 million. The omission of the Vietnamese in government documents seems to indicate that they are not at all considered to be "Cambodian." In terms of national memory, popular belief often reiterated by political pronouncements seems to relegate them to the unenviable position of "natural enemies." In terms of prevailing discourses, national life is decidedly Khmer, other ethnic groups exist socially, politically and economically, albeit in the margins.

Cambodian scholar Seanglim Bit's assessment supports this rigid conceptualization of identity and extends its application to other ethnic groups:

Other ethnic groups who have immigrated to Cambodia (i.e. Vietnamese, Chinese, Burmese) do not have full access to the rights of Cambodian citizenship even though their families may have established continuous residence in the country for generations. In addition, ethnic groups distinct from the Cambodians such as the Cham (Moslem descendants of the ancient kingdom of Champa) and members of hill tribes are incompletely assimilated into Cambodian society. The Cham had been granted a measure of cultural self-determination until the Khmer Rouge period singled them out for enforced "Khmerization" attempts to obliterate their cultural traditions. Hill tribes were traditionally targets of cultural chauvinism until they were actively recruited as participants in the Khmer Rouge regime. (Bit 1991)

This rigidity may be seen as a xenophobic reaction that in turn may be attributed to collective memory of the so-called first "dark age" of Cambodian history. David Chandler depicts the political events of this period, starting from the abandonment of Angkor in the 1440s up to the establishment of a French protectorate in 1863, in his tome, *A History of Cambodia* (1992). It was during this period when the Thai and Vietnamese took turns installing Khmer kings (with the Vietnamese

actually appointing a Vietnamese as monarch). Present-day Khmer attitudes towards the Thai and the Vietnamese cannot be divorced from this memory. Bit notes, “Cambodian folklore characterizes the Thai as intent on illegally taking the riches of Cambodia for their own gain. Periodic raids by the Siamese resulted in sacred literature and religious artifacts, Khmer artisans, records and trained technicians finding their way to Thai soil as war booty to enhance the Siamese court.” This booty apparently included court dancers and musicians. On the Vietnamese, Bit remarks, “Much more attention was invested in extending Vietnamese culture to the areas under their control and supplanting local activities and officials with Vietnamese equivalents (Bit 1991).” Memory of this kind highlights negative contact of war and subjugation. When more positive events such as the return of classical dance to Cambodia through the agency of Thai dance masters or the overthrow of the “genocidal Pol Pot regime” by the Vietnamese army are not given the same attention in the creation of memory, a generation’s view of historical knowledge turns negative and may dangerously serve political interests that benefit from ethnic discord.

Burdened by a great number of armed men belonging to the warring factions of the nearly three decades of civil war and an exposure to the extreme cruelties of Pol Pot’s (also known as Saloth Sar) regime that saw the deaths of nearly three million Cambodians in a short span of four years, Cambodian society seems to have come to be inured to violence. The country is crippled by the great number casualty. The casualty includes a great portion of the country’s intelligentsia—a class that ought to have functioned effectively in recent years as a mediating force as holders of knowledge against violence. Presently, violence seems to be viewed as part of life in Cambodia, a not-so-rare occurrence that seems to mark time more regularly than conditions of peace and order. The battered national psyche is still in need of healing. This healing seems to be unable to start until some degree of closure is achieved with the “genocidal” crimes of the Khmer Rouge. Until then, nerves will continue to fray, and violence against “oppressive others” may happen any time as seen in the case of the burning of the Thai embassy and the ransacking of Thai-owned establishments in January 2003.

In the last five decades, Cambodia’s constitutional order has changed six times. The country has gone through the following changes in its official name: Kingdom of Cambodia (in French, *Le Royaume du Cambodge*, 1953 to 1970), The Khmer Republic (under Lon Nol,

who ruled from 1970 to 1975), Democratic Kampuchea (under the Khmer Rouge, the Communist Party which controlled the country from 1975 to 1979), The People's Republic of Kampuchea (under the Vietnamese-backed Phnom Penh government from 1979 to 1989), The State of Cambodia (in French, L'Etat du Cambodge; in Khmer, Roet Kampuchea from mid-1989), and The Kingdom of Cambodia (from the May 1993 elections to present). Except for the last two incarnations, the rest saw change through very violent means. The people's negative participation in the political process has been the rule rather than the exception. However, with "relative peace" being maintained now for about a decade, one can say with caution that some level of normalization of political participation is being achieved.

Although centers of knowledge production, more importantly educational institutions such as universities, nearly met total decimation in the hands of the Khmer Rouge from 1975 to 1979, these were put back into operation by the Vietnamese-backed regime that took over from 1979 to 1989. The revival of knowledge centers can be described as phenomenal since the 1993 elections which was made possible by international cooperation under the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). Since then, international aid agencies and nongovernment organizations have set up shop in Phnom Penh. These organizations operate around a whole gamut of social concerns from issues such as the prevention of child trafficking to sustainable development. Their offices and networks serve as veritable centers of knowledge production and training ground for capacity building and participation in a renewed national life. This present condition of openness to foreign expertise mediates the weakness of the Cambodians in the area of knowledge about their political system and knowledge about ethnic minorities.

