Migration, Ethnicity and Conflict in Southeast Asia[1]

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Abstrak

Konflik kekerasan merupakan ancaman paling nyata bagi pembangunan berkelanjutan dalam setiap masyarakat. Sumber konflik biasanya berasal dari peperangan antar-negara. Akan tetapi, selama lima puluh tahun terakhir, sumber konflik telah berubah dan sebagian besar berkaitan erat dengan proses nation-buliding di negara-negara pascakolonial, seperti di Asia, Afrika, dan Amerika Latin. Di negara-negara yang baru terbentuk, konflik yang bersumberkan pilihan ideologi negara adalah yang paling umum. Jika tidak terselesaikan, konflik berujung pada pemisahan atau pembagian wilayah negara-negara yang bersengketa, seperti kasus China-Taiwan, India-Pakistan, dan beberapa contoh konflik dalam kilas balik sejarah. Ketika ideologi berperan penting, konflik tidak bisa dilihat dari pengaruh faktor-faktor non-politik seperti demografi dan etnisitas saja. Konflik yang berdasarkan mayoritas-minoritas selalu terkait dengan komposisi demografis populasi tersebut di mana etnisitas, agama, dan ekonomi terbawa ke dalam konstelasi politik setelah Perang Dingin. Konflik etnis tidak terselesaikan dan terkadang berujung pada disintegrasi negara-bangsa. Terputusnya hubungan Uni Soviet dengan negara-negara satelitnya, pemisahan negara-negara bagian Yugoslavia, dan mungkin Indonesia merupakan beberapa contoh kasus ini. Myron Weiner, Thomas Homer-Dixon, dan Milica Zarkovis Bookman merupakan penggagas studi tentang hubungan antara demografi, politik, dan konflik. Komposisi etno-demografis dan pengaruhnya dalam proses *nation-building* telah ditelaah melalui berbagai macam teori terkait dengan konflik kekerasan. Tulisan ini merupakan sebuah upaya untuk memperkaya wacana tentang hubungan populasi dan konflik dengan mengacu kerangka pengetahuan yang ada dan bukti empiris yang terdapat di wilayah Asia Tenggara.

Kata kunci: demografi, migrasi, konflik etnis, negara-bangsa, konflik kekerasan, populasi.

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1   This is a slightly revised version of a paper presented at Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Tsukuba, Japan, 15 February 2011. The original version of this paper was published as "Population, ethnicity and violent conflict", at *Population Review,* Volume 45, Number 1, 2006.

> *As one might expect in a region with deeper sources of political instability and fewer democratic traditions, the ways in which population issues and politics have intersected have been harsher…*

> Michael S Teitelbaum and Jay Winter (1998:5).

This is an exploratory essay aiming to search for explanation of the relationship between population, ethnicity and violent conflict with reference to the situation in the Asian region – particularly in Southeast Asia. The main issue that will be explored is the overlap among the disciplines of demography, anthropology/sociology and politics. Although ethnicity related violent conflicts have become the major features of our time, research studies that directly confront the interconnection of population, ethnicity and conflict are still very rare.

In 1995, a sociologist, Calvin Goldscheider, edited a book on the linkages between ethnicity and population processes in the context of nation building. *Population, Ethnicity and Nation-Building* is perhaps a pioneer in the field of population studies where ethnicity is prominently featured as an important factor in the dynamics of demographic changes and political developments. Indeed, in the mid 1990s, it culminated in the pervasiveness of ethnicity - as shown in the preface to the book:

> *Hardly a day passes that issues of ethnic conflict do not appear on the front pages of our newspapers, on the evening news, or in special magazine articles and television programs. Ethnic-based issues have become conspicuous in the revolutions in Eastern Europe and in the collapse of the Soviet Union. They are central to emerging societies, economies, and politics of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. They are continuing features of the politics of race and immigration in Western pluralistic nations decades after assimilation, economic development, discrimination, ethnic identification, and the salience of ethnic communities. Ethnicity, linked to discrimination and racism, remains the source of intergenerational disadvantage and inequality in countries around the world– East, West, and South.*

Since then, we have witnessed the flourishing of research studies and publications on ethnic conflicts within different disciplines. Interestingly, studies that focus on the relationships of population, ethnicity and conflict are still very limited. The discipline of demography and population study seems unmoved by the increasing issues of ethnic conflicts that have rapidly become the major research agenda among the various disciplines of the social sciences and humanities. Only recently IUSSP (International Union for the Scientific Study of Population) began to bring the issues of demography and conflict

into their professional organization.[2] In the literature, the connection between demography and conflict is generally treated indirectly or analysed only superficially. The provinciality that is still very strong among the different social science disciplines could be the major reason that hinders the development of interdisciplinary study on this issue. This essay is a modest attempt to fill the gap in the footsteps of previous pioneering scholars such as Weiner, Homer-Dixon and Bookman that integrate demography with the studies of politics and conflict. The paper starts with a discussion on a theoretical framework explaining the relationship between population dynamics and conflict, followed by a more specific examination of the relationship between migration - one of the three main components of population dynamics - and conflict. Within this theoretical framework, it elaborates the changing paradigm of viewing security threats: from geopolitics to ecodemography. Before closing with some illustrations from Southeast Asia, it examines the role of ethnicity in nation building and the contribution of population dynamics to the impact of ethnicity on nation building.

