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CONTENDING NATIONALISMS  
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA  

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The contemporary politics of Southeast Asian nationalism cannot be characterized in terms of any overarching trend. There are real differences in the degree and character of nationhood in, for example, the corporatist cohesion of Singapore, the authoritarian stalemate of Burma, and the ‘post-authoritarian’ instabilities of Indonesia. Moreover, some nation-states are apparently being strengthened by globalization, others weakened; some characterized by increased ethnic conflict, others by its easing; some consistently authoritarian, others intermittently democratic.

The comparative evaluation of Southeast Asian nationalism is, however, problematized by conceptual ambiguities. When national identities are seen as the outcome of a long modernizing process of national integration, Vietnam, Burma and Thailand might be seen as developing into nations over several centuries (Tarling, 1998), but both there and elsewhere, nationhood in contemporary Southeast Asia remains vitiated by religious and linguistic diversities (Engelbert and Schneider, 2000; Connor, 1979), and by the asymmetries of political and economic clientelist networks (Neher, 1987). Alternatively, national identities can be seen as reactive responses to external pressures, so as to invite the view that colonialism not only created nations by imposing centralized and unified territorial states on Southeast Asia, but also reactively generated the anti-colonial nationalist movements which imbued the populations of these states with strong national loyalties (Neher, 1994). According to some observers, the external forces of globalization have subsequently weakened the nationalist autonomy and legitimacy of some Southeast Asian nation-states, notably Indonesia (Beeson, 2002; 2003). National identities are also sometimes seen as crucially dependent on ideas of equal citizenship, so that it is the shallowness of democratization transitions in this region which is identified as the key inhibiting influence on the growth of national identities (Henders, 2004). But there is a fourth approach, the one adopted in this chapter, which sees national identity, not as a reflection of societal structures, but rather as a contingent and variable ideological construction. National identities are seen to vary because they arise out of the interplay between civic and ethnic myths of nationhood which are deployed in the course of political interactions, by both state and non-state actors. This implies that while there are no linear trends in national identity common to all countries in the
region, there are nevertheless some consistent patterns to the variations in their national cohesion.

In the rapidly changing societies of Southeast Asia, politics cannot be understood as solely the pursuit of material self-interests. It also reflects the search for cultural and ideological resolutions to the insecurities engendered by the varying impacts of globalization, which foster prosperity for some and impoverishment for others. This is reflected, not just in the economic gulf in per capita GNPs between, for example, Singapore and Cambodia ($30,170, and $260 (US) for 1998, cited in Funston, 2001), but also in the social gulf, evident throughout the region, between swidden agriculturists under threat from ‘development’ and new urban middle classes seeking security in consumerism. In such circumstances, globalization, far from promoting the cosmopolitan homogeneity of Southeast Asia, is likely ‘to generate difference, uniqueness and cultural specificity’ (Kahn, 1998: 9). Nationalism can then be seen as an ideology which attaches to such specificities so as to ameliorate the anomic impact of disruptive social change. Nationalism, in its various forms, offers myths of moral and cognitive certainty as to the causes of contemporary disruptions and the prescriptive visions of community towards which politics can mobilize.

National identities in Southeast Asia offer such ideological security to citizens in the form of three visions, denoted here as ‘ethnocultural’, ‘civic’ and ‘multiculturalist’. These terms are not used to refer to descriptions of contemporary political or social structures, but rather to the distinct ideals of national development towards which populations can be mobilized by political elites. Ethnocultural nationalism depicts the modern nation-state as built on a high-status ethnic core, and offers a promise of security through assimilationist development towards ethnocultural sameness. Civic nationalism portrays the nation-state as developing towards a community governed by ethnically-blind norms, so as to offer security in the vision of progress towards equal citizenship. Finally, when the nation-state is imagined in multiculturalist terms, it offers security in the vision of an ethnically-balanced polity, promising just autonomy and resources to each of its component ethnic communities. So long as either or all of these visions of the nation-state retain widespread mobilizing and legitimatory power, then current inequities can be seen as resolvable through national development. Moreover, the three visions can become so intertwined in state symbolism and in the nationalist imaginings of civil society, that
the tensions between them remain inchoate, thus promoting the political cohesion of the nation-state.

This has not however been the case in Southeast Asia. The contentious politics of its nationalisms derives in part from the tensioned interplay between civic, ethnocultural and multiculturalist nationalist visions; and in part from the politics arising out of the internal dynamics of each of these visions.