Considering the conditions such as state-implicated violence against ethnic Vietnamese exhibiting a pattern of regularity (with a conservative frequency rate of incidents happening more than thrice a year), the de facto state of nonrecognition of ethnic Vietnamese as Cambodian citizens despite centuries of residence, and some degree of accommodation accorded to other groups, most notably the Muslim Cham minority, this writer gives Cambodia ratings that eventually sum up to a mean score of roughly (- 1).

## **Indonesia**

Indonesia's case presents ethnic violence in three distinct but related discourses. The first discourse involves the position of ethnic Chinese

in national life. Periodic outbursts of violence against Chinese Indonesians seem to consistently follow periods of economic upheaval and political change. They are the “usual suspects,” the convenient scapegoat for all woes that descend upon Indonesian society. Indonesian regimes since Sukarno seem to be unable to stem this anti-Chinese tide of violence. The problem appears to be more than just a question of numbers and democratic representation. It apparently requires a more pro-active policy that seeks to educate the masses about the contributions of the Chinese Indonesians to society and perhaps a more concerted effort on the part of the political elite to encourage a more active and noticeable participation of the Chinese Indonesians in politics and other aspects of national life. Scholars have pointed out the Chinese absence in Indonesian collective memory. It may be added that what is remembered and therefore associated with the Chinese is the failed communist instigated coup which led to the downfall of Sukarno and the establishment of Suharto’s New Order regime. Memory and perception serve as key concepts to the understanding of and solution to this problem (Adam 2003).

The second discourse involves the emergence of movements of self-determination propelled by the actions of the elites of ethnic groups in the margins of Indonesian national life. These groups either have a different set of symbolic centers, as in the case of Aceh, which looks across the straits of Malacca for its models of nation-of-intent, or felt that they never really belonged to Indonesia in the first place. The same can be said of East Timor. It only gained independence, after world public opinion was outraged by the brutality shown by pro-Indonesia armed force. State violence through its armed appendage defined the zero-sum discourse. An unraveling of the Indonesian polity was portrayed as the cost of letting go of the half-island colony of Portugal. The continued existence of the Indonesian state at present debunks this myth and begs the question of what were the true motivations behind the state-sanctioned violence in East Timor. One view, which emphasizes the reality of the military as a stakeholder and as a traditional non-neutral actor in Indonesian politics, presents a zero-sum discourse. It follows that to lose one part would eventually lead to losing all. As a social force with its own identity and interests in Indonesian politics, it may be surmised that the top leadership in the military felt that too much would be lost in terms of prestige, face and other symbolic resources. A more materialist interpretation would extend this assessment of potential loss to the vast offshore oil

resources known to exist under the adjacent seabed. Oil through the government agency Pertamina is very much part of military entitlement in Indonesia.

Another interpretation would look into the culture of military engagement. Conflict in the military mind is solved by applying force in a right amount or dosage. No dosage is too much if it ends all forms of resistance. The miscalculation perhaps did not take into serious consideration external factors like world public opinion owing to the size of the territory and the rapid movement of information—especially images from the venue of conflict to television sets all over the world—causing different publics to react negatively and governments to take decisive action through diplomatic means backed by a threat of sanction and use of force. In this instance, globalization hastened the achievement of independence which otherwise would not have been forthcoming had information been scant and acts of violence effectively hidden, conditions which would have prevailed just a decade or two in the past. At present, with cellular phones sporting camera and wireless Internet capability, images and information can be transmitted beyond the control of governments. The global market for electronics takes some credit for the exposure of cruelty along ethnic lines and the unraveling of discursive state images. Taming military propensity to commit human rights abuses (as it is trained to do in the first place) is now rightly an issue-area of note with serious implications in both Indonesia and the United States.

The third discourse of ethnic conflict in Indonesia is seen in violence among ethnic groups. The discourse is fed by perceptions of displacement or marginalization of “original inhabitants” by relatively newcomers. The hacking of Madurese migrants in Kalimantan and the wanton destruction of churches and residences of Christians in Ambon and Moluccas are examples of ethnic conflict in the margins that question the very foundations of the Indonesian state, the principles of unity in diversity enshrined in the national ideology of Pancasila. Nationalist ideology may have weakened and lost functional meaning over time. Political socialization perhaps has failed in the margins where neglect of education or the distant presence of the state is a given. Socioeconomic encroachment can only explain conflict up to a certain level. Killing sprees that are obviously ethnically defined, one group inflicting violence upon the other, across the archipelago imply some systemic problem. Given the communal nature of violence, socioeconomic roots no longer hold water since rationality would

effectively take note that the costs are greater than the reward, that more violence means more poverty and not the opposite.

