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**Political Faultlines in Southeast Asia:
Movements for Ethnic Autonomy as Nations of Intent**

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POLITICAL FAULTLINES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: MOVEMENTS FOR ETHNIC AUTONOMY AS NATIONS OF INTENT

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Introduction

Movements for local autonomy are currently active in at least six nation-states of Southeast Asia:

- Burma—among the Karens, Karennis, Shans, Mons and others
- Indonesia—in Aceh, Riau, Papua, Sulawesi, Bali and others, in addition to an already independent East Timor
- Laos—among the Hmongs
- Philippines—among the Bangsamoro in Mindanao
- Thailand—among the Malays of South Thailand
- Vietnam—among the Bahnar

The Southeast Asian economic crisis that commenced in 1997 has had an impact of these movements. It has triggered heightened activism in some movements—for example in East Timor, Aceh, Papua, Maluku in Indonesia, as well as among the Hmongs in Laos, the Bangsamoro in the Philippines, and the Malays of South Thailand. In other cases, it has catalysed long dormant movements—for example, Riau, Sulawesi, Bali in Indonesia.

Movements for local autonomy in Southeast Asia are thus:

- A long-standing phenomenon dating from the very inception of certain nation-states
- A still relevant and un-resolved phenomenon
- A dynamic and evolving phenomenon which may engender new nation-states (such as East Timor which gained its independence from Indonesia through a referendum and a bloody struggle after that)

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I use the term 'movement' in a straightforward dictionary sense:

(a): tendency, trend <detected a *movement* toward fairer pricing> (b): a series of organized activities working toward an objective; *also*: an organized effort to promote or attain an end <the civil rights *movement*>
(Merriam-Webster: <www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary>)

The movements that we are discussing in this collection of papers cover all three senses of the term above:

- A tendency or trend—this is a diffuse phenomenon which is disseminated into different areas of social life, such as an orientation towards greater local autonomy
- A series of organised activities working towards an objective—this is a more specific phenomenon which pulls together different organised activities into one convergent direction, the common goal, such as a new and distinctive nation-state
- An organised effort to attain an end—this is an institutionalised phenomenon, which may be a government, a party, an army or an institute, serving as a vehicle for reaching a specific destination, such as the declaration of independence.

In terms of their orientation, movements for local autonomy are centrifugal. They occur on certain peripheries of certain nation-states. Three questions arise from this:

- On which peripheries are they likely to arise?
- In which nation-states are they to be found?
- Which types of centre-periphery relations are associated with the emergence of such movements?

Answers to these questions will contribute to a comparative sociology of the centrifugal movements that have emerged in Southeast Asia. Such a comparative sociology currently does not exist, as these movements tend to be dealt with as culturally and historically unique processes within national specificities. Such a sociology indeed nests within a larger inter-disciplinary social science of nationalism and the nation-state. In other words, to a greater or lesser extent, these movements are articulations of nations of intent or, to use Guibernau's term (1999), 'nations without states'. Or to put it yet another way, separatism is an alternative nationalism and a separatist movement is a sub-state seeking to be full-fledged state.

I would like to refer to Gellner's thinking on this matter (1983: 63):

The transition from agrarian to industrial society has a kind of entropy quality, a shift from pattern to systematic randomness. Agrarian society, with its relatively stable

specialisations, its persisting regional, kin, professional and rank groupings, has a clearly marked social structure.... Industrial society is different. Its territorial and work units are *ad hoc*: membership is fluid, has a great turnover, and does not generally engage or commit the loyalty and identity of members.... The *nation* is now supremely important, thanks both to the erosion of sub-groupings and the vastly increased importance of a shared, literary-dependent culture.

There are two aspects in Gellner's statements that can be differentiated. One aspect characterises a society marked by civic nationalism as 'a community of equal citizens' who are thereby interchangeable and mobile. Gellner, however, bundles this characterisation with another aspect that is highly debatable. With regards to this second aspect, O'Leary (1998: 78) points out that Gellner holds to a functionalist view that gives 'primacy...to industrialisation in explaining the genesis and maintenance of nationalism'.

It is obvious that the Southeast Asian nation-states where separatist movements exist discussed, cannot be considered as industrialised societies. Does this necessarily indicate that civic nationalism cannot be found in such societies? Does this also imply that we should expect to find separatist movements in such societies?

In the case of the Philippines, some of the most prominent leaders of the Muslim separatist rebellion are people who were previously in the mainstream of Philippine society, who had been educated in tertiary institutions in Manila and who had even served in the national police force. The Muslim separatist movement was actually precipitated in 1968 by Ferdinand Marcos who had launched a national program of aggressive actions against Philippine Muslims. This implies that previously, there had existed a greater degree of civic nationalism in the Philippines, such that Philippine Muslims did not feel so marginalised to the extent they must have their own separate nation-state. (See McKenna, forthcoming).

