

CHAPTER 4

ETHNICITY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT

The ideologies of Thailand's southern insurgents are more ethnonationalist than Islamist, and the targets are primarily Thai officials, Muslim civilians suspected of being informants for the government and Buddhist civilians and monks.¹⁹ "The conflict is about reclaiming the homeland for ethnic Malay Muslims rather than any ambition to establish a regional caliphate."²⁰

Globalization facilitates the revival of religious and ethnic identity in Southeast Asia in many ways and puts the borderlands in a new spotlight. The flow of people, commodities and ideas is not arbitrary, but is based on historical ethnic and religious ties in local spaces. Ethnic minorities who are trapped in marginal spaces of the nation-state are using the new spaces to reconstruct transnational ethnic and religious communities. Identities are not only multifaceted, but they can change and the fluidity and ambiguity of identities such as Thai and Malay is a central character of borderlands.

Neither ethnicity nor race is genealogically or biologically determined; they are both social constructs. Racial categories are thus produced sociopolitically, through power-relations and social practices that affront human dignity. The transformation of these practices requires a positive anticipatory undertaking, focused on a vision of the oneness of humanity that addresses the political, economic, and spiritual dynamics of racial production.²¹ The explanation about ethics will be discussed in the following section.

¹⁹ Paul Ehrlich, "The Southern Problem", *Asia Media*, 2006, <http://www.asiamedia.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=40884>.

²⁰ Paul Ehrlich, "Southern Exposure" (includes an interview with Francesca Lawe-Davies) in *Asia Sentinel*, 2006, http://asiasentinel.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=24&Itemid=35.

²¹ Arash Abizadeh, "Ethnicity, Race, and a Possible Humanity," *World Order* 33, no. 1 (2001), pp. 23-34, <http://profs-polisci.mcgill.ca/abizadeh/ethnicity.pdf>.

The Definition of Ethnic Groups

An ethnic group is a group of people who identify with one another, or are so identified by others, on the basis of a boundary that differentiates them from other groups. The term ethnic means of or relating to a group of people recognized as a class on the basis of certain different characteristics such as religion, language, ancestry, culture or national origin.

This boundary may take any of a number of forms such as racial, cultural, linguistic, economic, religious, or political and may be more or less permeable. Because of this boundary, members of an ethnic group are often assumed to be culturally or biologically alike, although this is not in fact necessarily the case. Another characteristic of ethnic groups is continuity in time, that is, a history and a future as a people. This is achieved through the intergenerational transmission of common language, institutions, values and traditions.

On the political front, ethnic groups are distinguished from nation-states by the lack of sovereignty. In the nineteenth century, modern states generally sought legitimacy through their claim to represent "nations." Nation-states, however, regularly include native populations that were excluded from the nation-building project and such people typically constitute ethnic groups. Members of ethnic groups, consequently, often understand their own identity in terms of something outside of the history of the nation-state. Sometimes ethnic groups are subject to prejudicial attitudes and actions by the state or its constituents.

The concept of ethnicity is rooted in the idea of societal groups, marked especially by shared nationality, tribal affiliation, religious faith, shared language, or cultural and traditional origins and backgrounds, whereas race is rooted in the idea of biological classification of homosapiens to subspecies according to morphological features such as skin color or facial characteristics. The term "ethnicity" may also be used to refer to a particular ethnic group.

An ethnic group is a specific kind of cultural group having all the following characteristics:²²

- a. Its origins precede the creation of a nation-state or are external to the nation-state.
- b. It is an involuntary group, although individual identification with the group may be optional.
- c. It has an ancestral tradition and its members share a sense of peoplehood and an interdependence of fate.
- d. It has distinguishing value orientations, behavioral patterns, and interests.
- e. Its existence has an influence, in many cases a substantial influence, on the lives of its members.
- f. Membership in the group is influenced both by how members define themselves and by how they are defined by others.

Minority-Group Aspirations

Most states have one or more ethnic minorities. Members of such groups invariably experience some degree of dissatisfaction with their status. In consequence, tension between subnational identity and national affiliation is a persistent and pervasive reality. The complaints voiced by members of frustrated minority groups usually reflect a rational desire to benefit from or, lacking that opportunity, to withdraw from a larger national society.

Marvin W. Mikesell and Alexander B. Murphy propose a diagnostic formula that focuses on minority- group demands ranging from recognition, access, and participation to separation, autonomy, and independence.²³ Combinations of letters in the formula rap and SAI letters in the formula- can thus be used widely as

²² James A. Bank, "Ethnic Studies Curriculum Guidelines," Center for Multicultural Education, University of Washington, 1991, www.socialstudies.org/positions/multicultural.

