

CHAPTER VI

UNRESOLVED LOCAL GRIEVANCES: A MAJOR ROOT CAUSE OF THE VIOLENT CONFLICT

6.1 Overview

According to “The Nation”, the southern communities have a lingering list of grievances against the state that include oppression, injustice, cultural alienation, poor governance, disregard of their history and historical anger over Patani’s annexation and economic under-development.

These grievances had remained unresolved, purposefully ignored and disregarded for a long time. There is a sense of frustration and anger over inequality and injustice. The following sections will examine “The Nation’s findings in these areas.

6.2 Oppression

My detailed reading of the newspaper articles on “oppression” are set out in Appendix III.

According to “The Nation”, the relationship between “oppression” and “violent conflict” is positive. “Oppression” leads to the negative result of violence. “The Nation” said that “suppression aggravated the situation” and “all the trouble in the South is the result of oppressive policy”.

The daily newspaper stated explicitly that it was the collective opinion of human rights activists, some pro-democracy academics and civil-society members that the violence was the result of the oppressive policy of abductions; extrajudicial killings and heavy-handed handling of protests, such as the one at Tak Bai. It was further emphasized that these oppressive pre-conditions of violence must be changed. It was also reported that PULO affirmed its position that even if Bht500 banknotes were used to fold 100 million paper birds, it would not assuage the sufferings of the severely oppressed. “The Nation” reported on 21 November 2004 that Abdulrahmann Abdulsamat, Chairman of the Islamic Council of Narathiwat, has said that the use of force and brutality like the Tak Bai crackdown has generated lack of trust between the local community and government agencies.

Although “The Nation” has established the emphatic relationship between “Oppression” and “Violent Conflict”, it cannot by its very nature of being a newspaper, espoused upon this idea. Moreover, the perpetrators are “nameless” and “faceless”. The relevant research question here is: How credible is “The Nation” s claim?

“The Nation”’s proposition is credible as some Muslim scholars and community leaders have pointed this out : (i) Che Man (1990: pp 168) referred to the heavy-handed military suppressions of demonstrations (ii) Farouk (1987: pp 264-266) wrote about the arrest and jailing of Malay Muslims without charges, police killings and brutality. (iii) Abdullahman Abdulsomat and Dato Neidir Waba, Muslim community leaders, have been quoted in the Bangkok Times of 4 November 2004 that

they deplored army and police brutality in cracking down on dissident voices of the South. (iv) Anand Panyarachun, Chairman of the National Reconciliation Commission, referred to the hundreds missing in the televised debate with PM Thaksin on 30 July 2005.

This technique of using brutality to oppress dissent and to pre-empt future demonstrations has become a traditional state response. However, such oppression of dissenting voices is “good fuel” for the insurgency (The Nation 5 November 2004).

6.3 Injustice

“Injustice” is a recurring theme in the newspapers’ reports. I have further analyzed this theme into 3 areas: (a) adjudicative injustice (b) retributive injustice (c) social injustice. A collection of detailed reading of the newspaper columns are set out in Appendix IV identifying “injustice” as a root cause of the violent conflict.

6.3.1 Adjudicative Injustice

According to the “The Nation”, the relationship between “injustice” and “violent conflict” is positive. Injustice leads to the negative result of violence.

“The Nation” explicitly and emphatically pointed to the lack of adjudicative justice (real and perceived) as one of the root causes of the violence

in its special reports and opinions. The newspaper identified the following activities to support its conclusion and these comprise:-

- (i) historical military brutality without accountability;
- (ii) perceived 'scapegoating' of Malay Muslims resulting in indiscriminate and unlawful house searches; detentions without charges;
- (iii) kidnappings and mysterious disappearances of Malay Muslim leaders;
- (iv) "high-handed" bullying and unlawful tactics by police such as talking people into taking blame.

In order to assess the credibility of "The Nation"'s analysis, John Barton's theory on human needs is used to evaluate this claim. The psychologist, John Barton, propounded the theory that certain ontological human needs drive human behaviors. At this human level, conflict and violence result from unmet human needs pertaining to safety; "belonginess"; self-esteem/recognition; personal fulfillment, identity, cultural security; freedom; justice and participation in society or state. Lack of justice can drive a human being into anti-social, anti-establishment, vengeful behavior. Therefore, based on a conceptual framework by Barton, there is a credible positive relationship between unmet "security" and "justice" needs and violent behavior.

