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# **On the Geopolitical Economy of Violence in Southeast Asia**

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## **On the Geopolitical Economy of Violence in Southeast Asia**

Understanding the meaning and role of violence in society is an important task. Violence goes to the heart of conflict resolution and peace building work, and draws attention to conflict in discourses and narratives on democratisation and globalisation. This is a broad study on the geopolitical economy of violence in Southeast Asia. It links violence with power relations and the organisation of the nation state, and the regional and world order. Violence is also constructed in various forms of disobedience and resistance to power and global apartheid. Violence is an expression of social maladjustment to capitalism and the concentration of power. Positive peace requires social, political and economic equality within nation states and the promotion of positive regionalism and globalism.

### **On violence**

The World Health Organization defines violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (WHO 2002:4). Violence implies cruelty which Shklar writes about as the “deliberate infliction of physical, and secondarily, emotional pain, upon a weaker person or group by stronger ones in order to achieve some end, tangible or intangible, of the latter” (Shklar 1998:11). Psychological violence is one of the more sadistic forms of violence and a 2010 French law makes psychological violence an offence (Davies 2010). What links victimizers to their victims and vice-versa is the element of fear. Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of Myanmar’s opposition to the military regime, talks about a climate of fear “within a system which denies the existence of basic human rights, fear tends to be the order of the day. Fear of imprisonment, torture or death; fear of losing friends, family or property; and fear of isolation or failure” (Aung 1991:16). Galtung, a leader in peace studies, argues that violence should be understood “as avoidable insults to basic human needs, and more generally to *life*, lowering the real level of needs satisfaction below what is potentially possible” (Galtung 1996:197).

### **Direct and structural violence**

An understanding of violence needs to distinguish between several aspects of violence. Direct violence is one important category and refers to violence which is purposefully administered

and meant to cause damage to mind and body or the taking of a life. Galtung divides direct violence into “verbal and physical, and violence harming the body, mind or spirit. All combinations leave behind traumas that may carry violence over time” (Galtung 1996:31). Bourgois’ valuable work on direct violence is contextualised as political violence which he defines as “targeted physical violence and terror administered by official authorities and those opposing it, such as military repression, police torture and armed resistance” (Bourgois 2001:8).

Another major category is structural violence, which John Burton describes ‘as damaging deprivations caused by the nature of social institutions and policies. As such it is, by definition, an avoidable, perhaps a deliberate violence against the person or community’ (Burton 1997:32). Peace activist Brand-Jacobsen defines it as the violence “built into the very social, political and economic systems that govern societies, states and the world. It is the different allocation of goods, resources, opportunities, between different groups, classes, genders, nationalities, etc., because of the structure governing their relationship” (Brand-Jacobsen 2002:17). Galtung calls structural violence: “the indirect violence built into repressive social orders creating enormous differences between potential and actual self-realisation ... The general formula behind structural violence is inequality, above all in the distribution of power” (Galtung 1975:173,175).

Structural violence is built in the construction and existence of the nation-state, Tilly’s study of the state is a useful introduction to the symbiotic relationship that exists between the state and the instruments of violence on which it depends to function. Tilly reminds us in the context of European history that war making and state making “qualify as our largest example of organised crime” (Tilly 1985:169). Violence continues to play a major role in the contemporary state’s core activities of war making, state making by marginalising or eliminating claimants to its territory, of providing protection for its citizens, and extracting from society and the world at large the necessary means to carry out the first three activities. Political violence comes into play when citizens resist state repression and demand their social, economic, political and civil rights. Violence has been a key feature in the formation of all existing nation-states and in national movements for new ones. As the state becomes more technologically developed, the process of state making becomes more sophisticated. Social disciplining and control, for example, focuses less on physical punishment and more on mind and genetic control. Scheper-Hughes makes the point that methods of extracting

consent evolve and become more refined, “developed and implemented by modern technicians of the social consensus, including labour and management specialists, urban planners, entertainment and media technicians, educators and, of course, doctors, counsellors, psychiatrists, and social workers” (Scheper-Hughes 1997:471).

Structural violence is embedded in capitalism. Capitalism transforms society to markets and social relations to market relations, creating new hierarchies and economic classes. A major feature of a capitalist society is the construction of inequalities in the distribution of wealth and income and the capture of the state by economic and political elites. Economic development is built on mass consumption of goods and services largely dictated by corporations and their advertising agencies. Many products and services and their associated lifestyles are detrimental to physical and mental health. Economic development destroys the environment and reduces the sustainability of the ecosystem to provide for the needs of the population. The air, waterways and soil are increasingly contaminated in ways detrimental to human health. Economic growth is uprooting and impoverishing rural population and forcing many people to move to megacities and live in slums which offer little prospects for a better life.

Violence is structured in the economic, cultural, and political systems of the nation-state and the world order. At the core of any major structure is power. Power is about control, domination, and exploitation, and is constructed as relations of force because power involves coercion and repression (Heilbroner 1986; Foucault 2004). Unequal access “to resources, to political power, to education, to health care, or to legal standing, are forms of structural violence” (Winter & Leighton 2001). Burton considers structural violence as “damaging deprivations caused by the nature of social institutions and policies ... and avoidable, perhaps a deliberate violence against the person or community” (Burton 1997:32). Capitalism creates inequality, poverty, unemployment, and alienation. At its roots, writes Miliband, “lie the twin and related plagues of capitalism: the fact that it is inherently and inescapably a system of domination and exploitation; and the fact that it is unable to make rational and humane use of the immense productive resources it has itself brought into being” (Miliband 1991:209).

The power of the state is fundamental to capitalism and the embedding of society in market relations. Foucault’s analysis of the construction of the modern European nation-state, is the history of the training and subjugation of the population to various disciplines and the

eventual imposition of a “tight grid of disciplinary coercions that actually guarantees the cohesion of the social body” (Foucault 2004:37). For Foucault, relations of domination and exploitation in capitalism and society are only possible because “of the subjugations, training, and surveillance that have already been produced and administered by disciplines ... all these power relations do not, therefore, emanate from a single source; it is the overall effect of a tangle of power relations that allows one class or group to dominate another” (*ibid*:277). Power, Foucault reminds us, “is essentially that which represses”, and political power “is perpetually to use a sort of silent war to reinscribe that relationship of force” (*ibid*:16). Where there is power, and therefore repression, there is always resistance. Relations of force cause suffering, and where there is suffering there is disobedience and the desire and demand for change. Power and resistance confront each other everywhere, and the struggle is everywhere.

Violence is built in the structure of the world system. The global order is a system of unequal economic and political power relations dominated by powerful and rich countries. Wallerstein’s world-system is the analysis of a capitalist world-economy dominated by a triad of the US, the EU, and Japan (Wallerstein 2003, 2004). The global order is a system of unequal power relations dominated by the US military. Chomsky has written extensively on the role of the US’ quest for global hegemony (Chomsky 2003, 2008). US hegemony and the dominating role of the triad are being challenged by forces in Asia and elsewhere in the world, and the ongoing struggle being waged on many fronts is threatening the survival of the human species and the planet’s ecosystem (GN 2008; Lovelock 2006; Stern 2006).

At the core of the world-system is nationalism. Nationalism is not only a power relationship to maintain social cohesion, but also an instrument of aggression against others, within the nation-state as well as externally against other people. The essence of nationalism is racism. Foucault talks of racism as “primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power’s control: the break between what must live and what must die” (Foucault 2004:254). Racism legitimises the state’s killing function, racism “is the precondition that makes killing acceptable” (2004: 256). The source of violence in the global order is the concentration of power in the nation-state because power corrupts and expands. Chomsky writes, “the way that power is concentrated *inside* the particular societies; that’s the source of extreme violence in the world” (Mitchell & Schoeffel 2002:315).