In the case of Indonesia, civic nationalism was not part of the agenda of the state elites associated with Sukarno and Suharto.¹ When Indonesia was founded as a nation-state,

All that the nationalist elite could agree upon was that there should be an Indonesia, and that it should, in some vague sense, be free. This foreshortened imagining was the first of modern Indonesia's tragedies.... The 1945 Constitution of the Republic was essentially the work of Java-based conservative secular nationalists who leant heavily on the

¹ Arguably, Habibie and Abdurrahman Wahid, who succeeded Suharto, are the first Indonesian leaders to advocate some form of civic nationalism.

ideas of Dutch-trained legal experts. Islam, the Left, and the Outer Islands were effectively excluded (Elson 1998: <www.gu.edu.au/centre/gapc/proflecture.html>)

Centre-periphery relations in nation-states are distinctly unequal, as indeed they were in earlier state structures. This is true of the power structure of all nation-states, regardless of their nationalist ideologies. The difference is whether the nationalist ideology that is espoused by the state elite acts as a consolidating force or as a countervailing force to this power asymmetry.

The process of choosing between these two options usually occurs within a context of struggle. Burma, for example, enjoyed fourteen years of parliamentary democracy (from its inception in 1947 to 1962), when a military *coup d'état* led by General Ne Win brought the country under a yoke of oppression from which it has yet to emerge. (See, for example, Silverstein 1977, 1980).

There are thus contending state elites with opposing interests and agendas. In this contestation between opposing forces, it is evident that in the last four decades in Southeast Asia, there has been a region-wide pattern of power consolidation at the centre. Furthermore, in several cases, this process supplanted an earlier, relatively more democratic phase—for example, in Burma and the Philippines, as noted above.

This process of power consolidation at the centre has brought about a nation-state structure that may be described as a consortium of patron-client groups (variously in alliance or opposition). As stated by Brown (forthcoming),

It has frequently been noted that the communitarian norms of Southeast Asian cultures coexist with the personalisation of political practice. Even in those countries where the forms of institutionalised democracy have become established, the patrimonial politics of patron-client linkages remains a central feature of political life. Patrimonial elites do indeed vary significantly in their responsiveness to their clientele, but in all variants, the politics of patrimonialism involve and promote inequalities of status and power.... Patrimonial politics is thus fully compatible with and, in some circumstances, conducive to the mobilisation of both a majoritarian ethnocultural nationalism and a minority-focused multicultural nationalism. However, the patrimonial element in politics is fundamentally incompatible with civic nationalism in that it is unable to promote the norms of equality of citizenship upon which civic nationalism is based.

Nation-states that are consortia of patron-client groups may be characterised as 'modern' on the outside (in terms of its international relations with other nation-

states of the world), but 'feudal' on the inside (in terms of how power is organised internally). Citizenship in such nation-states is nominally individual but effectively collective.

Is this characterisation applicable to those Southeast Asian countries where separatist movements exist—namely, Burma, Indonesia, Laos, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam? Yes, there is ample evidence that power is indeed organised in terms of patron-client groups in these countries.²

Diversity on the periphery

In this situation, a widening gap emerges between centre and periphery. In view of this process, nation-building is not just an irreversible, post-colonial 'done deal'. The nation-states of Southeast Asia (and indeed in other parts of the world) are very much polities in process that are in the making and un-making. For example, the making of East Timor is part of the un-making of Indonesia

Movements for local autonomy are an intrinsic part of this making and un-making process. They are undoubtedly a phenomenon of the periphery that arises when the gap between centre and periphery widens beyond a critical distance.

But are such movements found on all peripheries? Quite clearly, the answer is 'no'. To take the Indonesian example of Sumatra, which may be considered as peripheral to the national capital of Jakarta, we find a diversity of centre-periphery relations:

- A well-established centrifugal movement in Aceh marked by armed struggle
- An evolving centrifugal movement in Riau marked by demonstrations and political negotiations
- A historical centrifugal movement (1956-1961) in Sumatra Barat (homeland of the Minangkabau)
- No discernible centrifugal movement in Sumatra Utara (homeland of the Batak)

How can we explain this diversity? In this context, I would like to modify Gellner's statement (1965: 166): 'Essentially, nationalism is a phenomenon connected not so much with industrialisation or modernisation as such, but with its *uneven diffusion*.' [my italics] I would like to adapt this observation as follows: centrifugal movements arise as a result of the *uneven diffusion* of the nation-state.