Framing the population conflict nexus

The interest in the linkage between demographic changes and politics began when in a 1971 essay Myron Weiner (1971: 667) explains what he means by political demography:

> *Political demography is the study of the size, composition, and distribution of population in relation to both government and politics. It is concerned with the political consequences of population change, especially the effect of population change on the demands made upon governments, on the performance of governments, and on the distribution of political power. It also considers the political determinants of population change, especially the political causes of the movement of people, the relationship of various population configurations to the structures and functions of government, and the public policy directed at affecting the size, composition, and distribution of populations. Finally, in the study of political demography it is not enough to know the facts and figures of populations – that is the fertility, mortality, and migration rates; it is also necessary to consider the knowledge and attitudes that people have toward population issues.*

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2   In June 2002 the IUSSP Regional Conference in Bangkok organized a special panel on migration and conflict. In November 2003 IUSSP organized a workshop that examined particularly the overlap between demography and conflict research and posed such questions as: What can demographers and conflict researchers learn from one another? What is known about the population dynamics of conflict? Is there a theoretical framework to guide our understanding of the demography of conflict and violence? In relation to ethnicity the workshop aimed to discuss such questions as: What is the role of ethnicity, religion and other group characteristics in the generation of conflict and when do they become a cause of conflict? How do political leaders make use of societal cleavages to spur conflict or war? Under what circumstances can population policy become an instrument exacerbating or leading to conflict? Among the publications resulting from this workshop see the special issue of *Journal of Peace Research*, volume 42, number 4, 2005.

While Weiner provides a broad explanation of the relationship between demography and politics, further elaboration is needed to link population and conflict. Conflict is indeed located in a central place in the studies that are concerned with human affairs. Systematic understanding of the relation between conflict and population, however, still generally needs to be further developed. In the early1980s, in the heyday of population research and the increasing need to control the rapid population increase in the developing world, understanding the ramifications of population dynamics and conflict at the international level became very important. The apparent communication deadlock between the *pronatalist* and *antinatalist* camps in the First World Population Conference in 1974 in Bucharest, loomed large and mirrored the conflicting ideologies and divided policy perceptions on population. Partly in response to the existing global situation, Nazli Choucri, a professor of international politics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston, wrote in 1984 on the interconnection of population and conflict. Arguing that: *…conflict is a central feature of all political behaviour, at all levels of human interaction, and the prominence of population variables in shaping political behaviour places population issues and conflict in close proximity.* Following Choucri's argument, we see that the connection between population and conflict is not straightforward but through what she calls *political behaviour.* As a simple proposition, her argument can be shown as

Population variables --------political behaviour ---------conflict

Population variables, according to Choucri, shape political behaviour and through political behaviour conflict will (or will not) occur. In the field of demography – that studies human population – population variables are basically related to three 'vital events', namely fertility, mortality and migration. The features of population phenomena that are confined to its size, its growth and its geographic distribution have been influenced by the change and the dynamics of its fertility, mortality and migration. While population variables in the narrow sense are the study field of demography, in social reality they cannot be isolated in a vacuum. Population variables have always been intersected with other social variables, including the economy, politics and culture; that in turn construct the social contexts in which human behaviour - including political behaviour - is performed. As Choucri clearly demonstrates, conflict is the central feature of all political behaviour. Political behaviour in its narrow sense has become a field of political science. Adrian Leftwitch, a lecturer in politics at the University of York, in his book *Redefining Politics: People, Resources and Power*, published in 1983, defines politics as follows:

> *Politics consists of all the activities of cooperation and conflict, within and between societies, whereby the human species goes about obtaining, using, producing and distributing resources in the course of the production and reproduction of its social and biological life.*

He further notes that:

> *…these activities are not isolated from other features of social life. They everywhere influence, and are influenced by, the distribution of power and decision making, the systems of social organization, culture and ideology in a society, as well as its relations with the natural environment and other societies. Politics is therefore a defining characteristic of all human groups, and always has been.*

According to Leftwitch, *cooperation* and *conflict* are two important features of political activities (or behaviour) that occur in a society. It is through cooperation and conflict that human behaviours are basically conducted in every space and arena such as in families, groups of kin or *tribes;* in villages, towns, regions, nation-states or associations; and, in the modern world, on a global basis. The central point that Leftwitch proposes is that the *politics of societies* – including but not exclusively the government – exist at every level and in every sphere are inextricably involved with how resources are used, produced, organized, distributed and redistributed, by whom, and with what consequences. Resources, according to Leftwitch, include capital, land, income, labour and other natural resources and also things such as time, education, status, influence, health and knowledge. The process of achieving sustainable development in any society will be a constant process of negotiation between conflict and cooperation that constitute the fundamentals of politics.