**THE ETHNIC DIMENSION OF NATIONALIST POLITICS:**
The political dynamics of nationalism in Southeast Asia can be traced in large part to the type of nation-building strategies promoted by state-elites during or after decolonization. The dominant tendency throughout Asia was for state-elites to portray the emergent nation-state as being built, in historical or status terms, upon an ethnic core, thus labelling and peripheralizing other linguistic, racial or religious communities as ‘ethnic minorities’ (Young, 1976).

In many parts of Southeast Asia, there is little convergence of linguistic, religious, racial, ancestral homeland, and contemporary homeland boundaries, so that many writers on the region resist the concept of ‘ethnicity’ for fear of imposing a primordialist cement on the subtleties and fluidities of communal identities (Steinberg, 1987). At the same time, however, it is widely recognized that the colonial regimes sought to legitimate themselves by constructing ethnic categories; making alliances with minorities such as Christian Karens in Burma and Moluccans in Indonesia, and sometimes also depicting the new ‘artificial’ state as the successor to pre-colonial kingdoms, as in Burma and Vietnam. The resultant majority-minority politics put Southeast Asian nationalist elites under some pressure to adopt ethnicity as a way of mobilizing majority support against the colonialists (Anderson 1998).

When state-elites have sought to use such ethnic mobilization for nation-building purposes, to construct the nation as built on an ethnic core, this has in turn influenced the construction of an ‘ethnic minority’ consciousness amongst religious, racial or linguistic minorities. Moreover, even in the Indonesian case where the anti-colonial struggle did not employ ethnicity as its mobilizing tool, subsequent separatist minorities have nevertheless legitimated themselves by depicting the state as an
agency of ethnic core (in this case Javanese) domination. The result has been a nationalist politics of recurrent ethnic core-minority tensions.

There are variations in the extent of the ethnocultural nationalist tendency in Southeast Asia, and thence in the degree to which the ethnic cores have been overtly favoured in public policies and in state symbolism. Moreover, the identity of the ethnic core is never uncontested. Thus for example in the case of the Philippines, the categories of Tagalog-speakers, Christians, lowland Malays, and the central and southern Luzon region, all have claims to be the core of the nation. However, because of the crucial importance of language for nation-building, it has in most cases been the largest linguistic community which has been identified as the nation’s ethnic core. In some cases, as with the ethnic Thai, Burman, Lao and Malay communities, the ethnocultural basis for nation-building was signalled directly in the name adopted for the state. Even where the name of the country (or as in Indonesia, also the choice of national language) did not specify the ethnic core, it has been evident, for example in school history curricula, in the recruitment profiles of administrative and military personnel, or in the cultural status-hierarchy promoted by the state, that Tagalog-speakers in the Philippines, Javanese in Indonesia, Khmer in Cambodia and Kinh in Vietnam, were to be regarded as the core of the modern nation. In some cases the identity of the nation’s ethnic core has been promoted in religious terms, as with the Buddhism of the Khmer, the Burmans, and the Thai; and the Islam of the Malays. In several countries, the ethnic core has been the linguistic group predominant in the fertile lowland regions, which has subsequently become the focal region for economic development; with ethnic minority communities occupying the more geographically and economically peripheral upland areas. In such cases, in Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, the bias of state policies in favour of the ethnic core has remained partly implicit, portrayed as a response to market forces, a reflection of disparities in access to education, or a consequence of the urban-rural divide. The corollary of this has been that the states’ depictions of indigenous linguistic minorities occupying the upland areas as culturally primitive, economically backward, or politically subversive, has seemed to stem as much from their geographically-determined marginalization from the focal points of capitalism and commerce, or their location in border zones, as from any explicit ethnic discrimination on the part of the state. By the same token, ethnic discrimination has sometimes been most overt in
those cases where the ethnic core and the ethnic minorities have shared the same urbanized locations. Such ethnic discrimination was institutionalized in Malaysia from 1970 onwards in the New Economic Policy of affirmative action in favour of Bumiputra (‘sons of the soil’, mostly Malay, but also Kadazan, Iban and others of eastern Malaysia), so as to disadvantage the ‘migrant’ Indian and Chinese minorities (and also the indigenous Orang Asli). In Cambodia, discrimination against the predominantly urbanized Vietnamese minority was explicit in the 1954 citizenship laws, and in the anti-communist pogroms of the early 1970s and the Pol Pot period.