What do I mean by the 'uneven diffusion of the nation-state'? I argue that there is uneven participation in the nation-state project by different ethno-cultural

² See, for example, Mulder 1996, Alatas 1997, Schiller and Martin-Schiller 1997 on Indonesia; Riedinger 1995, Sidel 1999, Hedman and Sidel 2000 on the Philippines; Carey 1997, Houtman 1999 on Burma.

groups, leading to political stratification that is not just individual, but collective. In other words, even in a situation of power asymmetry between centre and periphery, the periphery is not uniformly disempowered.

This uneven access to power in a patrimonial nation-state occurs on ethno-cultural lines, rather than on class lines. But is this access to power given or taken? In other words, is it the political centre that rations out uneven access to power or is it that different groups on the periphery access power unevenly? My answer is 'both'. We see this quite evidently in the Southeast Asian countries where separatist movements exist.

In Indonesia, the Javanese dominance of national politics is obvious. (See, for example, Mulder 1996, Anderson 1972, 1988, 1990). But is ethnic politics in Indonesia to be understood simply in terms of 'Java *versus* non-Java'? It is indeed more than that. Different ethno-cultural groups of 'non-Javanese' also access power in the nation-state in different ways and to different degrees.

In this context, a comment commonly made by Riau Malays on the Bataks is instructive:

Put a Batak into any government post and soon that whole department will be employing his relatives. This does not happen with Malays. Why? Because the Batak have their *marga* 'lineage'. Malays don't have *marga*. That is why there are many more Batak and much more senior Batak in the Indonesian government.

The Riau Malays' comment on the Bataks is actually a comment on the Indonesian nation-state. In an ideal-typical nation-state, 'social origins should not matter in determining placement in the occupational and prestige hierarchies' (O'Leary 1998: 50). But in Indonesia, social origins do matter, not just for individuals, but for collective groups. It matters whether one is Javanese, Batak or Malay, not just within one's local community, but in the context of the Indonesian nation-state.

Nation-states that are consortia of patron-client groups both feed and feed on 'pre-modern' social structures and relations.³ But different 'pre-modern' social structures and relations vary in terms of their cultural content and thereby their political potential in interaction with such a context.

The better organised a patron-client group is, the more effectively it can participate in a patrimonial nation-state. In this situation, the social origins of different patron-client groups provide different cultural raw materials for group formation—for example, in terms of pre-modern kinship patterns. Ethnicity, in this sense, is not just a static 'zoo' of fixed categories within an unchanging

³ This argument is perhaps analogous to the Marxist analysis of the relationship between 'merchant capitalism' and 'pre-capitalist social relations'. See, for example, Smith (1983: 335-337).

nation-state. On the contrary, it is a dynamic arena of competing groups with different 'ethnic capital' in terms of political potential.

Significantly, both Bataks and Minangkabaus have descent-based corporate groups, whereas Acehnese and Riau Malays do not. (See, for example, Kipp 1993 on the Bataks and Kahn 1993 on the Minangkabaus). This social difference conveys more than just cultural diversity; it contains different political trajectories in a patrimonial nation-state.

I argue that in this type of state, centrifugal movements tend to arise among those who feel marginalised in accessing the power of the state, not just as individuals, but as collective political units among other such units.⁴ They thus seek to form their own political domain where, collectively, they will not be inferior citizens.

This entails a centrifugal orientation—a *turning away* from the national centre towards a re-definition of one's own location as the centre. This is a reversal of the centre-periphery relationship. And how does the periphery become re-defined as the centre? To begin with, this effort at re-defining periphery as centre must be legitimated; it must be seen and felt by its advocates as just and true.

Atavism and indigeny

There are two thematic commonalities in the ideological shaping of different centrifugal movements across Southeast Asia (including the three discussed in this collection of papers):

- Atavism—'reversion to a past style, manner, outlook, or approach' (Merriam-Webster: <www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary>)
- Indigenism—'articulation of rights that come from belonging to a place' (my definition)

Atavism allows one to say, 'Once upon a time, this was the centre. And as it was, so it shall be.' The past is thus seen as leading to a particular trajectory of the future, even if the present is out of sync with both past and future. Indigenism allows one to say, 'We are the original inhabitants of this place; we belong to it and it belongs to us.'