The failure to guarantee the rule of law (pressing proper charges, access to legal advice, due judicial hearings) seemed to have driven the community to **distrust** the military and police and so the perpetrators took the law into their hands. Extreme injustice over a sustained period of time could result in “revenge” killing even though two wrongs would not make a right. The human outrage generates hatred for the state apparatus and even non-combatants.

“The Nation” also reported that Chidchanok Rahimmula, a lecturer at Prince of Songkla University, had signified that the killings and punishments went on and on, without legal procedures (The Nation 9 November 2004). Prinya Theewanaruemitkul of Thammasat University also exhorted the government to guarantee the rule of law or else the sense of injustice will drive the local citizens into the arms of the perpetrators (The Nation 14 November 2004).

Intense passion of hatred is manifested in the slitting of throats and beheadings, methods of killing totally unheard of before 2005. Beheadings and taking revenge are articulated in the Quran : (47 : 4-12) enjoins Muslims fighting a lawful war in Allah’s cause to fight hard, cutting off the unbelievers’ heads until they are overcome. (42 :40-44) : “If you have been wronged, and take revenge, you do not incur great guilt”. The theological justifications for the correct applications of these sections of the Quran are still the subject of debate amongst Islamic teachers just as some Islamic teachers refuse to condemn suicide killings in Iraq. Recovery of documents from the Krue Se and Tak Bak incidents revealed that there are evidences of Islamic inspirations amongst the killed Malay Muslims.

As the perpetrators come from the community of Malay Muslims, this connection with “Islam” is credible.

In conclusion, oppression conducted by unjust state operations without regard for due process of the law fuel the insurgency.

6.3.2 Retributive Injustice

Apart from the lack of adjudicative justice, there is the very real sense of lack of retributive justice. Military and police officers guilty of unjust killings in the Krue Se and Tak Bai incidents were not brought to justice but merely re-deployed. Ministers-in-charge are rotated out during cabinet reshuffles.

“The Nation” reported that the National Human Rights Committee and Senator Sophon Suphaphong of the Senate Social Development and Human Security Committee had exhorted the government not to let “brutal and bad officials to go on living” but to be brought to justice. In a special report and one editorial, “The Nation” emphasized that justice through due process of the law must be brought upon those responsible for Tak Bai otherwise the Malay Muslims will grow up hating the state for its injustice.

Although the injured and families of victims of Tak Bai were financially compensated, Muslim community leaders said that these are not adequate retributive justice. Some social critics, including Anand, had commented on the hundreds mysteriously missing and no police officer has been formally charged for

this “missing” incidents. The Times (Asia) edition of 10 May 2004 covered an interview with a masked militant leader and some villagers who swore that there was no justice for Malay Muslims in the South and so they have to seek revenge for those innocent victims of police brutality and unlawful acts.

“The Nation”’s proposition can also be supported on principles of good governance in a democracy. The concept of retributive justice is religiously neutral as all free and democratic societies regard them as standards of good governance and civilized behavior. The Malay Muslims’ demand for justice stands on sound democratic principles. The large delegation of academics who met with the Prime Minister in November also proposed that officers responsible for the Tak Bai massacre be brought to justice (The Nation 15 November 2004). In conclusion, “The Nation”’s proposition that lack of retributive justice is a one of the root causes of the conflict is credible.

6.3.3 Social Injustice

“The Nation” has also reported on Malay Muslim community leaders’ call for the state to involve the local communities more in their policy-making and projects. Government officials were deemed unresponsive to the needs of locals, even commented upon as preferring to stay in their air-conditioned offices rather than visiting remote villages.

Poor governance involving persecution by corrupt government officials and the “feeling” of being treated as “second-class” citizens were also given

as possible reasons for the conflict. This research will take up the issue of “cultural alienation” as a major sub-theme of social injustice in section 5.

6.4 State Policies on Governance

This section will examine the issue of local grievances against improper state governance pertaining to security, police and military issues. My detailed reading of the newspaper articles are set out in Appendix V.

A reading of the articles establishes a “positive” relationship between “State Policies” and the “Violent Conflict”. The intensity of the relationship is “emphatic”. A short summary of the linguistics used in these articles would affirm that the state sanctioned “oppression” and “injustice”:-

- (i) state justified violence by state officials;
- (ii) state authorities have no mercy nor morality;
- (iii) state terrorism;
- (iv) government use force outside legal framework : infamous methods, secret killings, kidnappings
- (v) state permits officials to use unlawful tactics
- (vi) root cause is government policy, flawed policies;
- (vii) systematic state failure.