²³ Marvin W. Mikesell and Alexander B. Murphy, "A Framework for Comparative Study of Minority-Group Aspirations," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 81, no. 4 (1991), pp. 581-604.

diagnostic devices and illustrations can be offered of both relatively simple and highly complex cases. The formula draws attention to the break between territorial and nonterritorial minority aspirations by grouping demands designed to elicit changes in the ways that individuals and groups are treated in the numerator and those with explicit territorial implications in the denominator. A shift in the discourse from the numerator to the denominator represents a more profound break than a shift from the rhetoric of recognition to that of access and participation. A similar view is implicit in the works of those commentators who divide policy responses to cultural conflict into personal and territorial approaches.

The aspirations of minority groups are governed by many factors. Leadership, central government responses, economic circumstances, degree of group distinctiveness, and majority group attitudes can influence the development and intensity of collective ambitions. In addition, as Philip L. Wagner (1966) and Anthony D. Smith (1986) have demonstrated, myths, real or imagined "roots," and a wide array of emotionally-charged symbols play key roles in the origin and persistence of ethnonationalism.

The purpose of the Table below is to indicate policies that might satisfy the demands of a group at a particular time. A group demanding autonomy, for example, is seeking some kind of control over its own affairs in a territory of its own. Fulfillment of this demand requires the enactment of a policy allowing for some degree of regional autonomy for the minority group. Just because a policy associated with a specific demand is implemented does not mean that the demand is satisfied or will not change. There are a variety of policy options associated with each demand, groups are rarely united around a single demand and policies, once implemented, can alter the context of intergroup relations.

From the perspective of the state, the major concern when confronting internal division is one of continuity. Territory and legitimacy are the critical issues for continuity. For any state, the prime objectives are to preserve the integrity of the territory and to ensure within these boundaries, the legitimacy of its existence through obtaining popular support for and acquiescence of its political authority." Rather than thinking of unitarism or pluralism as the ultimate goals of states, we need to recognize that unitarist and pluralist policies are pursued in an effort to preserve the territorial

integrity of the state and to provide it with at least some degree of legitimacy. The response of state authorities to minority demands is based on the type of arrangement that those in control deem most likely to promote continuity and legitimacy at any particular time. The response can range from policies that authorities believe will create a unitarist state to those that acknowledge and encourage pluralism.

Table of Minority-Group Objectives²⁴

Aspiration	Types of associated policy	Types of cultural-political arrangements sought
Independence	New state transfer to neighboring state	Recognized secession
Autonomy	Control of minority region devolution region unilingualism	Confederalism Federalism Regional autonomism Regional administrative decentralization
Separation	Exemption from societal norms	Community autonomism
Participation	Power sharing input into policy making	Proportional representation Ethnic quotas in government legislative special majorities
Access	No discrimination Employment opportunities Advancement opportunities Special subsidies	Affirmative action Anti-discrimination laws Economic development assistance
Recognition	Acknowledgment of group's existence Respect for group's special attributes	Official language or religion special cultural institutions

²⁴ Mikesell and Murphy, p. 8.

Ethnic Groups as a Social Movement

Currently ethnic group movement as in the South of Thailand is often considered as social movement with the emergence of social movement theory. Theories of social movements are closely connected to the general problems of society's development. To analyze social movements separately, in abstraction from the social structure, is to limit the problem by superficial analysis, which is not fruitful and does not allow us to understand the nature of social movements. For that reason all the serious theories of social movements are based on general approaches to the principles of society's development.²⁵

Four main approaches can be distinguished :

1. 1. Collective behaviour theory

Collective behaviour accounts are still known as the orthodoxy in studies of social movements. Social movements under this approach are considered as semi-rational responses to abnormal conditions of structural strain between the major societal institutions; that damage causes malfunctioning of the whole social system.

Mass society accounts and mass deprivation accounts are close to the approach of collective behaviour but there are some differences. Two important theorists about mass movements are Hannah Arendt and William Kornhauser.