## **Everyday violence**

Violence is found in everyday life, in the relations between individuals and groups as they interact in their daily activities and localities. Every day violence is about the struggle for power among individuals, the little “wars” being waged everywhere in homes, schools, places of work, and increasingly on roads. According to the World Health Organization “the number of people killed in road traffic crashes each year is estimated at almost 1.2 million, while the number of injured could be as high as 50 million” (WHO 2004:3). Scheper-Hughes calls this form of warfare “invisible genocides and holocausts” and says that such “right before your eyes ... gratuitous and useless social suffering ... encompass the implicit, legitimate, organised, and routinised violence of particular social-political state formations” (Scheper-Hughes 1996: 889 and 1997:471). Her work on everyday violence explores a number of localities including Brazil and South Africa’s form of invisible genocide “practiced against a class of poor and semi-autonomous youths existing on the margins of two transitional societies” (Scheper-Hughes 1996:892). In Northeast Brazil she laments about “the normalisation and institutionalised social indifference to staggering infant and child mortality in shantytown favelas” (1996: 890). Her work raises important questions about the nature of terrorism and the identity of terrorists.

Bourdieu uses the concept of symbolic violence to explain violence within stigmatised and other dominated groups. Symbolic violence is “the internalised humiliations and legitimations of inequality and hierarchy ranging from sexism and racism to intimate expressions of class power. It is exercised through cognition and misrecognition, knowledge and sentiments, with the unwitting consent of the dominated” (Bourdieu 1997, 2001; cited in Bourgois 2001:8). Stigmatised populations, for example, turn violence perpetuated against them inwards against their own. Germaine Greer and Marcia Langton explore the issue in the context of violence within Aboriginal society in Australia (Greer 2008; Langton 2008). Bourdieu uses the concept of inert violence to decipher everyday violence as structural violence and writes that “the violence exerted everyday in families, factories, workshops, banks, offices, police stations, prisons, even hospitals and schools ... is, in the final analysis, the product of the “inert violence” of economic structures and social mechanisms relayed by the active violence of people” (Bourdieu 1997:233; 1998).

Everyday violence is implied in globalisation's neoliberal free market policies. US President Barack Obama blamed Wall Street's predatory practices on society for the 2008 US financial meltdown and global financial crisis and said that "some on Wall Street forgot that behind every dollar traded or leveraged, there is a family looking to buy a house, pay for an education, open a business or save for retirement" (BBC 2010). Predatory capitalism has been responsible for loss of employment and security, cut backs in public education and health, which in turn metastasize to cause mental illness, suicide, drug addiction, domestic violence, predatory youth, gang warfare, road rage and other forms of everyday violence. Tadjoeeddin and Murshed exemplify the link between the 1997 Asian financial crisis contraction of the national economy and the doubling of the poverty rate with "routine" violence of popular justice and intergroup/neighbourhood brawls in a number of districts on the island of Java (Tadjoeeddin & Murshed 2007).

Scheper-Hughes argues that "misrecognised everyday violence is what makes mass violence and genocide possible" (Scheper-Hughes 2001:5). A pre-disposition for mass violence is constructed in a process of social and personal crisis and upheaval which mobilises a critical mass of people to be sufficiently hateful to want to kill others, and for many others to be apathetic and inert to an evolving pattern of violence taking place around them. Scheper-Hughes suggested "a genocidal continuum comprised of a multitude of "small wars and invisible genocides" conducted in the normative spaces of public schools, clinics, emergency rooms, hospital wards, nursing homes, court rooms, prisons, detention centers, and public morgues" (2001:7). The built-in violence in a country's everyday life, is also what makes possible the mass killing of "others" in a war against another country.

### **Nation-building as organised violence**

The construction of Southeast Asia's nation states has been a violent process marked by the invasion and occupation of the region by Western powers, to more recent development of national movements for liberation and wars against colonial powers, and civil wars to capture control of the state. The most brutal episode was the Vietnam war against France and the US which ended with the defeat of the US with the occupation of Saigon in 1975. By Vietnamese estimate, during the American period of the war, "3 million civilians were killed outright, 300,000 people were missing, 4.4 million wounded, and 2 million were harmed by toxic

chemicals,” and “the land was ravaged by bombs, Rome Plows, and chemical weapons” (Herman 2010:10).

Decolonisation and nation-building is an on-going process. Territorial and maritime boundaries are contested in a number of areas by various states as with the Philippines claim to Malaysia’s state of Sabah. The construction of the nation state is an unfinished business demonstrated by the excision of East Timor from Indonesia in a coup planned by Australia’s Howard Government following the resignation of Indonesia’s ruler Suharto in 1998. Timor Leste became Southeast Asia’s newest sovereign state in 2002 after a long and violent struggle and the loss of many of its people. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century a number of liberation movements were demanding regime change or full independence in Southern Thailand and the Philippines, West Papua and the Moluccas in Indonesia, and in Myanmar. Behind secessionist demands are narratives of state violence and discrimination, unequal power relations, and the failure of ruling elites to manage the economy for the betterment of all citizens.

Nation-building is a form of racism because it involves the construction of a national identity built on the hatred of others. Erikson describes the process of creating more inclusive identity as a form of pseudo-speciation, because it sets up a bonding process which reinforces a sense of solidarity and pride for the group by externalising aggression towards others outside the group (Erikson 1965). The process is well illustrated with the case of Myanmar, where the Burman controlled government pursues a policy of forced assimilation of minorities. Continued warfare against them has resulted in much human suffering and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. The Norwegian Refugee Council reports that Myanmar’s war against minorities “has affected the eastern border areas in particular, and especially the Karen, Karenni, Shan and Mon ethnic groups. In western Burma, the Muslim Rohingya people and other minority groups along the Bangladesh and India borders have also suffered from the military campaign” (IDP 2004). A national identity is built on politically biased interpretation of history and generates hatred for other people. Nationalism and patriotism are violent psychological mechanisms meant to shame and humiliate others. The role of these powerful drives shows the lack of trust and tensions that exist among countries of Southeast Asia and demonstrated in the recent clash between Cambodia and Thailand over the ownership of the Preah Vihear temple, and the continuing tensions between Singapore with both Malaysia and Indonesia.

Nation-building also creates hatred within the country against those who do not fit the official profile. In the case of Malaysia, the situation favors the “genuine” Malaysian who is essentially a Malay, a person who is Muslim and speaks Malay. Indians and Chinese are tolerated but disliked by Malays who control the institutions of state including the military. It is therefore not surprising that a recent survey of the country’s race relations uncovered widespread racism and deeply entrenched negative stereotyping. Muzaffar explained the results as reflecting a situation where “ethnic boundaries are real in our society and almost every sphere of public life is linked to ethnicity in one way or another” (Kuppusamy 2006).

### **State violence**

Structural violence is directly linked to the corruption of the ruling elite. A major aspect of political corruption is the enrichment of the ruling elite by abstracting resources from the commonwealth. The Suharto and Marcos families, and their cronies, typify predatory practices for personal enrichment by using their control of the state to accumulate multibillion dollar fortunes. Typical were direct payments for business licenses and monopolies, land theft, bribes on state’s procurement contracts, and foreign investments and loans administered by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Many practices were legal as in the case of Ferdinand Marcos who according to Carbonell-Catilo rewrote sections of the Philippines constitution to “legalise his looting of the nation’s wealth” (cited in Johnston 2001:18; Carbonell-Catilo 1985). State corruption is responsible for the destruction of the environment and the pollution of the waterways. Land clearance and the rapid rate of deforestation in Southeast Asia is directly linked to large bribes paid out to individuals and political parties in power.