Ethnocultural nationalism has been least evident in Singapore and East Timor. In the case of East Timor, which achieved independence, after an armed struggle, in 2002, most observers saw national unity as developing more on the basis of perceptions of a common enemy (Indonesia), and the spread of a common religion (Catholic), than on the idea of a Tetun Dili ethnolinguistic core (Kingsbury, 2001). In Singapore it is indeed the case that the Malay minority (14%) are depicted in the constitution as having a ‘special position’, with Malay as a national language. But since the mid-1960s the Singaporean government has downplayed this element of national identity, not least because its main political constituency has been amongst the Chinese majority (78%). During the 1980s and 1990s, there were indeed some signs of a shift towards a Chinese focus for national identity, with the state promotion of Mandarin and Confucianism, and then the advocacy of an East Asian-oriented ‘Asian Values’ nationalist ideology. But the PAP government has taken some care to ensure that state policies and national symbolism do not appear to favour either the socio-economically and numerically dominant Chinese, or the socio-economically disadvantaged Malay minority. The PAP leaders are aware of the political dangers inherent in favouring either a Malay minority in a predominantly Chinese country, or a Chinese majority in a predominantly Malay region.

In those countries where state-elites have constructed the nation in the language and symbolism of the ethnic core/ethnic minority distinction, the result has been that identity constructions of ethnolinguistic or ethnoreligious categories and disparities have attained hegemony in public discourse, and have been cemented predominantly in the terminology of ‘race’. This has promoted the ethnic assimilationist enterprise in those cases where governments have depicted the ethnic minorities as sharing the same racial stock as the ethnic core. Thus the SLORC
regime in Burma claims that all ethnic communities are descended from a common racial stock, and thus are amenable to assimilation, if not for the interference of ‘fanatical racists, ideological insurgents, and so-called religious insurgents’ (Government of Burma, Ministry of Information, 1992, quoted in Lambrecht, 2004:155). In Laos and Cambodia (and to a degree in Thailand), ethnic minorities have been pressured into assimilation with the ‘culturally superior’ ethnic cores, by being officially classified as Lau Theung (upland Lao) and Lau Sung (highland Lao) in Laos, or as Khmer Loeu (upland Khmer) and Khmer Islam in Cambodia. But in other cases, the construction of ethnicity in terms of race has functioned precisely to inhibit assimilation. In Malaysia, the depiction of ethnicity in racial terms has been employed so as to push ‘Indians’ and ‘Chinese’ into an acceptance of their low status as citizens on the margin of a Malay-focused nation, and to emphasize the structural nature of the socio-economic and political disparities which accompany racially-defined status. Thus even though intra-ethnic disparities of wealth and income have coexisted with inter-ethnic disparities (Roslan, 2004), it has been the latter which have been politically salient, with economic disparities almost universally portrayed and perceived, until recently, in terms of an imbalance between Malay poverty and Chinese or Indian wealth.

Many ethnic minority communities have perceived their lower status as deriving from discrimination by a state seen as the agent of the ethnic core. But ethnic minority responses to this have varied, in part reflecting their diverse positions as decentralized aboriginal communities, as homeland communities with a history of political cohesion and autonomy, or as communities of migrant origin (Lande, 1999).

Where assimilationist policies have been applied to migrant communities, as with the Sino-Thais or the Chinese Indonesians, they have met with more success than when applied to ‘hill tribe’ minorities (such as the Hmong in Thailand, Laos and Vietnam) where they have been ‘usually ineffective and often destructive’ (Duncan, 2004:6). Migrant communities which have been pushed to accept low status as ‘second class citizens’, have generally been acquiescent. Chinese and Indian communities in Malaysia have indeed periodically responded to their marginalization in ethnic riots, but by and large the state has been successful in its strategy of co-opting their political and economic elites so as to promote ethnic minority acquiescence to ethnic core dominance. When subjected to persecutions in
Cambodia, the Vietnamese have remained more the victims than the perpetrators of ethnic violence.