Hannah Arendt was a political philosopher. Arendt's work deals with the nature of power, and the subjects of politics, authority, and totalitarianism. Much of her work focuses on affirming a conception of freedom which is synonymous with

²⁵ Sergey Mamay, "Theories of Social Movement and their Current Development in Soviet Society," in CSAC Monographs (Britain: University of Kent, 1998), pp. 46-59, <http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/csacpub/russian/mamay.html>.

collective political action among equals. Her two famous works are *Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition*. Her first major work is an analysis of the historical circumstances, including nineteenth-century anti-Semitism and imperialism that contributed to Hitler's rise to power and the development of Fascism. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt diagnoses the causes of modern alienation in an influential study that asserts the triumph of the active over the contemplative life and the modern loss of a sense of publicly significant action.

Another important theorist is Kornhauser. In his famous book, *"The Politics of Mass Society"* (1959), he explored the social conditions necessary for democracy and the vulnerabilities of large-scale society to totalitarianism. Kornhauser, who became a recognized social movement theorist, distinguished between dangerous mass movements and more democratic types of social and political organizations that characterize a diverse society.

Kornhauser wrote in his book that "Mass movements mobilize people who are alienated from the going system, who do not believe in the legitimacy of the established order, and who therefore are ready to engage in efforts to destroy it," "The greatest number of people available to mass movements will be found in those sections of society that have the fewest ties to the social order."

According to Arendt and Kornhauser, the normal or healthy society is characterised by strong class and group solidarities, which play the controlling function and prevent the manipulation of the people. But when this class or group solidarity becomes fragile under the conditions of industrialisation and urbanisation, the processes of massification begin. These uprooted and atomized masses become vulnerable to direct mobilising appeals by powerful elites and charismatic leaders. Totalitarian movements emerge as a result. The 'mass deprivation' accounts add to the collective behaviour approach that a social movement is a weak form of revolutionary outbreak or an aspect of revolution.

When the country's institutions treat each ethnic group unequally, the deprived ones will revolt against the government.

1. 2. Resource mobilisation theory

The second main approach to the problems of social movements is the 'resource mobilisation' approach. The resource mobilisation theorists point out that social movements are rational and new responses to new situations and new opportunities in society. Movements are seen as innovative forms of political participation which create and sprout new political resources available in modern democratic societies. They are treated as emerging pressure groups or as embryonic parties. Social movements are seen as a part of the political process.

1. 3. New social movement interpretations

The third main approach is the new social movements approach. The new social movements interpretations treat social movements as both symptoms of and solutions to, the contradictions inherent in the modern super-bureaucratic society. Social movements articulate the tension between the expanding spheres of human autonomy and growing regulation inherent in the logic of postindustrial development. The main characteristic of social movements, according to new social movement theorists is their anti-state mind and action. New social movements, in contrast to old social movements, are the product of new contradictions of society, contradictions between individual and state. 'New values' theorists also emphasize that the condition of economic prosperity and political stability experienced by the post-1945 allies in the West, allow them to de-emphasize material values and lead them to embrace post-materialist values, reflecting higher aesthetic, self-realisation, and creative needs. These approaches change class interests into universal human interests.

1.4. The action-identity approach

The fourth and last approach is the 'action-identity' paradigm. The main representative of this approach is Touraine. Touraine is a French sociologist. His key interest for most of his career has been with social movements. He has studied and written extensively on workers' movements across the world, particularly in Latin

America and more recently in Poland where he observed and aided the birth of Solidarity.

Touraine considers that social movements are far from abnormal or pathological. Social movements not only prevent social stagnation, but also promise social emancipation. The established institutional forms and the underlying norms of knowledge and investment against which movements erupt, are seen as impositions of the ruling classes, that is, of groups that dominate the processes of socio-economic reproduction and shape social norms. All these class-related social forms of domination are challenged by social movements, which are the principal class counter-actors.

According to Touraine, the old form of industrial capitalism is gradually replaced by a new post-industrial, 'programmed' society with a fundamentally different pattern of class relations and class conflicts. In a programmed society the dominant class is the technocracy, and workers cease to be the main challengers of the status quo. The key class conflict is socio-cultural rather than socio-economic; it revolves around the control of knowledge and investment.

Current sociological theories of social movements generally incorporate elements of the structural and political-institutional perspectives described above, as causal factors shaping the context for mobilization. Thus macrosocial changes like urbanization, industrialization, and migration affect groups' mobilization potential through changes in population size and demographic patterns, relative societal location, spatial concentration, and means of communication. Similarly, the political terrain affects the strategic opportunities for action and the articulation of concrete issues and interests.

The conflict in the South of Thailand will be analyzed under the framework of ethnicity and social movement in the next chapter.