Political corruption also involves the use of the country’s resources by the ruling elite to maintain power and control the state. This is clearly the situation of a one-party state such as Singapore, or a totalitarian regime such as Brunei, which draws directly on the resources of the commonwealth to stay in power and use the instruments of repression against their opponents. Both forms of political corruption involve direct and indirect violence. Direct in the form of the repression of opposition, including the detention and use of torture; indirect in the form of the mismanagement of the economy resulting in forms of genocide exemplified by the large number of children dying of easily treatable diseases, or ethnic violence because of growing economic and political inequality.

Political corruption highlights the state's predatory potential. In many instances, state extraction for private gains has been a key feature in Southeast Asia's recent history. When the state is captured by agents of a predatory class, the role of the state is not to promote the wellbeing of its citizens but to deliver profitable opportunities for its clients. It happened under Marcos and Suharto, when the regime pilfered the country's resources to benefit the few. The 1997 Asian financial crisis further exposed the criminal activities of the ruling elite when it coordinated the transfer of massive private sector debt to citizens. The situation in Indonesia at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century suggests that corruption continues to fuel the indignation of people. The government's \$760 million rescue of Bank Century in 2010 whose major shareholders are among the richest families in the country has been widely interpreted as a sign that political corruption is alive and well in Indonesia. Money politics in the recent presidential election has implicated bank shareholders and President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in the scandal (Allard 2009b).

Former diplomat Walther Marschall analysis of the Cambodian tragedy and the suffering of the Khmer people puts the blame on King Sihanouk's corrupt regime of a small feudal and business elite interested only in amassing personal wealth. A military coup engineered by the US put general Lol Nol in power; what happened, Marschall writes, was "an insignificant coup within the framework of a feudal state by which one group ousted another in order to secure the financial benefits of power too long monopolised by the former" (Lenart 1976:41). The military coup destroyed other political options for progressive change and promoted the rise of the Khmer Rouge to power. Political power in contemporary Cambodia controlled by Hun Sen's Cambodia People's Party (CPP) is symptomatic of a protection racket delivering the country's land and other natural resources to a privileged class. A recent report by Global Witness states that "Cambodia's political elite, including several relatives and associates of the prime minister are "ransacking" the country's natural resources for their own gain" (AJ 2007). Cases such as these demonstrate the similarity between a predator state and a criminal organisation and show how thin the line is between governance and a criminal activity.

The nature of political corruption changes with time and discourse. It is now more customary to talk about democracy and democratisation. Election is increasingly used as a benchmark to legitimise a political regime in global governing circles. Democratisation further suggests the metamorphosis of political corruption and its repackaging to make it more acceptable by

society. Democratic governance in Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia, for example, hides more sophisticated forms of corruption. Heryanto and Hadiz argue that regime change has led to the “reconfiguration of politics in which dispersed, predatory, and frequently antidemocratic forces have appropriated the institutions and discourses of democracy” (Heryanti & Hadiz 2005:266). Corruption remains entrenched but is reconfigured to the new democratic structure put in place. Within it, old and new political forces find ways to accumulate more wealth. Electoral funding by the rich and corporate sector buys elections and politicians. Interests of the ruling political and economic elite gain control of the political agenda and in turn legislate favoured business interests and the accumulation of private wealth. In Southeast Asia, the new regimes are “predominantly run by money politics and political violence ... old interests and such un-civil forces as political gangsters may reinvent themselves and appropriate the democratisation process, thereby, exercising predatory power through the institutions of democratic governance” (2005:267).

In the recent history of Southeast Asia, the state has been a major player in inter-ethnic violence. A recent case is that of Indonesia during the period of regime change triggered by the 1997 Asian financial crisis when ethnic violence broke out in a number of localities. A major theatre of conflict between Christians and Muslims was in the Maluku islands. According to Aditjondro, this “civil war” was ignited in 1998 by gangs paid by the Suharto family and its entrepreneurs and military cronies who had sizeable investment in the Maluku Islands—in 1990, Prajogo Pangestu, a wealthy Suharto crony who had sizeable investment in the Malukus, transferred some US\$225 million to Suharto’s foundation bank account in the Netherlands. Aditjondro concludes that the conflict in Maluku was directly connected to the political struggle in Jakarta and manipulated by those who stood against the coming of a new political regime which threatened the power and wealth that had been accumulated by the ruling elite under Suharto’s rule.

The US “war on terror” encouraged Southeast Asian governments to use violent means to repress domestic dissent. Former president Bush declaration of “war on terror” in 2001, followed by the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, emboldened Southeast Asian regimes to use extreme measure against their dissidents. Witness the waves of extra-judicial killings in Thailand and the Philippines in recent years, the arrest and torture of “terrorists” in Cambodia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Myanmar, and the increasing use of violence against secessionist movements in the region. The US “war on terror” brought the US back in

Southeast Asia's politics, manning and funding government's counter-terrorism initiatives and running covert operations with Australia, its key ally in Southeast Asia. US hegemony is a major setback in the advances of civil and political rights in the region. Saunders writes that all across Southeast Asia "fragile democratic movements are being menaced by armies and governments emboldened by the war on terrorism. In Thailand, in Malaysia and in the Philippines, the threat of Islamic terrorism is real—but so is the threat created by the war on terror" (Saunders 2003). Charoonpatarapong of Focus on the Global South writes that the "war against terror has become a legitimate tool for many governments to take up legal and military measure in crushing Islamic movements in its own, or even in other countries" (Charoonpataropong 2003).

### **Violence against the state**

In Southeast Asia as elsewhere in the world, the capture and control of the state is what national politics is mainly about. This political struggle is an on-going form of civil war waged by progressive and reactionary forces in different localities and contexts. Since the end of World War II, Southeast Asia has been marked by some particularly gruesome episodes of human cruelty. One was the military coup that deposed Indonesia's president Sukarno and killed an estimated 500,000 people (Cribb 2001). The pogrom of members and sympathisers of the country's communist party was carried out by the military, and Muslim and Christian groups (Geertz 1995; Friend 2003). But it was largely a Hindu affair in Bali where it is estimated that some 80,000 Balinese were killed between 1965 and 1966, or roughly 5 percent of the island's population at the time (Robinson 1995). Cambodia also experienced a traumatic period from the late 1960s onwards until the protagonists signed the 1991 Paris accord to bring peace to the country. The death toll during Pol Pot's Khmer rouge regime between 1975 and 1979 is estimated at between 1.5 and 1.7 million (Sharp 2005). The numbers are considerably higher adding the killings between 1970 and 1975 and between 1980 and 1991, perhaps in excess of a million casualties.