It has been the impact of ethnocultural nationalism upon previously autonomous homeland ethnic minorities which has been most disruptive of national unity in Southeast Asia. State interventions into ethnic minority homeland regions in many cases involved the disruption of traditional authority structures, as ethnic minority elites were replaced by governmental officials recruited from the ethnic cores; and as social cohesion was disrupted by the progressive impositions of new fiscal, administrative, and educational structures, as well as by migrations of labour. Such attempts to expand state control over peripheral ethnic minority regions have frequently had a reactive impact, provoking some amongst the dislocated elites and disrupted communities into ethnic nationalist rebellion. These have occurred, for example, among the Patani Malays in Thailand; the Mindanao Moros in the Philippines; the Karen, Shan, Kachin, Chin and others in Burma; the Papuans and Acehnese in Indonesia; and the Hmong in Laos. In many cases these rebellions could trace their roots both to pre-colonial disputes and to unrest in the early colonial period directed against the expanding influence of the modern state. During the global ‘ethnic revival’ period from the late 1960s, they began legitimating their calls for political autonomy within or outside the existing nation-states, on overtly ethnic nationalist grounds (Christie, 1996). In all cases, the governing regimes responded to such outbursts of inter-ethnic violence and separatist ethno-regional rebellion, with the use of coercion. Characteristically, the coercive capacity of states has been sufficient to contain rebellions, or at least to impose a military stalemate, but not to fully dislodge the militants so as to restore effective state control of the disputed ethnic minority regions.

Popular support for such movements has fluctuated, as ethnic minority populations such as those in Aceh, Patani, or Muslim Mindanao, have been subjected to divergent pressures from the developmental promises of the nation-state, the autonomy promises of their separatist elites, and the coercive pressures from militants on both sides. The resultant trauma and stalemate of these confrontations breed the anxieties and insecurities on which the nationalism of militants feed. The conflicts thus persist and become entrenched, not just because of the socio-economic and power disparities associated with the ethnocultural dimension of the nation-state, but
also because of the ideological absolutisms, the nationalist fanaticisms, in which politics becomes simplified as a struggle between two stereotyped communities, the virtuous ‘Us’ and the demonized ‘Other’. This was evident, for example, when the confusion underlying tensions between migrants and locals in Ambon, became reconstructed, during 1999, into the moral clarity of an Islamic jihad against subversive separatism, versus a Christian crusade against Islamic ‘evil oppressors’ and the ‘absolute tyranny’ of the Indonesian state (Turner, 2002: 2,5). Visions of ethnic minority separatism thus remain salient in nationalist ideologies, both as the internal threats against which the imperative of national unity can be asserted by state-elites, and also as the legitimatory banner for the ethnic nationalist militants who continue the struggles against the alien state.9

Such military and ideological stalemate, which has kept several of these Southeast Asian separatist disputes going since the 1960s (and in the case of Karen separatism in Burma since the late 1940s), can however be broken. The perceptions of alienated or marginalized ethnic minorities that the state is the agency of an ethnic core, can be tackled by changes in constitutions, state-symbolism, or government policies, which employ more ethnically-neutral language or reduce ethnic biases in favour of the core. This was attempted in Malaysia by the replacement of the overtly pro-Bumiputra New Economic Policy by the National Development Policy in 2000, and is one interpretation of Cambodia’s ‘ethnically blind’ 1993 Constitution (Ovesen and Trankell, 2004:252-3).

But the political capacity of Southeast Asian governments to move away from assimilationist policies has varied. It has depended not just on their administrative capabilities, but also, more fundamentally, upon their ideological ability to reconstruct the nation-state in terms other than that of ethnic core versus ethnic minorities. Indeed, most Southeast Asian countries, with the exception of Burma, have had some degree of success in ameliorating inter-ethnic confrontations by deploying visions of the nation-state as a civic community transcending ethnic differences. Ethnic minority perceptions of state bias in favour of the ethnic core remain politically salient and unresolved, but they are not the only focal point of nationalist politics.
THE CIVIC DIMENSION OF NATIONALIST POLITICS:

Throughout Southeast Asia, ethnocultural constructions of the nation have been accompanied, since the decolonization period, by civic nationalism: the idea that the state constitutes a community of sovereign citizens whose status as ‘one people’ ought not to depend upon their ethnic identities, but should derive from the common patriotic loyalties of those permanently residing within its territorial boundaries. In no country has citizenship been restricted to the ethnic core, and in all countries some areas of public life have functioned on the basis of ethnically neutral legal norms. The language of civic nationalism is indeed sometimes employed as rhetoric to camouflage ethnic dominance, but even where that has been the case, its influence has nevertheless been more than cosmetic. It ameliorates ethnic tensions by ensuring that at least some members of ethnic minority communities come to see the state as not just an agent of ethnic core domination, but rather as a potential engine of progress towards ethnically-blind development and social justice. Even if such beliefs are regarded as misguided or naive, their impact is to act as a kind of buffer between proponents of ethnic core domination, and proponents of reactive ethnic minority rights.