With regards to the latter concept, I follow Gray (1995) and Benjamin (2000) in differentiating between 'indigeny' and 'indigenism':

Taking a hint from Gray (1995: 40ff.), I must distinguish between unselfconscious indigeny as an embedded social

⁴ In a comparable way, Brown in his paper describes Indonesian student activists as lacking involvement 'with political networks.... The result is that those who most strongly articulate civic norms are precisely those who lack access to political influence.' So both marginalised indigenes and students create movements as bottom-up political manifestations.

dimension...and the self-conscious indigeneity involved in asserting some degree of autonomy from the state. Let's call the former 'indigeneity' and the latter 'indigeneness' (after Gray). However, *pace* Gray, indigeneness is at least as often used by the state for its own purposes (Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia), as it is by those who wish to get the state of their backs (Benjamin 2000: 22).

In this essay, my focus is on ideological indigenism—that is, 'the self-conscious indigeneity involved in asserting some degree of autonomy from the state', what Gray and Benjamin call 'indigeneness' (see above).

Our focus in this collection on the atavism and indigenism of movements for local autonomy address a gap in the theorising that has hitherto been done on nationalism. O'Leary (1998: 77) has mapped the range of theories and theorists on nationalism in the following chart:⁵

Nations are	primarily tools of manipulative elites or ideological masks for interests	primarily expressions of authentically felt identities	<i>both</i> tools of elites and authentic expression of identities
perennial and permanent features of humankind	Pierre van den Berghe	Johann Gottfried Herder (& most nationalists)	Johan Gottlieb Fichte
(often) continuous with premodern ethnies	<i>[Gap in theorising on movements for local autonomy as nations of intent]</i>	John Armstrong	John Hutchinson
(mostly) modern		Anthony Smith	Ernest Gellner Benedict Anderson Walker Connor

⁵ To enhance the value of this chart, I add some relevant information, where available:
 Benedict Anderson—currently at Cornell University; suggested reading—Anderson (1991)
 John Armstrong; suggested reading—Armstrong (1982)
 Paul Brass; suggested reading—Brass (1994)
 Walker Connor—currently at Middlebury College; suggested reading—Connor (1994)
 Johan Gottlieb Fichte—born in 1762, died in 1814; suggested reading—Fichte [1793] (1996)
 Ernest Gellner—born in 1925, died in 1995; suggested reading—Gellner (1983)
 Johann Gottfried Herder—born in 1744, died in 1803; suggested reading—Koepeke (1997)
 Eric Hobsbawm—currently at Birkbeck College, University of London; suggested reading—Hobsbawm (1992)
 John Hutchinson—currently at the London School of Economics; suggested reading—Hutchinson (1994)
 Anthony Smith; suggested reading—Smith (1986, 1991)
 Pierre van den Berghe—currently at the University of Washington; suggested reading—van den Berghe (1990)

As indicated above, there is currently a theoretical gap with regards to ‘nations’ that are ‘(often) continuous with premodern *ethnies*’ and that are ‘primarily tools of manipulative elites or ideological masks for interests’. In addressing this gap, we are not saying that all nations should be characterised as such. We are merely recognising the empirical reality of such a category in the form of movements for local autonomy that may be understood as nations of intent.

Even more so than institutionalised nation-states, nations of intent are primarily (and sometimes only) ‘imagined communities’, to use Anderson’s term (1991).⁶ In the absence of explicit institutionalisation, the members of this imagined *political* community must be able to experience it as real. Our emphasis in this collection is not that the political community is imagined. Rather, our emphasis is on *what* it is that is being imagined.

We argue that atavism and indigenism are important components of what is being imagined. Atavism roots the imagination in time, indigenism roots it in space. Atavism emphasises the continuity of past and present, with implications for the future. Indigenism emphasises the relationship between people and place, with implications for their rights over place. In this way, atavism and indigenism serve to authenticate the imagining of a community of the future. With reference to O’Leary’s chart shown above, we argue that continuity with ‘premodern *ethnies*’ is authenticated ideologically so that it is felt as ‘authentic’. It is not just a naïve, unmediated expression of ‘authentically felt identities’ (to use O’Leary’s term).

As implied above, atavism is not an unselfconscious ‘primordialism’ with pre-existing loyalties that are unthinkingly transmitted. On the contrary, atavism is an active reaching back to the past to draw upon ideational and moral resources. Atavistic constructions of the past may or may not be historical. However, it is not veracity that is the point here. The point is temporal location. Cultural constructions that are temporally located in the past enable usages for present purposes. The present is thus reconstructed in terms of this constructed past, thereby legitimating a particular trajectory towards the future.

George Orwell declared in his *Nineteen eighty-four*:

Who controls the past controls the future.

Who controls the present controls the past.

In the context of my argument, I would modify his statement thus:

Who controls the past controls the present.

Who controls the present controls the future.