Southeast Asia "civil war" continues. In Thailand, the struggle for democracy has been punctuated by military coups. The latest in 2006 overthrew prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra and appointed Abhisit Vejjajiva as prime minister triggering another major political crisis which then unfolded during 2010 in a class war in Bangkok between red-shirted, mostly rural poor and working class protesters, and yellow-shirted and army-and palace-backed urban middle class defenders of the oligarchic regime. The gap between rich

and poor has been growing in the country, and the dispossessed are increasingly vocal in their demand for social justice. Many members of the “red army” mass rallies represent the poor from the north-east of the country known as Isaan, home to some 40 percent of the country’s 67 million people, whose income is a third of that in Bangkok. They have been joined by the urban working poor in a bid to return Thaksin Shinawatra to power. In Indonesia, out of power, former political heavyweights continue to wage war on the state. Forces aligned with the former Suharto order are engaged in acts of violence against the new order. Former general, President Yudhoyono has implicated his rivals for the July 2009 hotel bombing in Jakarta. He said that “the elites were trying to undermine his election win ... and take over the KPU (election commission)”, in a plan to turn Indonesia into another Iran (Allard 2009a). He named former special commander Prabowo Subianto as one of the conspirator in the plot to take power from him.

Seditious and rebellious action against the state is a common occurrence and often a “blowback” from state violence—the term “blowback” was first invented by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) for the “unintended consequences of policies that were kept secret from the American people” (Johnson 2000:9). There has been a spate of bombings in Indonesia in recent years, targeting hotels, bars and other public spaces. The culprits are religious fanatics who want revenge and punish the state for the violence committed against Muslims throughout the world. The situation in Indonesia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia illustrates the impact of globalisation in linking the national state with global power politics. In other words, many national conflicts have become globalised, while the hegemonic global struggle has become nationalised as well as localised. This is the real meaning of the global village in the new world order. Bombings in Indonesia in recent years are an integral part of a wider frame of the war in Afghanistan, Iraq, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Yemen, Somalia and elsewhere in the world. Blowbacks are a reminder that today’s violence has a long and often forgotten history. Religious fanatics bombing public places in Indonesia are members of organisations originally funded and armed by the West to fight communism. As religious mercenaries for the West they played a major role in the defeat of the Soviet Union by bringing an end to the Russian occupation of Afghanistan in 1989.

Organised crime is a form of violence against the state because criminals challenge and disobey the state’s authority and undermine its legitimacy. Organised extortion is a major feature of Southeast Asian society and a product of the socio-political order of the nation

state. The contradictions of capitalist development encourages greed and the accumulation of wealth and promotes many business opportunities to rot and defraud society, and exploit human beings. As outlaws, criminals are usually hunted by the state, arrested and punished. Paradoxically civil society often depends on criminals to fund its political parties and politicians, and to hide the state's reliance on illegal use of force to maintain order and legitimacy. In East Timor, the formation of gangs is a direct consequence of a political system that denies educational and work opportunities to young people. Politicians rely on gang violence to maintain power, enforce the law, and resolve disputes, particularly over land ownership (ABC 2008; Callinan 2010). Criminal organisations have been used by the state to kill political dissidents. Both Indonesia's Suharto and Thailand's Thaksin Shinawatra used hired killers to carry out extra-judicial killings during their terms in office. McCoy writes that "in the Philippines, the Arroyo administration, unable to suppress the communist and Islamic insurgencies, unleashed a clandestine military operation to assassinate over seven hundred social activists merely suspected of subversion" (McCoy 2009:535). Another 57, including many journalists, were slaughtered in December 2009 on their way to a political rally by a powerful Mindanao warlord armed and funded by the Arroyo government (Pollard 2009).

A major pillar of organised crime is the market for illicit drugs. The history of Southeast Asia's Golden Triangle rise as a global source of opium is directly linked to the expanding demand for heroin in the United States. The market for drugs expanded dramatically during the Indochina War when the US military and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) became big drug traffickers to raise funds for CIA's global covert operations to destabilise political regimes and arm terrorist groups during the Cold War and its aftermath (McCoy 1972). The military and police in Thailand, the Philippines, Myanmar and other countries have been involved in large scale drug trafficking for many years. Profit from rackets such as drug trafficking often subsidises political parties and politicians. Politicians in the region have made fortunes by offering protection to drug cartels, smugglers, and other rackets throughout the region. The case of the Philippines exemplifies the nexus between the political class and crime. Organised crime operates the illicit drug and gambling business under police protection. The police extortion racket in turn provides funds for elections. The ruling political elite at various levels of government is funded by an extortion racket controlled by the state's security agencies (McCoy 2009). Political rackets in the Philippines and elsewhere

in the region, only survive and prosper because of the military and other forms of support from the United States.

### **Construction of inequality**

As elsewhere in the world, urbanisation in Southeast Asia has led to the creation of large slums. Slum dwellers according to 2003 United Nations report account for 28 percent of the region's urban residents (UN 2003). The concentration of poor people on such a scale is one of the most obvious failures of state-led capitalist development in the context of a world order dominated by the West (Davis 2006). Urban slums are symptomatic of a system that discriminate, punishes, and excludes a large percentage of its citizens. The new urban poor have been marginalised by the global economic order and segregated within the expanding urban mosaic of Southeast Asia. Slums are crucibles of everyday violence, organised crime, and movements which call for the overthrow of the state and ruling elites.

Construction of Southeast Asia's slums is largely due to changes in the welfare of rural population and their migration to cities. Some 15 percent of Ho Chi Minh's population lived in slums at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Marr 2005:305). Formation of slums is invariably linked to state-sponsored policy of forced displacement and relocation as part of a land grab by powerful political-economic cartels. In Rangoon and Mandalay some 16 percent of the population were relocated in preparation for the "Visit Myanmar Year 1996" (Skidmore 2002). Similar operations have taken place in Kuala Lumpur, Djakarta and other cities over the years as part of massive and corrupt "landgrabs by politicians and developers" (ACHR 2003). Slums in some major cities such as Manila and Jakarta are prone to frequent flooding because funds for flood prevention project, often funded by international financial organisations, have been diverted by politicians greedy for power and wealth. Land grab by the rich is a common practice throughout the region. According to Erhard Berner, a handful of families own nearly half of Manila (Berner 1997:21). Slum life is often associated with the deportation of refugees and foreign workers, which is a common occurrence in the region. Malaysia has been involved in the deportation of refugees from Myanmar and Indonesia. Singapore has sent ship loads of foreign workers back to their country of origin. Thailand has deported Hmong and other minority refugees back to Laos. Mass deportation by government usually takes place at time of economic downturn, particularly when the construction industry is stagnating.

Forced eviction is a crime against humanity and a common occurrence in the region. Many residents in Jakarta are subject to eviction by government-backed developers driven by quick profit in a rising land market. Many poor people have been evicted by the police and gangs of thugs and “many thousands more of Jakarta’s poor live in fear that one day the security forces and bulldozers will come to their communities” (HRW 2006:3). New order President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono regulations on land acquisition are said to be “more brutal than laws enacted by Soeharto” (2006:39). In Malaysia, Tamils are losing their land and jobs and families are moved out as plantations give way to residential housing mainly for ethnic Malays (SBS 2008). In Cambodia, a corrupt government is in the process of selling the country to the rich to fund its party machine and make fortunes for the ruling elite. Foreign investors can buy land and real estate outright “and the super-rich, predominantly British, French and Swiss speculators, fuelled by a high-risk machismo” are big operators in the selling of Cambodia (Levy & Scott-Clark 2008). The country’s forests, “lakes , beaches and reefs—and the lives of the thousands of residents” are now controlled by foreign speculators, and in 2008, “more than 150,000 people were threatened with evictions. Forty-five percent of the country’s land mass has been sold off” (2008). Land grab in rural Cambodia by the ruling elite is forcing many poor families to migrate to urban areas. Urban land grab “by developers seeking to make vast profit is rampant in Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville where companies like Kith Meng’s Royal Group use the police and armed groups to evict residents occupying land transferred to the group by the regime” (Paul 2010:44). Phnom Penh’s urban poor are further exploited by paying more for their water than their richer neighbours who have access to piped water (cited in Davis 2006:145).