An examination of discourses and the state's role in its development ought to bring up some answers. Clearly, globalization and the role of market forces as a template of the movement of goods, peoples and ideas across ethnically defined spaces, which comes with some notion of territoriality, may have unwittingly created problems. The entry of goods and ideas at a rapid rate does not normally create feelings of anxiety in native populations. The entry of unfamiliar peoples in large numbers however is a more sensitive and potentially precocious affair especially in traditional societies that are used to relative isolation. In this area of concern, globalization fails as a paradigm of movement. The free competition/open market paradigm long espoused by the United States limits itself to goods and services, and is glaringly silent on labor. Ethnic violence belonging to the third discourse in Indonesia is very much a function of capitalism and its push and pull forces that propel people to move in search of livelihood in an increasingly resource-scarce world.

Among the three hot spots, Indonesia seems to be the most difficult to pin down using the syncretic model. With its three overlapping discourses on ethnicity, a more precise valuation of a high degree of persuasiveness can only be acquired through longitudinal surveys across a wide sample. Nevertheless, for the sake of description, as shown in Table 2, Indonesia scores better than Burma/Myanmar and Cambodia. The Indonesian state maintains contact mainly through its huge bureaucracy. Isolation seems to be more of a function of geographical distance. Furthermore, although perceptions of Javanese domination seem to be generally felt, the state cannot be described as falling into the hands of one dominant ethnic group. Still, Indonesia fits into a conflict-oriented pattern of action as seen in how it dealt with several militant collectives. Also, looking at its behavior in the past two decades, in terms of according significant levels of self-rule, the Indonesian state has rigidly stuck to its unitary character. Combining these scores with that of knowledge, participation and peace-violence orientation, Indonesia shows a mean score of (-0.33).

## **POSSIBLE AREAS OF CONSTRUCTIVE INTERVENTION**

Ethnic conflict to a certain extent may be controlled by governments with copious amounts of political will, good will and the willingness

to invest in the social education of its populations. The identification and thrashing of ideas that clearly widen the gap between the real and the perceived milieu ought to be pursued actively. The development of an open society that places value on freedom of speech, celebrates difference in all aspects of social life going beyond ethnicity, and pursues the development of a highly educated and enlightened population apart from the basic necessity of ensuring security from poverty will do much to lessen the salience of ethnicity as a rallying point and therefore an enabling device of conflict. These factors also help develop critical thinking among members of the population thereby lessening the possibility of exploitative mobilization using violent means. As for the idea of knowledge as a political resource and as a public that anchors peace, order, stability and prosperity, familiarity can only breed good intentions, tolerance and prudence born out of the need to affirm reason over so-called primordial and affective concerns.

Solutions outside the state are of course also abundant and more than welcome. Although the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) affirms the principle of nonintervention in internal affairs, it does not discourage mediation by third party states when requested by contending entities. Such pattern of conflict resolution was seen in the case of the MNLF and the Philippine government with Malaysia acting as the invited mediator.

The diplomatic route offers an array of devices that have not been fully exploited by individual governments, marginalized ethnic groups and international organizations. ASEAN's much criticized policy of constructive engagement with Burma/Myanmar may be seen as a diplomatic tool that works in tandem with the more forceful style of Europe and America, a style that does not hesitate to use strong condemnation, denunciation and even economic and political sanctions. The former perhaps unwittingly takes a good cop role, while the latter takes on the bad cop role (cops being tragic metaphorical devices as good and bad and as relative concepts also socially constructed and never always universal in operationalization).

International law, its evolution and the strengthening of international institutions that uphold it, is another area rich in potential solutions. A region-wide affirmation of international law principles, the affirmation of the tenets of the universal declaration of human rights, the recognition of international treaties or conventions that define the rights of indigenous communities and minorities coupled with strong symbolic and real action as in the sending of peace-

keepers or troops to take part in internationally sanctioned military engagements effectively check regimes with known histories of violence along ethnic lines. The trial of Milosevic, the person and face behind ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, before an international tribunal emphasizes serious commitment to international law as a real practice and expression of humanity among civilized nations. This relatively recent development has more or less disposed of the almost sacred Westphalian conception of non-intervention among co-equals. Taking precedence over this abstract principle relating to the rights of states is the more sacred principle of respect for the inalienable right to life that upholds the dignity of all individuals. Such notions have already crossed the realm of theory into the realm of practice or conduct. It was made possible through the development of international institutions and great strides in making governments more transparent and accountable through access to information. These new modes of engagement have yet to be explored in the Southeast Asian region.

This paper has presented a syncretic model of ethnic conflict that combines state types, their corresponding behavioral tendencies, and a compound variable of political culture. The model has rendered some aspects of ethnic conflict more understandable by bringing to fore variables that are observable and quantifiable through processes of valuation. These in turn aid comparability across space and time which hopefully opens opportunities for further testing of relative salience. Aside from uncovering discourses or developing an awareness of their importance shaping perceptions of difference, decision makers may benefit from their own assessment of situations of ethnic conflict through informed analyses of observable patterns of behavior as well as other indicators. A good grasp of both the perceived and real can only positively influence the efficacy of intervention. ❁

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