The civic vision of the egalitarian citizenship community has manifested itself in different forms. The predominantly authoritarian bent of most Southeast Asian governments has been reflected in their depictions of the nation-state as an artifact of colonialism, forged through nationalist struggle, whose unique collective identity must be repeatedly defended against external threats, and also against the internal fissiparous impacts of individual rights claims, minority vested interests, and ethnic rivalries. The nation is thus portrayed in monistic terms as a singular people sharing a common developmental destiny. This kind of collectivist civic nationalism thus serves to legitimate the claim by authoritarian-inclined governments that they are the sole articulators of the will of the unified nation.

This has been the dominant construction of the nation-state employed by Singapore’s PAP government, initially promoted in the 1960s to inculcate a siege mentality of ‘survivalism’ as a small, resource-poor island in a hostile region. Subsequently the regime promoted a civic nationalism which focused on developing a patriotic pride in the state’s economic transformation. In this civic nationalism it is the uniqueness of the Singaporean collectivity rather than the equality of the individual
citizens which is stressed, so that individuals are called on to accede to the inequities of a ‘meritocratic’ hierarchy, inter-ethnic socio-economic disparities, and authoritarian suppression of individual liberties, as the price individuals must pay for collectivist development (Chua, 1995).

Most Southeast Asian authoritarian regimes have promoted such collectivist civic nationalist visions by intertwining them with ideas of ethnocultural nationalism, in order to enhance their legitimacy amongst citizens of ethnic minority origin uneasy with the dominance of the ethnic core. Thus, in the case of Thailand, the various authoritarian regimes of the ‘bureaucratic polity’ legitimated themselves by employing ethnic Thai structures of the monarchy, Buddhism, and the ‘Standard Thai’ language as symbols of the civic unity of the modern territorial state. In Suharto’s Indonesia, the ideology of *Panca Sila* translated Javanese ethnic values into a universalistic civic language. In the case of Malaysia, Mahathir began his Prime Ministership in 1981 as the defender of Malay-centric ethnocultural nationalism. But he modified this by moving in a civic direction as he began tentatively to wind back Malay dependence on ethnically-based state patronage and to adopt some aspects of the neoliberal agenda for globalization. He sought to modify the Malay-centric view of Malaysia by articulating a more civic vision of a ‘united Malaysian nation’, *Bangsa Malaysia*, in which Malays and non-Malays were developing ‘a sense of common and shared destiny’ (Mahathir 1991, quoted in Cheah, 2002:221)

But such collectivist-authoritarian civic nationalisms breed their own reactions. The rapid economic development of some of the Southeast Asian countries has promoted the growth of new middle classes and civil societies which have been increasingly active in making diverse demands- for increased freedoms from state intervention in some areas, but also for increased access to state patronage or government subsidies in others. States which have stressed that they are the sole legitimate articulators of the will of the nation are thus challenged by civil society claims that the nation is pluralistic rather than monistic, and that the focus of the nation is not the central institutions of the state, but rather the vibrancy of civil society (Rodan, 1997). The resultant contentions between collectivist and pluralist proponents of civic nationalist visions can push the issue of ethnic conflict towards the political margins.
In Malaysia, the clash between the two strands of civic nationalism took political centre stage in the 1990s, so that the issue of Malay priority in relation to the Chinese and Indians ceased to dominate politics. Mahathir’s sacking of Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim provoked a conflict in which their divergent liberal and collectivist civic visions for Malaysia’s development, mobilized large segments of Malaysian society so as to cut across ethnic lines. In Thailand, the progress of democratization, evident since the 1973 Bangkok student protests, began to generate a ‘new nationalism in Thailand... geared towards assisting reformed Thai capital’s venture into the global economy’ (Connors, 2003:239). This took a pluralist form as the centralized ‘bureaucratic polity’ was modified into a potentially more pluralistic and decentralized ‘bourgeois parliamentary political system’ (Anderson 1998) with a strengthened civil society. However, it also opened the door for provincial elites to take part in ‘money politics’ and political clientelism, and thence to ally under the ‘democratic authoritarian’ umbrella of Prime Minister Thaksin’s populist nationalism (Pongsudhirak, 2003). In the Philippines, the civic nationalist vision has been promoted by President Aroyo’s articulated goal of a ‘strong republic’ whose effective governmental and administrative institutions would be better able to combat corruption and terrorism; but the salience of this vision remains vitiated by the unresolved tensions between the ‘People Power’ nationalism of mass demonstrations advocating such reforms, and the continued patronage influence of the interlocking dynasties which constitute the Philippines’ national oligarchy (Anderson, 1998). The result, in Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines, is not a transition from an authoritarian-collectivist to a liberal-pluralist national identity, but rather an unresolved tension between these divergent ideas of the civic nation.