### **Everyday violence**

Many insights into everyday violence are provided by statistical material on the region. The Asian Development Bank estimates that “some 75,000 persons were killed and more than 4.5 million were injured in road crashes in Southeast Asian countries during 2003 ... with many victims severely disabled for the rest of their lives” (ADB 2004). In the Philippines, where 38 percent of the population lives below the poverty line of less than US\$228 per year, “intentional injuries account for 48 percent of all injury deaths and motor vehicles crashes for 15 percent. The proportion of all deaths attributable to intentional injuries, such as self-inflicted, assaults, stab wounds, homicides, injuries due to firearms, suicides, or other violence, has increased 925 percent and that of vehicle crashes by 600 percent from 1960 to 1995”. The writer further notes that “the Philippines has a problem

with injuries because of the epidemic of intentional injury that has gone unabated, unrecognised and potentially underdocumented” (Consunji & Hyder 2004: 1111,1116). Incidence of rape against women and girls is increasing in Cambodia. According to a recent study by the government, “around a quarter of the female population faces domestic violence”, which the government links to increases in the use of alcohol and other drugs by men (BBC 2008). Prisons are also places of violence, in Thailand, for example, overcrowded jails housed more than 166,000 in 2008 (Walmsley 2009). According to Richard Barrow, many are in jail as unsentenced offenders, and “60 percent of the prison population today are there due to narcotic offences” (Barrow 2008).

Road transport affects the quality of the air and creates health problems for the urban population. Industrial development also takes its toll. An example is the major health problem linked to Thailand’s Map Ta Phut, one of the world’s biggest petro-chemical hubs. Air quality has deteriorated in the region affecting the health of the local inhabitants. Deterioration of water course ecology is a widespread phenomenon on mainland Southeast Asia. This is largely caused by deforestation of high grounds which intensifies water flows downstream and bank erosion which in turn increases flooding of low grounds and delta areas where population is concentrated in megacities. There are many other aspects of the unintended consequences of unbridled exploitation of natural resources. A telling case is that of the mudflow which by mid-2007 had submerged some 700 hectares around the town of Sidoarjo in East Java. The catastrophe was the consequence of a drilling project by an Indonesian company controlled by Indonesia’s minister for People’s Welfare, Aburizal Bakrie. The gas exploration well blew up releasing an unending flow of mud forcing many thousands of villagers from their homes (Forbes 2007).

There is a high level of human trafficking in Southeast Asia. Human trafficking involves the exploitation of human beings and includes “the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs” (UN 2000:2). Human trafficking is the modern designation of the oldest human activity: enslavement. One aspect is the trafficking of thousands of domestic workers from Indonesia to Malaysia. Domestic workers are confined and “work long working days with unreasonable duties and without break, non-payment of wages, physical and psychological abuse, sexual abuse and poor living conditions. Indonesian domestic workers have often already entered the trafficking process before they have left

Indonesia. Many domestic workers have their first experience of abuse in labour recruitment camps, where they can be held in confinement and incur large debts for accommodation and food” (Noble in Paul 2009).

A study on trafficking of Vietnamese citizens shows the flow “mainly from the Northern provinces to China and from the Southern provinces to Cambodia. Vietnamese women are trafficked to China for marriage, domestic work and forced labour while young boys are trafficked for adoption” (Knepper in Paul 2009). Trafficking to Cambodia is “sexual exploitation of women, and young girls 15 to 17 years old. Although there is no official account of it, Vietnam has a significant internal trafficking problem, with women and children from rural areas trafficked to urban centres for commercial sexual exploitation and domestic labour of exploitation” (2009). A recent study states that:

An increasingly open market, and government policy to attract foreign investment and to encourage Vietnamese workers’ migration, is closely linked to the rise of labour-based trafficking within Vietnam but also to regional economic poles such as Thailand and South Korea. The law prohibits forced and compulsory labour, including by children; however, such practices occur (Knepper in Paul 2009).

Human trafficking also involves the forced displacement of people from their abode. A case in point is that of Myanmar’s Rohingya minority having to flee their country to Thailand in 2009 where they were mistreated by the military. In one instance, the military “set almost 1,000 of them adrift on the high seas in boats with no motors, and little food or water” (Head 2009). Laos’ Hmong people have been forced out of their land over several decades. They have sought refuge in other countries, including Thailand where they have been imprisoned. Other indigenous and vulnerable minorities have been deported or forcibly displaced because of the destruction of their environment: the case of the Penan of Sarawak and the Semang of Peninsular Malaysia, and that of the Cham people of Cambodia. Another form of human trafficking is Indonesia’s policy of transmigration: the re-settlement of Javanese and other islanders to the communal land of West Papuans. The government plans to shift some 625,000 people, mostly from Java on 2.5 million hectares in Papua’s Merauke region in the coming years (Editor 2010). Forced eviction is a form of genocide which affects some of the most vulnerable communities in Southeast Asia and a reflection on the shameful policy of the world order.

### **Predatory globalisation**

Following the defeat of the Soviet Union's alternative for a socialist global economy, the West implemented a plan for a global free market. Globalisation in this context has been a massive campaign to incorporate the former USSR and the rest of the world in a US-led global economy. The philosopher John Gray argues that this was another variant of the Enlightenment project "of supplanting the historic diversity of human cultures within a single, universal civilisation ... by the way of the worldwide spread of western—and more particularly, Anglo-Saxon—practices and values" (Gray 1999:215). The West's strategy to gain control of the global economy was conducted principally by the US Treasury-Wall Street complex, and the Washington-based International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB). One of the primary targets in this power drive was East Asia, with a particular focus in the 1990s on the so-called Tiger economies, which included Southeast Asia's Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia.

Chalmers Johnson describes the US campaign against East Asia as "astonishingly ambitious, even megalomaniacal attempt to make the rest of the world adopt American economic institutions and norms" (Johnson 2000:206). The first phase of the project led to the deregulation of East Asia's economies and unrestricted capital flows in US dollar and short-term foreign lending. The second phase, reminiscent of the Viking or Mongolian raids of the middle ages, was the launch of hedge and derivative funds to attack national currencies and treasuries' foreign currency reserves in 1997 (Stiglitz 2002). Hedge funds, mostly based in the Caribbean or other such tax havens went to work to destabilise Thailand's and other currencies and stock markets. Johnson writes that "hedge funds were let loose on them ... the funds easily raped Thailand, Indonesia and South Korea and turned the shivering survivors over to the IMF, not to help the victims but in order to ensure that any Western bank was not stuck with non-performing loans in the devastated countries" (Johnson 1999). The outcome was financial and economic chaos for a number of countries, but billions were made by hedge funds and foreign banks.

The 1997 Asian financial crisis led to major losses in production and increases in unemployment and poverty, particularly in Indonesia and Thailand. In Indonesia, it led to

riots, ethnic warfare, and widespread killings between 1998 and 2000 in East Java, West and Central Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and the Maluku islands (Davidson 2009). Chinese-pogroms erupted particularly in Jakarta; Johnson writes that, “by the time the IMF was finished with Indonesia, over a thousand shopkeepers were dead (most of them Chinese), 20 percent of the population was unemployed and a hundred million—half the population—was living on less than one dollar a day” (Johnson 2000:211-12). The crisis highlights the problem of globalisation and the expansion of markets which exacerbates ethnic inequalities in Southeast Asia. Predatory capitalism is a form of violence because, among its destructive effects, it favors the accumulation and concentration of wealth and economic power in certain ethnic groups. The importance of this issue is given relevance in the work of Chinese-Filipina law professor Amy Chua who argues why globalisation has further advantaged the economic power of Chinese minorities and fuelled conflict and violence in Indonesia and the Philippines and elsewhere in the region (Chua 2003).