There is a “definitive” (“prius” in Latin) relationship between “State Policies” and the other 2 themes. “Oppression”, the lethal strikes by the military and police to disperse demonstrations or protests; the pre-emptive procedures through

abductions, mysterious killings, un-lawful detentions of persons are made possible by state-sanctioned policies. “Injustice”, both adjudicative by denying the person of his legal rights and disallowing the legal process to flow as well as the absence of retributive justice after wrongful killings, are permitted by the state. Social injustice – the failure to consult and involve the local communities in policy-making and being unresponsive to their needs and requests – has a historical bearing over several changes of government. The state’s biased policy against the minority local community is reflected in the state officials’ attitudes of indifference towards or ignoring the locals.

State policies, being one of the major root causes of the conflict, can also be “logically” derived (that is by induction) by examining the range of narrators quoted by “The Nation” and the nature of the reports (whether it is a daily report or editorial or opinion piece). A gamut of narrators, consisting of the “elite” class have highlighted such state abuses : Privy Councillor, Anand; former supreme commander of the Thai Armed Forces, Surayud, Senator Sophon Suphaphong, Academicians Parinya of Thammasat University, Surichai and Phra Sripaiyatmoli of Chulalongkorn University, the Senate’s Social Development and Human Security Committee and the National Human Rights Committee. Furthermore, “The Nation” espoused this in their editorials and opinion reporting.

The consequences of “flawed” state policies are suspicion and great distrust of the state amongst the local communities (The Nation 21, 24 November 2004).

In my opinion, the government cannot flush out perpetrators without the full co-operation of the communities. These communities provide safe sanctuaries, whether willingly or unwillingly. For a broad section of the communities who want to live peacefully, they could be caught between the “devil” and the “deep blue sea”. The Government has to build up trust and keep this very important “middle” ground in the communities on its side. Then, the state can draw out the intelligence required for its operations.

6.5 Cultural Alienation or “Exclusion”

Cultural alienation is the sense of being excluded, prevented from participating in the mainstream activities and development of the state due mainly to ethnicity, religious and language differences. It will include negation or suppression of the cultural identity of the minorities.

According to a detailed reading of “The Nation” as set out in Appendices VI and VII, the relationship between “Cultural Alienation” and “Violent Conflict” is positive. Cultural alienation led to the negative result of violence

“The Nation” does not fudge or imply the relationship. By all accounts of the examined reports, it either states explicitly or emphatically this relationship. The ideas reported by “The Nation” includes:-

- (i) Conflict is caused by neglect, failure to understand local habits and way of life;

- (ii) Malay Muslims felt alienated because of language and religious differences. The Government should reduce their isolation.
- (iii) Thai nationalism (presumably in its present unsatisfactory form of being based on race, language and religion) makes Malay Muslims uncomfortable.
- (iv) Some are less Thai than others according to dialect.
- (v) There is this “us” versus “them” mentality, “Thai” versus “un-Thai”, “less Thai” and hence less loyal to the state
- (vi) Supremacist Thai doctrine or Thai identity based on language and race.

The research question at this point is again : “ How credible is ‘The Nation’s claim?’”. Although “The Nation” deemed “Cultural alienation or exclusion” as a root cause of the conflict, it by its very nature of being a newspaper, could not fully explore this dimension. Moreover, the perpetrators are “nameless” and “faceless” and so no empirical evidence can be obtained.

The following sub-sections will contextualize and augment the newspaper’s claims by examining researches conducted by several scholars as well as personal observations:-

- (i) Chavivun (1980)’s dissertation that the Malay Muslims has been suffering from a history of prejudices : of being avoided or “left alone” by the

Buddhists; being stereotyped as “Khaek” (dark, lazy, untrustworthy visitors who have no legitimate place in the country);

(ii) Panomporn (1984) asserted that the state’s forced assimilation policies were to erase the Malay ethnicity of the people. Seni (1988) noted that the Malay Muslims viewed the Malay language as a boundary marker between “us” and “them” and linked their present to their glorious past, a separate sovereign polity. Hence, any attempt to forcibly assimilate them is a violation of their cultural identity.

(iii) Che Man (1990) wrote about the “colonization” of the South from its historical and political roots and yet none of the Malay Muslim’s values are being made part of the civil society of modern Thailand. He had already noted that Islamic religious elites have assumed leadership positions in the then separatist movements. Islam is already used to justify violence as a means to the end. The separatist movements even obtained support from Islamic organizations overseas.

(iv) Chaiwat (1992) noted that “Patani” has been Thai-ified as “Pattani”. Along this similar line, I note that “Jawi” is likewise Thai-ified as “Yawi” (there is no “Y” consonant sound in the Malay language).