The question is: who *does* control the past? The past is plural; it is neither homogeneous nor uni-dimensional. Moreover, constructions of the past need not even be historically true. So which ‘past’—or more cogently—*whose* ‘past’ is

⁶ ‘In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign’ (Anderson 1991: 5).

to be adopted as the authoritative account? The 'past' is thus a site of struggle; like the present and the future, it too is contested political territory.

McKenna (forthcoming) discusses such contestation among Philippine Muslims—between new religious teachers, trained in the Middle East and calling 'for a return to the plain, unadulterated teachings of Islamic scripture' and the traditional nobility 'harkening back to an idealised local past' and a 'cultural tradition of local saints'. Wee (forthcoming) discusses a similar process of contestation among Riau Malays—between those on Sumatra looking back to a golden age of shared Malay culture and those in the Riau Archipelago referring more specifically to a bygone Riau-Lingga sultanate.

There are thus competing atavisms that compete not so much in terms of their veracity (because they could all be true), but in terms of their consequences. Atavistic constructions not only legitimise certain versions of the present; they also identify insiders from outsiders, descendants from non-kin. Atavism justifies indigenism: that is, temporal constructions are used to justify rights over place—who should live there, who should own it.

Rajah (forthcoming) shows how the Karens justify their status as the first people in Burma and therefore its rightful inhabitants, through temporal constructions that 'date' their arrival from Yunnan in precise thousands of years. A further implication of this construction is that the Karen refugees in Thailand, who are Rajah's respondents, have been wrongfully displaced from Burma.

But how do 'we' (as a collective) know that 'you' (as an individual) belong to this place that we claim as 'ours'? The effort to belong results in 'identity work'—that is, working to present an identity that is simultaneously inclusive (to insiders) and exclusive (to outsiders). (See, for example, Hannerz 1983, Derks 1997, Stewart and Strathern 2000 on identity work). The scope of 'identity work' is varied and may include, for example:

- Genealogical accounts of kinship and descent relations
- Integration into local groups with co-villagers to vouch for one's identity
- Links to common places of origin—for example, ancestral graves, houses, fields
- Knowledge of ethno-historical narratives—for example, stories of collective ancestors, places, events
- Language use
- Religious practices
- Observable customs and habits—for example, dressing, etiquette

'Identity work' is carried out in various ways, thereby realising indigenism as an experienced social reality on the ground and thus more than just abstract rhetoric.

Insiders' rights versus outsiders' claims

The identification of insiders implies the recognition of their local rights, especially over land and other resources. The significance of this lies in its opposition to the claims of outsiders over the same land and resources. The identification of insiders is thus simultaneously the identification of outsiders as people who do not belong 'here'—the insiders' place of origin.

So while it may be the case, as mentioned above, that centrifugal movements arise when the gap between centre and periphery widens beyond a critical distance, it also seems to be the case that local concern with insiders' rights over resources is heightened by outsiders' claims over those same resources. In this context, indigenism is a response to the experience of victimage.

For example, in Indonesia, in Riau province, development processes are driven not by local needs but by external agendas emanating not only from Jakarta but also from Singapore. In this context, the formation of the 'Growth Triangle' in 1989—encompassing Singapore, Johor and Riau—should properly be understood as a collusion of interests between the national governments of Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. From a local Riau perspective, the 'Growth Triangle' has meant the regionalisation and globalisation of resource extraction and transfer.... The key relationship in the 'Growth Triangle' is between resource-poor but capital-rich Singapore and resource-rich but capital-poor Riau. In this relationship, resources from Riau flow out (including fresh water, oil, bauxite, tin, timber) and capital from Singapore flows in but not to the people of Riau (see Wee and Chou 1997, Chou and Wee 2000).

So who are the main Indonesian beneficiaries of the 'Growth Triangle'? They include Liem Sioe Liong (through his Salim group of companies), Suharto's family (especially his daughter Tutut, his son Bambang and his cousin Sudwikatmono), B J Habibie and his relatives, Caltex, oil-palm estates, timber logging companies, paper and pulp factories, golf courses, beach resorts and many other trans-national corporations (see, for example, Aditjondro [no date]: <www.munindo.brd.de/george/george_tutut_3.html>).

Even at lower levels of economic benefits, the beneficiaries are not the indigenous people of Riau. The jobs that have been created in town centres, factories, beach resorts and golf courses have been going to Javanese labour migrants, recruited directly by Jakarta-based labour agencies. Even before the formation of the 'Growth Triangle' and the huge influx of labour migrants from Java, there have long been Javanese transmigrants who were given tracts of land especially in mainland Riau.