It is assumed that an objective of US economic war against Southeast Asia was to weaken Japan’s economic influence and undermine its economic model for the development of the region, which incorporated the importance for a strong state and the role of Japan as the leading nation. Another target was to weaken the role of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and to incorporate Southeast Asia within the 1989 US- and Australia-led Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Walden Bello writes that “APEC was meant to be a westward extension of the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA), and both were intended to serve as a geoeconomic counterweight to the European Union” (Bello 2008a:6). Part of APEC’s strategy to counteract East Asia regionalism was to push East Asian regimes to deregulate their financial and trade sectors. Western loans and aid, and military support played an important role in corrupting the ruling elites to speculate the future of their countries and expose their citizens to the destructive social and financial impact of the financial tsunamis of 1997 and 2008.

A major legacy of the crisis is the debt burden imposed on citizens with the massive transfer to society of foreign-owned private debt. In Indonesia at the time of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the banking sector collapsed unable to repay its obligations to foreign lenders. The IMF came to the rescue with new money which the Indonesian state was forced to use to repay the private sector’s debt to foreign lenders. By the stroke of the pen, the Indonesian state transferred the banking debt to the people of Indonesia. Law professor Ross Buckley

writes that “in Indonesia, the IMF co-ordinated a massive socialisation of the private sector debt” (Buckley 2010). A great deal of the money that was used to refloat the banking sector in Indonesia disappeared in the black hole of tax heavens in Singapore and elsewhere in the world. In many cases, bank assets were eventually sold to the families that had been principal shareholders before the crisis. In effect, writes Buckley, “these families were able to buy back, for US28cents in the dollar, the assets they had owned before the crisis—with foreign debt having been discharged by their government” (2010). Buckley’s conclusion is that the global financial system “rewards international commercial banks and the elites within nations, at the expense of the common people” (2010). Buckley could have added that the financial system rewards speculators and international hedge funds which gamble and steal capital from the commonwealth and thus contribute to the use of violence by the disadvantaged and discontented.

Economic warfare continues to be centered on formulating and dictating the future of ASEAN. China and the US are increasingly competing to influence ASEAN members to join opposing versions of wider regional blocs. China’s vehicle is mainly the ASEAN plus China, Japan, and South Korea—ASEAN + three (APT)—free trade area scheme. The APT was initiated in 1997 as a reaction to the Asian financial crisis, and to the need to collaborate and respond to the destructive challenge imposed by the US on Asia’s future. It led to a series of initiatives starting with the 2000 Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI) to establish bilateral currency swaps for protection from future attacks on their financial systems. The US and Western allies have continued their efforts to undermine ASEAN’s regionalisation process by encouraging member states to sign bilateral trade treaties with the US and the EU. However, it is likely that the 2008 Global financial crisis will weaken the West’s influence in the region. One major issue confronting ASEAN is raised by Walden Bello when he writes that “for Southeast Asia, the challenge is how to avoid becoming an appendage of the Chinese economy” (Bello 2008b:9).

### **Hegemonic struggle**

Southeast Asia as a region is the product of war and the struggle for regional and global hegemony. The creation of Southeast Asia began with Western imperialism and later by Japan’s hegemony over the region during World War II (Anderson 1998:3-8). During the Cold War, Southeast Asia was a war zone where the USSR, China, and the United States fought proxy wars for the control of territories and people. The 1967 Association of

Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was a US-UK initiated security alliance linking Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines with the US against communist insurgencies which threatened Western political and economic interests in the region. It was an adjunct to the 1954 Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) against communism. Anderson writes that SEATO was “formed in American Manila and later headquartered in Bangkok ... to save the whole postcolonial region from the communist spectre” (Anderson 2002:7). With the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, ASEAN created a free trade area (AFTA) and expanded its membership to include Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar; in 2007, ASEAN leaders signed a charter and made a commitment to accelerate the establishment of an ASEAN community by 2015.

The 1997 Asian financial crisis exposed ASEAN as a paper tiger. The crisis, according to the Singapore Institute of International Affairs,

undermined the coherency and structural integrity of ASEAN. The region’s economic structures were destabilised with massive domestic imbalances crippling member states and reversing the successful trends of the 1980s. Many ASEAN countries returned to economic nationalism by reversing economic liberalisation and protecting their own domestic industries and markets, such as the case of Malaysia experimenting with controls over capital flows and currency rates (SIIA:15).

At the time, Obaid Haq made the point that ASEAN offered no protection from predatory globalisation which devastated the region’s society. He writes, “the economic crisis of 1997 and the political turmoil that followed it, seriously damaged the image and credibility of ASEAN. It exposed the weakness of its members and thereby diminished their influence and bargaining power with great powers including China” (Haq 1999:37). ASEAN’s weakness has been further exposed by its inability to play a constructive role in other crises including East Timor, Myanmar’s natural disaster and political turmoil, and the widespread violence linked to self-determination demands by ethnic minorities in Thailand, Myanmar, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

The construction of Southeast Asia is now encapsulated in the dynamics of ASEAN and its potential for further integration. ASEAN is at a turning point because it faces the contradictions incorporated in its proposed community platform which accepts democratic

principles and human rights as the legitimate basis for political power and the formation of a Southeast Asian community. This introduces a substantial wedge in the argument of the importance of Asian values and the function of cultural differences in the distribution and nature of political power. The incompatibility of political regimes is likely to become a growing source of political tension and threaten ASEAN's policy of non-interference. The dynamics of a new cold war between China and the US bears on the capacity of ASEAN to pursue its economic and political agenda. Further integration in Southeast Asia is hampered by the model China offers the region about the benefits of an authoritarian state and of closer ties with China. Ideological differences are deepening between the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand, which are moving away from authoritarianism towards more Western-like forms of liberal democracies, with an emphasis on formal elections and parliamentary politics; in contrast to Myanmar, Singapore, Brunei, Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia's more determined stance on one-party state rule.

Deepening differences in Southeast Asia are highlighted by members' commitment to human rights. Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines have national human rights institutions (NHRIs) and are full members of the Asia Pacific Forum (APF) which are compliant with the Paris Principles (Byrnes, Durbach, Renshaw 2008). In contrast, Singapore, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam are non-APF members and differ in their views, particularly regarding civil and political rights. The schism between authoritarian and more open political regimes could be further amplified by members commitment to form a human rights commission under the terms of the 2007 ASEAN Charter. Some critics maintain that the human rights commission will be ineffective "since ASEAN normally avoids interfering in the internal affairs of its ten members, which include military-run Myanmar as well as Vietnam and Laos both communist states" (AJ 2009). Overall it could be argued that democratisation has been reversed in Southeast Asia since the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. The International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group (ICLMG) report finds that "the anti-terrorism agenda in Southeast Asia has proven to be "catastrophic" for democracy and human rights in the region. It has led to massive arbitrary detention of alleged terrorists; renewed justification for old repressive laws; an increase in human rights violations, and the criminalisation of legitimate dissent" (ICLMG 2004:8). Another and related divisive issue is growing inequality within ASEAN. Levels of income and poverty show striking differences between ASEAN's founding members and the new members known as ASEAN4: Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam. Growing domestic inequality

is also a major feature of ASEAN's founding member states of Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines where level of poverty is very high and rising.