(v) Farouk (1987)’s proposition was that the state’s insistence on using Thai as the administrative language instilled fear, resentment and “marginalization” of the Malay Muslims. The language issue drove a wedge between

the local population and the state. The state's interference in family matters (Shariah law could not be implemented for matters on marriage and inheritance); daily activities and attire (as promulgated during Phibun's regime) reflected a great deal of intolerance and insensibilities towards the Malay Muslims. Specifically, the state's abolition of Shariah Court was deemed an "assault" on Islam. The price of Thai citizenship seemed to be the Malay culture and religion.

(vi) Uthai (1987) wrote that the Malay Muslims suspiciously viewed state education policies as being directed to devalue their status both socially and economically and eventually to get them to deny their religious and ethnic identity.

(vii) The following are personal observations of the lacuna of Malay Muslim cultural space in civil society : (1) the emphasis on the Thai race and language in the Gallery of Thai history at the Bangkok National Museum (thereby excluding minorities) (2) the absence of Islamic art in the museum whilst there are showcases of Buddhist and Khmer art (3) the custom of addressing the Malay Muslims as "Thai Muslims" or "Thai Malays" in an effort to emphasize their loyalty or rather "absence" of loyalty to the state (4) absence of Islamic public holidays in the state calendar whilst Buddhist holidays are honored (5) the "silence" in school textbooks about the history of Patani and the grand canon in front of the Ministry of Defence. (6) Buddhist statues are abundantly found in government buildings and even meeting rooms without regard for Islamic sensitivities. Shared "space" is not neutralized for religious harmony and respect.

(viii) The Krue Ze Mosque is a good case-study of cultural violence (in the context of Johan Galtung's concept of peace) against a minority group. According to Chaiwat (2005), in front of the Krue Ze Mosque was an equally ancient tomb, that of a Chinese female saint Lim Kun Yew. Lim came from China to Patani to persuade her brother, Lim Tho Khiem, who had earlier embraced Islam to leave the faith and go home to China. Having failed in her mission, she committed suicide under a cashew tree near the mosque. According to a verbal legend, she issued a curse that the construction of the Mosque would never be completed. Her burial plot in front of the Mosque became developed into a sizeable shrine.

Culturally insensitive tourist brochures and leaflets promoted her sanctity and attracted tourists. "As more tourists come to visit the goddess's shrine, the social reproduction of the curse becomes more intense (Chaiwat 2005 pp 72-77)" and "a verbal myth became a written one". The "curse" is a severe affront to Islamic sensitivities. In June 1990, Malay Muslims rallied to demand that the Mosque's historical site status be revoked (thereby restoring it as a religious place of worship subject to repair and maintenance by the community) and to remove the Chinese shrine was the ground that it was improperly located.

The government responded by issuing warrants against organizers charging them with lese-majesté, attacking officers of the law, instigations to mob. According to Chaiwat, this incident reflects the Malay Muslims' politics of identity negotiation with the state as well as a contention for cultural space with other

ethnic groups. The state seems to resolve such cultural politics not by negotiations and discussions but by force.

The second Krue Ze incident in April 2004 resulted in 32 Malay Muslims killed and a government inquiry admitted that disproportionate force was used. Yet, no police or military officer has been court-martialed or disciplined.

(ix) Charles Keyes, an anthropologist from the University of Washington, at a conference “The Impact of Globalization, Regionalism and Nationalism on Minority Rights in Southeast Asia” held in Chiangmai on 14 November 2004, commented that the Malay Muslims’ efforts to articulate their cultural needs and grievances have failed, been prevented and resisted and so ethnic conflict is the outcome (Bangkok Post 15 November 2004). His opinion is in line with Barton’s theory on unmet human needs that lead to violent confrontation.

In conclusion, “The Nation” s proposition that “cultural alienation” is one of the root causes of the violence is credible.

6.6 Historical Anger

“The Nation” has propounded that historical anger over the annexation of Patani is one of the biggest factor fanning violence in the south. A careful reading of the newspaper (set out in Appendix VIII) revealed that “The Nation” has established a positive relationship between “History” and the “Violent Conflict”. Historical anger led to the negative result of violence and confrontation with the state.

Based on textual analysis of the linguistics used, “The Nation” stated explicitly the strong co-relationship between “Historical anger” and “Violent Conflict”:-

- (i) The militants are inspired by lingering anger over Patani’s annexation;
- (ii) The single biggest factor in the violence was the differences in ethnicity, religious beliefs, cultural and historical background;
- (iii) The separatists have latched onto the history of the South;
- (iv) We must recognize the significance of the baggage of history on the violence.