In contrast, the indigenous population of Riau have been systematically dispossessed and impoverished to make room for these newcomers. Under the authoritarian regime of Suharto, land was often expropriated forcibly, even at gunpoint. In almost every case, inadequate or no compensation was given, because the villagers were treated as squatters without title deeds.

It is in this context that the Riau Malay movement for local autonomy has emerged as an assertion of indigenous rights. The Indonesian case illustrates how patrimonial politics also makes for patrimonial economics. The consolidation of power at the centre is also the consolidation of wealth at the centre, both of these bolstered by an ethnocultural nationalism. Ideology, power and money thus flow in the same direction with hardly any countervailing forces.

This gives us further insight as to which peripheries are fertile breeding grounds for centrifugal movements. These tend to be *resource-rich* peripheries where the benefits of resource extraction flow from the periphery to the centre.⁷

The following table shows the top four provinces in Indonesia where natural resources such as minerals, forestry products, oil and gas contribute to the lion's share of the province's Gross Domestic Product:

Province	Total GDP (billion rupiah)	Share of GDP		
		Oil & gas	Minerals	Forestry products
Riau	26,435	59.0	1.4	1.7
East Kalimantan	27,243	49.1	7.4	4.3
Irian Jaya	8,926	3.8	47.2	6.2
Aceh	17,229	46.1	0.8	3.1

Source: Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics
(from the Embassy of the United States of America [Jakarta] 18 May 1999:<www.usembassyjakarta.org/econ/wealth.html>)

It is more than just a coincidence that these are also the provinces with movements for local autonomy. The ideological use of indigenism in these movements is also more than coincidental, because indigenism relates people to place in a seemingly ascriptive manner that heightens the intrinsic justice of insiders' rights in the face of unjust appropriations by outsiders.

Is this argument that movements for local autonomy tend to be found in resource-rich peripheries also applicable to other countries, such as the Philippines and Burma? It seems to be the case indeed in Mindanao, homeland of the Muslim Bangsamoro:

Mindanao spreads over 94, 229 sq km/34 percent of country's land area and provides a substantial contribution to the country's economy. The Moro areas in Maguindanao,

⁷ Nietschmann (1999:1) describes the centre's appropriation of resources in the periphery as 'development by invasion':

The majority of these artificial Third World states can only be maintained by the invasion and physical incorporation of lands and resources of hundreds of indigenous nations. What is called 'economic development' is the annexation at gun point of other peoples' economies.

Sultan Kudrat, North and South Cotabato, Basilan and the Sulu islands have rich reserves of untapped natural resources, raw materials and, cheap labour. The Government of the Philippines's all-out war against the MILF [Moro Islamic Liberation Front] has mainly been because of these resources.

As many observe, Mindanao is the 'Land of Promises' and in fact is the 'Rice Bowl' of the Philippines. The land is characterized by fertile soil suitable to cultivate a variety of crops and has a timberland of nearly 39 per cent of nation's forest cover, despite massive deforestation. These areas, especially those within the MILF camps, have potential for super profits.

Mindanao represents 48 per cent of gold production, 63 per cent nickel and 18 per cent charcoal in the country's total reserves. The Philippine National Oil Company (PNOC) is eyeing a marshland in the said area for natural gas extraction. The Moroland Sugar Corporation is planning to establish a milling facility within a 25,000-hectare land area which will traverse six municipalities. The Consunji concession and a Malaysian corporation are planning to log and to put up a palm oil tree plantation respectively in the town of Buldon. These are but examples of the region's potentials as an investor's haven. The MILF is a deterrent to the government's program of attracting more foreign investors in the region (Oxfam 2000: 4-5).

The situation of the Karens in Burma is perhaps even more tragic, as shown in the following news article (which I quote at length because of its pertinence):

Burma experts and ethnic Karen leaders believe there is more than a passing connection between Rangoon's offensive against Karen rebel bases and a multi-million-dollar natural gas deal to be signed by Thailand and Burma on Thursday [2 February 1995]. Under the agreement, the Thai government will buy 515 million cu ft of Burmese gas daily for a period of 30 years at a cost of four million dollars annually. A pipeline to transport the gas from the Andaman Sea field to Thai territory will have to cut through land belonging to the Karens, the strongest of the ethnic rebel groups fighting Rangoon's ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).

The reason SLORC attacked the Karen headquarters in Manerplaw last week [23-29 January 1995] was to secure the border area with Thailand for its gas projects along the Salween river, Burma expert Bertil Linter told a forum.... The Salween river forms for much of its length the Thai-Burma border and both Burmese and Thai sides of the river are Karen land. Burma's Karens have been fighting for greater autonomy from Rangoon for more than 45 years.