Singapore and Thailand became more independent from ASEAN traditional collegiality by forming the Singapore-Thailand Enhanced Economic Relationship (STEER) framework in 2003. Dent argues that Thailand and Singapore bilateral axis or alliance undermines ASEAN regional solidarity (Dent 2006). One mechanism is the use of bilateral FTA's linkages within the Asia-Pacific. He suggests that both countries supported the inclusion of Australia and New Zealand in ASEAN and AFTA, and backed APEC defunct plan for a free trade area. In essence, both Thailand and Singapore are weaving a pattern of trade relations for a renewed APEC. The implication is that Thailand and Singapore could split ASEAN and open up the region further to hegemonic interference. Political changes in recent years will reverberate on the future of ASEAN. The role of former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra continues to dominate Thailand's political scene. More important are the implications of the 1967 Asian financial crisis and the 2008 global financial crisis. One outcome is the increasing level of competition among ASEAN members for export markets and foreign investment further straining their relations and capacity to collaborate together in their plan for a regional community.

The US has been expanding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to incorporate Russia's former satellites and areas of the Asia-Pacific. This is part of a US strategy to deploy a global missile defence system to defend the "homeland", establish US military control of space and gain nuclear primacy. The US global missile system is essentially designed against Russia but is also targeted against China. In his 2007 Munich address, Russian Federation's President Vladimir Putin condemned the US aspiration to world supremacy and said that it was unacceptable and dangerous, and a major threat to world peace. The US unipolar model of power, he argued, has caused new human tragedies and regional confrontation and that the militarisation of space would lead to disaster (Putin 2007). US policy in Asia anchors NATO's expansion on Japan and Australia, and secures their core allies in Southeast Asia's Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Former US ambassador to NATO, Victoria Nuland, said the US "wants a globally deployable military force that will operate everywhere .... it's a totally different animal whose ultimate role will be subject to US desires and adventures" (Kolko 2006). Both Japan and Australia are vital allies in the US global missile system and the control of space. China's overt military engagement in Southeast Asia

appears limited to the support and arming of Myanmar military dictatorship and the construction of a number of military installations in that country. China's naval bases in Myanmar are an integral part of China's plan to become a major naval power to counter US naval presence in the Pacific and South China Sea, and to protect major shipping lanes, including the Malacca Straits through which passes most of China's oil imports (Wong 2010).

Southeast Asia has been relatively peaceful in recent years albeit rising tensions in the South China Sea over sovereignty issues to a number of islands and reefs, and the recent aggressive posturing between Cambodia and Thailand. Nevertheless, there is a new world order where China is reshaping Southeast Asia's relations with the rest of the world. More disturbing perhaps, is a climate of distrust in Southeast Asia fuelled by nationalism and competing economies reflected in the growing military budgets and purchase of offensive weapons by ASEAN member states. Southeast Asia is a region where the arms race has accelerated. A Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) report shows that arms sales to Indonesia and Malaysia have increased dramatically. Singapore in 2009 was among the world's top ten arms importer and Vietnam became the latest Southeast Asian state to import long-range aircraft and submarines. Siemon Wezeman of SIPRI warns that "the current wave of Southeast Asian acquisitions could destabilise the region, jeopardising decades of peace" (SIPRI 2010).

It is possible to think of Southeast Asia caught in another Cold War in the hegemonic struggle between China and the US. The dynamics of the China-US conflict is being played out in the region on a number of fronts. Southeast Asia is again an important part of US global strategy in its support of authoritarian and corrupt regimes with arms and money in the "war on terror", and the creation of an Asian NATO. While the policy allows US and allies some territorial emplacement for their forces and the control of political regimes, it is a major step backward for the democratisation of the region. Power politics between China and the US is being played out in Myanmar. Behind Myanmar's dictatorship is China's military and financial might. China occupies an important place in Myanmar's economy and the country is now a critical land link for the transportation of oil, gas and other imports. Meanwhile, the US is busy trying to overthrow the regime, financing a large number of social movements and armed groups. William Engdahl suggests that the US was behind the failed "Saffron

revolution” and has recruited India as a proxy in its bid for power in the region against China (Engdahl 2007).

### **Inequality and violence**

Violence is the outcome of inequality. Wilkinson and Pickett suggest that “inequality is socially corrosive, leading to more violence, lower levels of trust, and lower social capital ... greater income differences are associated with lower standards of population health (Wilkinson & Pickett 2005:1775,1778; Wilkinson 2004, 2005). Income inequality is symptomatic of social stratification and unequal power relations. Social stratification implies mechanisms to construct and impose differences in the distribution of wealth, income, and status. Inequality is symptomatic of a predatory regime which favors some and punishes others in the distribution of opportunities and outcomes, and life chances. Inequality is linked to lower level of social trust and to higher level of violence in the form of corruption and crime (You 2005).

Inequality is constructed in different but interrelated socio-economic and political spheres of life, such as class, race, state, generation, gender, religion, and nation. In all cases, unequal power relations provide psychosocial pathways between inequality and violence via forms of domination and exploitation. Class is a case in point. Differences in material conditions and life chances produce a situation of relative deprivation responsible for chronic stress and a sense of humiliation of being a “loser” rather than a “winner”. The increased burden “of low social status makes more people feel disrespected. Feelings disrespected, put down and humiliated is much the most frequent trigger to violence” (Wilkinson & Pickett 2005:1778). Criminologist Hal Pepinsky argues that domination and “power over others is the major cause of crime and violence” (Pepinsky 1991: 8-9). A system of unequal distribution of income, wealth and opportunities creates a sense of injustice in the minds of many and a license to prey on others. There can be no peace without justice but capitalism requires violence on the part of the state to ensure the resilience of the system using fear and incarcerating those who break the rules. The unequal distribution of income and wealth is associated with unequal political power and a regime ruled by an entrenched elite. The predatory nature of the political and economic regime lead to the decline of trust and social capital, and the loss of respect for others. A good social life is a peaceful existence, according

to Quinney, and one “based on equality, with the elimination of poverty, racism, sexism, and violence of all kinds” (Quinney1991:11).

Inequality indicates ongoing forms of “civil war” which pit individuals against each other. These are class and race “warfare”, the “war” of the sexes and generations, and various forms of warfare between nation states. They are waged increasingly in the context of a political economy characterised by domination, exploitation and the drive to consume and accumulate wealth and the destruction of the environment. The contradictions of a society embedded in market relations sustained by greed, desire and envy lead to the expansion of criminal activities and organised crime. A similar situation exists at the global level where a predatory form of globalisation is impoverishing many, and the source of much human suffering. Falk argues that neo-liberal globalisation has enforced on the world in the last three decades a policy of “liberalisation, privatisation, minimising economic regulation, rolling back welfare, reducing expenditures on public goods, favouring free flows of capital, strict controls on organised labor, tax reductions and unrestricted currency repatriation” (Falk 1999: 2). It is not surprising that both the 1997 Asian and 2008 Global financial crises involved widespread fraud and huge payouts to company executives and financiers, massive bail-outs of many bankrupt banks and businesses by taxpayers, and major cut backs on public expenditure. Buckley says that one should not be surprised about the resilience of such a destructive global financial system because “a system that rewards the powerful at the expense of the powerless is likely to prosper” (Buckley 2010:5). Wilkinson and Pickett argue that,

rather than adopting an attitude of gratitude towards the rich, we need to recognise what a damaging effect they have on the social fabric. The financial meltdown of late 2008 and the resulting recession show us how dangerous huge salaries and bonuses at the top can be. As well as leading those in charge of our financial institutions to adopt policies which put the wellbeing of whole populations in jeopardy, the very existence of the super-rich increased the pressure to consume as everyone else tried to keep up (Wilkinson & Pickett 2009 :262).