A definitive relationship can be established between “State Policy” and “Historical Anger”. Deputy PM Chaturon Chaisang (who has previous experience in the South) pointed out that the militants were inspired by lingering anger over the annexation of the Sultanate of Patan and that the anger was increased by authorities’ raids, unlawful treatment and kidnappings. He proposed a soft approach plan to the government, including a special administrative body which will eventually give the Malay Muslims the freedom to run their lives according to their faith and culture (The Nation 5 November 2004).

In an opinion article dated 9 November 2004, “The Nation” also outlined the historical “baggage” of the South as well as the historical discriminatory

conditions that had prevailed since Patani's annexation. The word "baggage" signified misgivings that have to be undone and a burden that has to be unloaded.

To determine whether "The Nation"s proposition is credible, a review of past research was conducted. Several researches and my observations revealed that historical state policies could be the pre-conditions to the violent conflict and these are :-

(i) Surin (1985, p 269) wrote that "through a series of historical 'accidents', the Malay Muslims have been living under the jurisdiction of a government that can hardly claim their loyalty". Political and socio-economic state policies have forced the Malay Muslims to adapt their tactics and orientation in pursuit of their goal of autonomy (note : not separation).

(ii) Che Man (1990, p 62 - 64) noted that there was considerable resistance to state assimilation efforts since the annexation. These efforts generated deep resentment as they were made to be perceived as "second-class citizens" in their own land. Particularly offensive were state efforts to interfere with their Islamic education system (Patani was a great Islamic centre for learning in the 16th century) but Malay Muslim willingness to participate in the national political arena was demonstrated since the general elections of 1937. This showed that the "separatist" movement did not really have mass support then.

(iii) Uthai (1987) noted that Indonesian and Malaysian nationalist movements fanned Malay Muslims' desire to have greater autonomy in their provinces – more government officials to be appointed from the local communities; Malay to be given official status; Shariah law to be enforced; formation of a Muslim board to direct all Islamic affairs. However, the state failed to respond adequately to their requests; kidnapped prominent Muslim leaders and ethnic nationalism has since turned violent from 1948. The state's 1960's land resettlement policy whereby north-eastern Thais were settled in the South, was viewed by the Malay Muslims as 'territorial invasion', similar to the 1902 annexation of Patani.

(iv) "The Nation"'s opinion report of 9 November 2004 has rightly pointed out that many Thai are unaware of the historical baggage of the South. This is really not surprising as the state has maintained a strict official silence on this. The historical baggage is not mentioned in history books, the Gallery of Thai history in the Bangkok National Museum, guidebooks or brochures.

In conclusion, unresolved historical anger over the annexation of Patani, the governance of the provinces since the annexation, the repetitive forceful methods of suppressing the cultural identities of the local communities contributed to the violence. The state has failed repeatedly to respond positively and peacefully to the local communities' demand for "space".

6.7 Economic Underdevelopment

“Economics” is one of the reasons proposed for the violence. The articles selected for careful reading are set out in Appendix IX. My review showed that the relationship between “Economic underdevelopment” and “Violent conflict” is mildly positive. Economic underdevelopment contributes to the confrontation but “money” per will not solve the unrest (The Nation 24 November 2004).

The strength of the relationship between “Economic underdevelopment” and “Violent conflict”, unlike the other themes, is the weakest and this is evident by:-

(i) the dearth of reporting on this theme by “The Nation”. Specifically, “The Nation” published a daily report on 24 November 2004 with the title “Money won’t end unrest : critics”. This is really why these promises about money and economics are in vain.

(ii) Privy Councilor, Surayud, commented that “money” is not a major factor for the violence (The Nation 2 November 2004).

(iii) only the Prime Minister seemed to be stressing this theme when he referred to “unemployed youths” and his economic development plans for the South. The other notable social critics and academicians have not lent their voices on this (based on textual analysis of my sampling universe).

(iv) The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Narathiwat Islamic Council, Abdulrahamn Abdulsamat and Nimu Makjae, had on 3 reported occasions (The Nation 28 October, 21 November, 24 November 2004) said that lack of trust, mistrust and not money or monetary incentives is a root cause. Wan Kadir Che Man, the exiled leader of Bersatu, was reported by “The Nation” on 9 December 2004 as having said that the violent conflict was caused by deep misunderstanding between government officials and Malay Muslims.

In view of the above findings, my research concludes that economic underdevelopment is not a root cause of the violent conflict.

This section concludes research findings on local conditions that cause the violent conflict. The next chapter will deal with trans-boundary issues that have a significant bearing on the violence.