It is not only the dual character of the civic vision which influences contemporary nationalist politics, but also its volatility. The appeal of civic nationalism depends primarily upon the extent to which members of ethnic core and ethnic minority communities share a faith that the elites and institutions of the state have the capacity to lead civil society towards the promised developmental social justice. The extent of this faith varies not just with fluctuations in national economic performance, but also with variations in the ideological skills of state-elites in mobilizing civic nationalism in response to external enemies or internal threats. The volatility of civic nationalism can be seen in the Philippines, where widespread
disillusionment and cynicism with political corruption and with the incapacity of the state to promote development and social justice, coexists with sudden bursts of optimistic ‘People Power’ mobilization behind leaders (notably Aquino in 1986, then both for and against Estrada in 2002) who promise a strong state capable of rebuilding civic national unity.

This variability of civic nationalism is significant for nationalist politics since fluctuations in the strength of the civic buffer between majority-focused ethnocultural nationalism, and the proponents of ethnic minority rights claims, mean that ethnic tensions can intensify or ameliorate in response to variations in popular perceptions of the developmental or social justice capacities of an incumbent regime or individual leader. When the civic nationalist buffer does weaken, in response to a loss of faith by citizens in the ability of state-elites to manage the economy or to defend the nation from threats, then the prospect of an escalation of ethnic conflict can prompt both state-elites and civil society activists to search for a different construction of the nation, in which contending ethnic demands might be accommodated.

THE POLITICS OF MULTICULTURALISM:
During the decolonization period the ethnic pluralism of Southeast Asia was widely depicted, both by governments and by academic observers, as a serious threat to national unity which might limit the opportunities for stable democratization, thus justifying the imposition of centralized authoritarian rule. Such warnings were apparently justified by the incidence of ethnic riots and ethnoregional rebellions in the 1950s and 1960s. The idea that ethnically plural societies can only be held together by authoritarian means is still argued, when convenient, by Southeast Asian state-elites. But since the 1980s, the counter-argument has been increasingly articulated, that political stability might be best promoted by the accommodation of ethnic differences – by a shift from policies of ethnic assimilation or domination, towards the making of concessions to ethnic minorities (Myers, 1996). One implication has been a modification of the construction of the nation by state-elites, so that ethnic minorities, including migrant communities, have increasingly been portrayed, not as merely peripheral to the ethnoculturally-defined nation-state, but more as component parts of a multicultural nation-state. The extent of consequential policy change has varied, but
in most countries multiculturalism is more than ‘meaningless rhetoric’, while remaining insufficiently influential to counteract entrenched ethnoculturalist patterns.

In Thailand, for example, a ‘resurgence of expressions of ethnic culture and identity’ (Jory, 2000:18) is manifested in the ‘rediscovery’ by Sino-Thais of their Chinese names and cultures, the celebration of hill tribe cultures as a component of Thailand’s culture and a source of tourist revenues, the increased acceptance of Lao and Khmer languages, and the administrative decentralization and political pluralism which have accompanied democratization. It has also been reflected in the shift from centralized assimilation to decentralized accommodation in relation to the Patani Muslims. During the 1990s these latter reforms led to the significantly increased recruitment of Malay Muslims to both appointed and elected governmental/political positions, the reduction of Muslim-Thai economic disparities, and the teaching of Malay and the celebration of Islam in Patani schools. The result, during the 1990s, was a ‘de-radicalization’ of Malay-Muslim separatism (Wan Mahmood, 1999).

The multiculturalist vision of the nation comes in two variants. In its collectivist form, multiculturalism implies a corporatist state strategy towards ethnic pluralism, whereby the state provides limited ethnic autonomy through institutional and ideological structures which are determined by the state, and designed so as to promote the cooptation of ethnic elites and ethnic demands. In its liberal form, it implies the decentralization of power and resources to ethnic minorities through internally self-governing institutions or territorial regions. Thus the politics of multiculturalist nationalism focus upon the unresolved tensions between these two manifestations of multicultural nationalism; state attempts at corporatist control of ethnicity, and the attempts by ethnic minority elites and by multiculturalist influences within civil society, at a restructuring of governmental power and social status in favour of ethnic minorities.