Since Burma began opening up to foreign investment, joint ventures in offshore oil and gas exploration, dam construction, forestry concessions and tourism, SLORC has put intense pressure on minority groups and pro-democracy activists who have sought refuge among the ethnic rebels. Burmese exiles have expressed concern over Bangkok's increasingly close ties with SLORC and its policy toward ethnic minorities in the Thai-Burmese border as Thailand's energy needs grow.

Karen National Union (KNU) president Gen Saw Bo Mya has accused Thailand in the past of putting pressure on the Karen, whose access to the outside world goes through Thai territory, to sign a ceasefire agreement with SLORC.

He suggested that the issue came down to the resources in the Karen-held territories which the Thais have been able to get at 'a good price because of their good dealings with SLORC'.

The Karen leader, who has fled to Thailand, said the Burmese army wanted to clear the border area of his guerrillas in order to build dams across the Salween river. Bangkok and Rangoon have been discussing some dam projects to provide hydro-electric power to Thailand's hungry industries.

Kwee Htoo Win, KNU governor of Mergui and Tavoy districts in Karen state, told the 'Nation' newspaper on Tuesday he believed the SLORC offensive is aimed at smashing the KNU's southern strongholds to facilitate the passage of the gas pipeline. He said his group had tried to contact the French and U.S. partners in the gas development project but had received no reply....

The Thai government has a 30 percent stake in the development plan for Burma's Yadana offshore oilfield, with the rest being taken up by Total of France, Unocal Co of the United States, and the Burmese government. Thai officials say the building of the 400-billion-dollar gas pipeline across the border into Thailand's Kanchanaburi province will begin as soon as the agreement is officially signed.

Meanwhile, Burma's embassy in Jakarta has denied that government troops were involved in the assault on the Karen bases which have sent over 10,000 Karen refugees fleeing into Thailand. An embassy statement said Rangoon had

merely provided logistical support for the attack which it said was carried out by the Democratic Karen Buddhist Organisation (DKBO), a splinter faction of the KNU.

But Karen leaders and officials of the exiled National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) said there was no question SLORC troops with recently-purchased Chinese armoured personnel carriers carried out the attack, aided by KNU defectors who may have revealed strategic secrets to SLORC (Makabenta 1995: <www.google.com/search?q=cache:U8f_9-MhorU:www.corpwatch.org/trac/corner/worldnews/other/other1.html+Karen,+Burma,+natural+resources&hl=en>).

The 120,000 Karen refugees currently in Thai refugee camps, some of whom are represented in Rajah's paper in this collection, are people who may never be able to go home again. In this context, the atavism and indigenism in their orientation are all the more poignant.

A darker rendition of Foucault's concept of the 'bio-politics of the population' may be relevant in this discussion. (See, for example, Foucault 1979). There are two points of differentiation:

- Whereas Foucault's 'bio-politics of the population' (1979:170) is concerned with the 'supervision' of the population 'through an entire series of interventions and regulatory controls' and often ostensibly for their own good, in the situations discussed above, over and beyond such 'supervision', there is a darker implication of human disposability.
- Furthermore, this implied human disposability is not necessarily genocidal or ethnocidal in its original intent. The original policy intent is actually targetted towards the extraction of resources with minimal cost and maximum efficiency—a wholly rational capitalist logic. The indigenous population who are there just happen to be in the way. They are therefore seen, either as economic competitors to be bought out (or even eliminated) or as a non-productive and costly 'overhead' to be reduced (or even eliminated).

This capitalist logic of resources extraction at the periphery by the centre, however, sets up a chain of social and political consequences that are schismogenic in process.⁸ That is, dispossession and displacement engender resistance which then engenders suppression of resistance which further engenders more resistance and so on.

⁸ Bateson's theory (1973) of 'schismogenesis' discusses two processes: (1) symmetrical schismogenesis (as in a competition between similar players) which leads towards more intense rivalry, (2) complementary schismogenesis (as in a relationship between superior and inferior), which leads to higher differentiation. I would locate the struggle between a government and a movement for local autonomy as one where the effort by the latter is to transform the relationship from complementary schismogenesis to symmetrical schismogenesis.

Atavistic indigenism versus class convergence

As shown above, movements for local autonomy are rooted in grievances of dispossession, impoverishment, marginalisation and displacement? If that is the case, then why is the discourse of class not used to articulate these grievances—a discourse that centres on the evident gap between poor and rich? Why is the discourse of atavistic indigenism used instead?

This is because the poor are many and there is competition between them for scarce resources. This is particularly so when it is obvious that avenues for upward mobility are blocked. It is even more so when such blockages are linked to ethno-cultural markers. A deadly combination of majoritarian ethnocultural nationalism and patrimonial politics- economics would indeed create a gridlock of such blockages for ethnic minorities.