Reclaiming the state is a priority to increase social, economic and political equality and reduce violence. Southeast Asian nations are corrupted by entrenched elites who have captured the state to advance their private interests and those of global partners. Recent major financial meltdowns illustrate the damage a US-led neoliberal global economic order has

inflicted on society in developing countries. Falk rightly argues that “predatory globalisation has eroded if not altogether broken the former social contract that was forged between nation state and society during the last century or so” (Falk 1999:3). The contract between citizens and the state needs to be renewed and reclaiming the state means the democratisation of power. Basil Fernando of the Asian Human Rights Commission writes that democratisation is a process whereby people engage in constructing a state for their own benefit with social equality as its core principle” (Fernando 2004). Democratisation of power must be accompanied with more economic and social equality. Galbraith makes the point in the *Good Society* that the basic need “is to accept the principle that a more equitable distribution of income must be a fundamental tenet of modern public policy and to this end progressive taxation is central” (Galbraith 1996:65). The main pathway to more equality and less violence is by means to implement key international charters and covenants on human rights. The Asian Human Rights Charter provides an important paradigm for state action and the role of government to bring socio-political and economic reforms to “meet the desire and aspirations of the peoples of Asia to live in peace and dignity” (AHRC 1998:3).

### **Positive regionalism**

The struggle for equality needs to be waged at the regional level as well, and for ASEAN to play an assertive role for social justice and the wellbeing of citizens. Regionalism should be, first of all, a form of resistance to, and protection from, negative globalisation. Falk points out the negative impact of globalism as “the conjuncture of largely non-accountable power and influence exerted by multinational corporations, transnational banks and financial arenas, and their collaborators with the ideology of consumerism and a development ethos weighted almost entirely towards returns on capital mainly achieved by maximising growth” (Falk 1999:69). The globalisation of regional integration in Southeast Asia has had negative impacts on most countries. The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that while “the number of vulnerable workers remained massive, accounting for an estimated 161 million workers, or about 60 per cent of the ASEAN workforce in 2007”, there are also significant variation by country, the share of own-account workers and contributing family workers in total employment, for example, ranged from over 70 per cent in Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Viet Nam to around 50 per cent in Thailand and below 10 per cent in Singapore” (ILO 2008:14). Regional integration shows little benefit for the Philippines, where levels of poverty have not declined significantly from their high level of 52.7 percent in 1994. Saturnino Boras maintains that regional integration has “undermined

subsistence for producers in the countryside. The Philippines has also lost grounds in several export products, such as agricultural products, electronics, garments ... The country has been transformed from a net agricultural exporting country to a net agricultural importing country” (Boras 2005:2).

Falk suggests that promoting positive regionalism is about “desired objectives such as the reduction of political violence, the attainment of economic well-being, the promotion of human rights and benevolent governance, the protection of ecological diversity, and the safeguarding of health and renewable resources. “Negative” refers to the negation of these goals through warfare, poverty, racism, ecological decay, oppression, chaos, and criminality” (Falk 1999:). Bello views regionalism in a similar vein when he writes that for Southeast Asia nations, “to expect to survive as national economies without becoming part of a larger economic bloc coordinating policies in trade, finance, technology, investment, and development is becoming increasingly unrealistic in a world where big economic blocs become the key players. ASEAN must become a reality, and this can only be done through a combination of political will and a democratisation of the process of regional integration” (Bello 2004:6). A pathway to positive regionalism is to require that all trade treaties to be compatible with United Nations human rights treaties.

The International Labour Organization calls for building “a people-oriented ASEAN in which everyone can participate and benefit from the process of integration and community building” (ILO 2008:2). The report warns of “widespread vulnerability among the region’s workers and their families resulting from low levels of social protection”. The ILO suggests that “the time has come to gradually strengthen the social dimension of regional integration through improved access to basic health care, protection for children, the elderly and people with disabilities, social assistance for people who are poor or unemployed and other features that vary according to country needs and stages of development. Building such a “social floor is crucial to ensure people’s security and a sense of community” (2008).

A legal mechanism is for the implementation of the ASEAN charter. Clause 13 of the Charter states that:

13.1 ASEAN will [adhere] to the principles of democracy, the rule of law and good governance, respect for and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms;

13.2 The purpose of ASEAN is to strengthen democracy enhance good governance and the rule of law, and to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, with due regard to the rights and responsibilities of the Member States of ASEAN;

13.3 ASEAN and its Member States shall act in accordance with the respect for fundamental freedoms, the promotion and protection of human rights, and the promotion of social justice (ASEAN 2007).

The democratisation of the Charter provides the political space to advance the political rights of citizens, and engage Southeast Asia's civil society organisations (CSOs), including NGOs representing national and regional human rights organisations. A number of NGOs have organised regionally for the purpose of working with Southeast Asian governments in the democratisation process of ASEAN. Some of the key organisations are the Solidarity for Southeast Asian Peoples Advocacy (SAPA), and the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) (PA 2008). SAPA's Task Force on ASEAN and Human Rights (TFAHR) and FORUM-ASIA, which represent more than 70 non-government organisations, have engaged ASEAN in the process of democratisation of the ASEAN Charter, particularly in regard to the formation of an ASEAN Human Rights Body (AHRB). At the Fourth ASEAN Civil Society Conference (ACSCIV) in Bangkok, in February 2008, the ASEAN Peoples' Forum (APF) demanded that ASEAN work for people and communities and put forth a call to reform ASEAN and for a more progressive association directed at the needs of the people (ACSC 2009; Collins 2008; SAPA 2006).

### **Positive globalisation**

Reclaiming control of the state and moving towards positive regionalism cannot be undertaken without the support of the international community, and the collaboration of transnational organisations and the business community. Globalisation, in other words, needs to work for the wellbeing of the population as citizens of Southeast Asia's nation states, and the international order must be reformed to promote the security and development needs of humanity. The International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group (ICLMG) report suggests that ASEAN

will increasingly reflect the key lessons that developing countries have learned over the last 25 years of destabilising globalisation: that trade policy must be subordinated

to development, that technology must be liberated from stringent intellectual property rules, that capital controls are necessary, that development demands not less but more state intervention. And, above all, that the weak must band together or they will hang separately (ICLMG 2004:23).

The Washington-led global economic order collapsed with the US financial meltdown of 2008. One reform agenda proposes an “offshoot of European Social democracy and New Deal liberalism that one might call ‘Global Social Democracy’ (GSD)” (Bello 2008). The agenda does not go far enough to meet the needs for social justice and peace in the world and Filipino Congressman Walden Bello calls for bolder aspirations and to “unabashedly aim for equality and participatory democratic control of both the national economy and the global economy as prerequisites for collective and individual liberation” (Bello 2008). Minimising inequality as a necessary course of action at the national level cannot be achieved without global demilitarisation. Francis, among many others, makes the point for “the need for a fundamental shift in international relations from the goal of domination to one of cooperation and interdependence. That will be possible only when we transform the global culture that not only permits but glorifies armed violence—framing war, the scourge of humanity, as not only inevitable but heroic” (Francis 2010).

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