The fact that state policies to promote the status and autonomy of ethnic minorities are thus open to interpretation as genuine concessions or as ‘fraudulent’ co-optations means that moves to institutionalize a more multiculturalist national identity have rarely succeeded in resolving ethnic conflicts, and remain politically problematical.
The Philippines has probably made most concessions in a multiculturalist direction, so as to offer significant autonomy both to the Igorot and to the Mindanau Muslims. The offer of territorial autonomy to Mindanao came only after the state-sponsored migration of Catholics had produced a situation in which Muslims formed a minority in most parts of Mindanao. This fact, together with the inefficiencies of the autonomous Mindanao administration under Nur Misuari, and the interventions of Jemaah Islamiah in giving support to Islamic militants, have combined to ensure that the Moro problem remains unresolved. In the case of Burma, cease-fires with ethnic rebellions were achieved by concessions which most observers have considered to be cosmetic, and ‘many of these agreements are essentially elite pacts between the military junta and minor despots, drug dealers, and bandits’ (Lambrecht, 2004:167)

In Singapore, the multiculturalist element in national identity took a rather different corporatist form, with the formation from the late 1980s onwards, of ethnic associations for the Malay, Indian, Chinese and Eurasian communities, which have functioned to co-opt ethnic elites, to monitor ethnic cultures, and to distribute ethnic welfare funds. In Indonesia it was manifested in the administrative decentralization measures of 1999 and in particular in the offers of ‘special autonomy’ to Aceh and Papua. In both these latter cases, ‘autonomy’ was greeted with suspicion by the ethnic minority nationalists. In Aceh for example, the GAM nationalist movement had become so radicalized by the state-sponsored violence towards them of the TNI armed forces, that they rejected the regional autonomy measure and the subsequent peace deal as ‘a trick by the Javanese state’. They rejected the autonomy compromise, not in favour of full independence, but in favour of a return to violence, in part because ‘GAM leaders believe deeply in an ethos of blood sacrifice’ (Aspinall and Crouch, 2003:x).

In Thailand, the impact of government accommodations to the Patani Malay-Muslims in easing support for secessionism, was counteracted by an upsurge of violence, variously attributed to ‘bandits’ or to Jemaah Islamiah, culminating in the carnage of April 2004. This appears to have fuelled a revival of Malay-Muslim perceptions of the Thailand state as an agency of Central Thai domination.

Constructions of national identity by state-elites in Southeast Asia have often been modified, since the 1970s, so as to reassure ethnic minorities that they are component parts of a multi-ethnic nation united by the vision of inter-ethnic social
justice. But as in other parts of the world, the promotion of multicultural nationalism has been recently undermined by the issue of Islamic terrorism, with governments now frequently portraying social discontent or political opposition in Islamic ethnic communities as politically subversive, allegedly playing into the hands of, or instigated by, domestic or foreign Islamic terrorists.

**RESULTANT VARIATIONS IN NATIONALIST POLITICS:**

The core issue in the nationalist politics of Southeast Asia thus remains the tension between the construction of the nation around the idea of an ethnic core, and the construction of ethnic minority communities as thereby unjustly marginalized. If ethnic majorities and minorities alike share a faith that the state is moving towards civic nationalist goals, then this tension can be ameliorated. But in Southeast Asia the volatility of this civic nationalist ‘buffer’ engenders a variability in its nationalist politics, which was evident, for example, in the diverse impacts of the 1997-8 economic crisis. In Indonesia, where faith in the Indonesian civic nationalist project had been undermined by the corrupt and coercive practices of the Suharto regime (Anderson, 1999), the economic crisis meant that the demands for democratization which led to the downfall of Suharto, initially offered only a weak civic buffer to the clash between divergent ethnic nationalist visions of democracy. The demands of the students calling for the overthrow of Suharto, for a liberal civic nationalism of equal individual rights, proved less powerful as a basis for political mobilization between 1998 and 2003, than did the assertions of ‘majority rights’ demands for the reform of the state in diverse Islamic directions, and of ‘minority rights’ demands for ethno-regional separatism. The resultant politics of ethno-religious and ethno-linguistic conflict seemed as if it threatened Indonesian national integrity. But by 2004, an upsurge of widespread support for the election of ‘SBY’ (Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono) as President, was interpreted by some observers as a renewal of faith in the capacities of an as yet unsullied leader, ‘a man of integrity and competence, neither overly religious nor anti-Muslim’ (Della-Giacoma, 2004: 14), who could revive the civic Indonesian project.