In Indonesia, for example, up to 1998, the four major destinations designated for government-sponsored transmigrants—84.4% of whom are Javanese—were Riau, Irian Jaya, West Kalimantan and Central Kalimantan.⁹ As we know from current events, all these are currently the sites of ethnic conflict, with varying degrees of violence.

This is yet another dimension of the type of peripheries that tend to host movements for local autonomy. There is a high incidence of in-migration to such peripheries by outsiders who are seen by the indigenous population as occupiers and appropriators. This is true of Mindanao which has experienced decades of in-migration by outsiders, many of whom came through government-sponsored resettlement programmes. As a result, Christian migrants and their descendants currently make up some sixty per cent of Mindanao's population (see Gluckman 1997, Muslim and Cagoco-Guiam 1999).

It is in the face of these large numbers of incoming migrants, most of whom are poor, that indigenism has emerged as the discourse of those who see themselves as the *indigenous poor*.¹⁰ In this context, atavistic indigenism may be understood as a 'weapon of the weak', to borrow a term from Scott (1987). For this reason, we cannot gloss over the ideological content of movements for local autonomy as mere epiphenomenon or 'false consciousness', constructed as it may be.

⁹ The Transmigration Programme was started by the Indonesian Government in 1950, with the aim of relocating large numbers of people from the densely populated islands to the sparsely populated ones. This resettlement scheme has become one of the largest mass movements of people in this century, having moved an estimated 1.5 million families. (See, for example, Linder 1997, Houshour 1997).

¹⁰ In the case of Burma, the Karens have been displaced not by incoming migrants, but by incoming mega-development projects. In addition to the gas pipeline mentioned above, 'by March 1995, a total of 23 proposed dams had been identified in the watershed of the Salween in Burma and in the border provinces of Thailand' (*FIVAS Report* 1999: 7.5).

Therefore, as an initial step towards a comparative sociology of such movements, there is a need to focus on the constructed ideological content of both centre and periphery. Ideological content is particularly important for sustaining movements that are not (yet) wholly institutionalised. Ideas can motivate actions and engender social consequences (which may include the realisation of the imagined nation-state).

A potential social consequence of atavistic indigenism that we should note is its incompatibility with class formation. Whereas class ideology forges horizontal linkages, the ideology of indigenism forges vertical linkages:

Horizontal class		Vertical indigenism	
Class X →	Inter-local → Inter-ethnic Inter-national	Indigenism A ↓	Indigenism B ↓
Class Y →	Inter-local → Inter-ethnic Inter-national	Local Atavistic Ethnic	Local Atavistic Ethnic

The irony is that international class convergence is occurring among the powerful at the centre. The Jakarta elite, the Manila elite and even, to some extent, the Rangoon elite are part of a globalising convergence of elite interests. The magnitude of power and wealth being consolidated at the centre in these and other such countries has enabled the beneficiaries to ‘make it’ not only as members of the state elite, but as shareholders of global capital. The cosmopolitanism of their capitalist practice is evident in their patronage of the same group of international private banks, speculation in the same international stock markets, investments in the same range of transnational companies, consumption of the same designer-branded luxury goods and play activities, and so on.¹¹ In this context, the transformation of appropriated resources from the periphery as wealth for the centre is an intrinsic part of the process of global capital accumulation.

¹¹ In Indonesia, for example, despite the economic crisis and the political chaos, members of the cosmopolitan elite in Jakarta are evidently thriving:

Car sales have nearly tripled, with sales of luxury cars such as BMW rising by nearly five times.... Of the 10 Ferraris and 10 Maseratis allocated to [the Jakarta] showroom this year, four Ferraris and two Maseratis have already been sold. Each of the Ferrari 360 Modena F1s, a model based on Formula One racing cars, sells for nearly \$400,000, about twice what they cost in the US, while each Maserati 3200 GT Auto costs \$180,000. Indonesia's per capita income is about \$700 (Leahy, *Financial Times*, 7 April 2001).

But while international elite interests are converging through global capital accumulation at the top, the indigenous poor are retreating into fragmented local indigenisms at the bottom. Moreover, even among the indigenous poor, there is competition for scarce resources. There are divisions within separatist movements. In this situation, there is little likelihood of larger movements with wider scope; there is, for example, no Sumatran separatist movement in Indonesia. Indeed, such fragmentation is part of a prevalent pattern that has developed worldwide in the context of post-Cold War globalisation, where the response to an increasingly global capitalism at the top is the emergence of increasingly local and inward-looking nationalisms at the bottom.

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