In Thailand economic crisis had a catalytic effect on the development of civic nationalism, immediately facilitating the pluralist provisions of the 1997 Constitution, and subsequently facilitating the concentration of power of Thaksin’s *Thai Rak Thai*
(‘Thais love Thailand’) party in 2001. Both the liberal and the collectivist elements in this civic democracy served to strengthen the buffer between contentions of ethnic nationalism (Reynolds, 2002). In Malaysia the economic crisis was employed by Mahathir to strengthen his authoritarian-collectivist civic nationalism against the liberal civic nationalism articulated by Anwar; thereby shifting the focus of politics in a civic direction. Previous Prime Ministers of Malaysia initially wedded to Malay-dominance policies, had tried to become more ‘inclusive’ (Cheah, 2002), but Mahathir was able to use the situations offered by the economic crisis, so as to take this civic shift further than his predecessors, and to do so without suffering a Malay backlash.

The strength of nation-states in Southeast Asian states does not depend, as is sometimes suggested, simply on the economic performance legitimacy of their governments. The 1997-8 economic crisis had varying impacts on the nationalist cohesion of different countries and the nationalist legitimacy of different regimes. The explanation for this lies only partly in the variations of governmental economic strategy.

CONCLUSIONS
The picture of unpatterned diversity in the cohesion and character of Southeast nation-states is modified once we see the common nationalist tensions which structure their contemporary politics. Ethnocentric constructions of the nation-states remain sufficiently strong to fuel ethnic minority resentments, which take varying political forms. At the same time, authoritarian-collectivist assertions of civic nationalism continue to challenge liberal-pluralist constructions of the nation. The result is that any ‘tendency’ towards more democratically multiculturalist constructions of the nation, remains incipient; blocked in Burma by the reassertions of an authoritarian and ethnoculturalist regime, unresolved in ‘transitional’ Indonesia, contested in the weak state of the Philippines, partial in the case of Malaysia, contained by the PAP regime in Singapore.

In a Southeast Asia of incipient or emergent NICs, national identities are indeed undergoing change. But this change should not be conceptualized as any linear ‘transition’ from ethnocultural, through civic, to multiculturalist national identities; or from authoritarian to democratic nation-states. Rather, we see a politics of nationalist
contestation; a contestation which is still partly about the territorial boundaries of the nation, but which increasingly focuses on the tensions between civic, ethnocultural, and multiculturalist constructions of national identity. It is indeed the weakness or strength of the state which is central to an understanding of nationalism in Southeast Asia. But it is not the administrative or economic weaknesses of states which directly threaten national unity, so much as ideological limitations in the state management of this nationalist contestation.
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Evident, but unresolved, in the various chapters of Leifer (2000).

Thailand was not colonized, but both its boundaries and its state structures were directly influenced by colonialism.

On the impacts of democratization in Thailand, see Connors (2003).

Percentage figures are misleading, in part because of variations in the treatment of the dialect-language distinction. Thus, for example, estimates of the Lao in Laos vary between 30 and 70%, depending on whether or not diverse lowland T’ai speaking groups are conflated.

In Indonesia, the national language is not that of the ethnic core. The Javanese are the largest ethnolinguistic group, but Malay was adopted as the national language because it had been used by the Dutch as the language of administration. In the Philippines, Tagalog is the most widely used language, but some estimates list Cebuano as a larger ethnolinguistic group (24%), than the Tagalog (21%). In tiny Brunei, it is the language of the ethnic Bruneis which has become the lingua franca; nevertheless it is Islam which is the central core for nation-building.

While the state does indeed seek to assimilate Orang Asli into Malay culture, they are nevertheless excluded from Bumiputra status, and its patronage benefits (Endicott and Dentan, 2004).

In Laos this official classification schema was dropped in 2002. In Thailand, governments have until recently referred to non-Chinese ethnic minorities primarily in regional terms – as the communities of Central, North, Northeastern, and Southern Thailand.

But the unease underlying Chinese acquiescence is indicated, for example, in Glad (1998).

For an examination of this process of nationalist ideologization in the Acehnese case, see Brown (2004).

Liah Greenfeld (1992) employs the distinction between ‘collectivistic-authoritarian’ and ‘individualistic-libertarian’ nationalisms, which is adapted here.
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