The changing global political context at the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s, especially after the Cold War was ending, has provided a new situation in which the tensions and conflicts were no longer bipolarized but becoming more diverse. The old, conventional wars have been replaced by what Mary Kaldor terms 'the new wars'. According to Kaldor (2001) *new wars* can be distinguished from *old wars* as their goal was the matter of *identity politics* rather than *ideology* and *geopolitics* and involved various types of groups such as paramilitary units, local warlords, criminal gangs rather than hierarchical military units and most casualties were civilians rather than combatants. The defining politics as put forward by Leftwitch need to be adapted to the current situation whereby identity politics in the context of the *new wars*, dominate the world scene as Kaldor argues. It is therefore very appropriate at this historical juncture to look at ethnicity as it is generally understood as the major source of human identity. Ethnicity is among the main social markers by which cultural boundaries among various groups of people are delineated. Conflict and cooperation, according to Leftwitch, among different culturally defined groups constitute the identity politics that will be the concern in the discussion on population, ethnicity and conflict.

Migration and Conflict

As briefly mentioned above, at the international level the contentious connections between demography and politics, began to be discussed at the First World Population Conference in Bucharest in 1974. The Conference, which was initiated by the UN, was intended to look at the increasing pressing issues of world population growth, particularly in the poor-south-developing countries. The rapid rate of population growth in the poor countries was perceived as a world socio-economic problem and a political security threat particularly as seen by the rich industrialised countries. It is very interesting that the delegates at this Conference clearly fell into two camps when they had to discuss the causes of and the remedies for rapid population growth. The first camp, mostly dominated by the countries that had links with the Socialist-Communist bloc, strongly argued that the remedies to the problem ought to be sought by redressing the global order, which tended to benefit the rich countries. In contrast, the other camp, dominated by the Western-Liberal countries, argued that birth control on a massive scale should be introduced systematically in order to sustain sufficient economic development.[3]

While the scholarly works on demography are understandably geared towards interpreting the mechanics of population growth, migration and population mobility are generally treated as only marginal factors in relation with population growth. As the development approach people focused their attention on the poor-south-developing countries, internal migration – mostly rural to urban – received their primary attention in conjunction with economic development.[4] Weiner was the only one who gave serious thought to the causal relationship between migration and politics until this theme emerged into the mainstream demographic discourse around the mid 1990s, when ethnic conflicts in Rwanda and Bosnia erupted. The attempt to connect migration to politics, therefore, emerged rather late, compared to its connection to economics. Myron Weiner, a political scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) – who is also a modernisation theorist – was among the pioneers who looked at the correlation between migration (and demography in general) and political behaviour. His research, based on Indian politics, provides an analysis of how internal migration of a particular ethnic group (the Assamese) created political change in their new place of residence.[5] As stated above, Weiner is the political scientist who introduced the term

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3   Finkle and Crane (1975) provide a comprehensive analysis of the politics of the World Population Conference in Bucharest in the first issue of the new journal published by the Population Council in New York *Population and Development Review*. Since then, Finkle regularly provides commentary analysis on the politics of subsequent world population conferences (Mexico City, 1984 and Cairo, 1994).

4   An example of research work on rural-urban migration is a book by Jack Caldwell (1969) *African Rural-Urban Migration: The Movement to Ghana's Towns*. While a contending Marxist explanation is given by Samir Amin (1974) in his book *Modern migration in Western Africa*.

5   Myron Weiner, *Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1978).

'political demography' after his involvement in a US funded research team charged with finding a solution to the problem of population growth in the poor developing countries in the early 1970s. Since then, Weiner developed his thinking on international migration and security.[6] In 1992 he published an article in *International Security* that exposed the perspective of the security/ stability framework (SSF). He contrasted with the international political economic framework (IPEF) and put forward by the economists.

According to Weiner, economists have discussed many issues concerning economic differences or inequalities between countries that influenced migration. Political scientists have also discussed conflicts that led to a wave of political refugees leaving a country. However, very few economists provided the necessary attention to how international migration created conflict within or between countries - that is, how to examine international migration as an independent variable, rather than as a dependent variable. According to Weiner, a discussion like this is very important in understanding why a country and its citizens always have a negative attitude towards international migration, even though they are aware of the economic benefits brought about by this kind of migration. Weiner further explains what is meant by SSF, which he carefully differentiates from what had long been known as the international political economic framework (IPEF).

IPEF explains international migration mainly by focusing on the existence of global inequality and economic relationships between the sending and the receiving countries. These relationships include the movement or shift of capital and technology, the role of the transnational institutions and structural changes in the labour market which are closely related to the international division of labour. SSF focuses on national policies concerning international migration which are created, because of concerns about the impact of migration on internal political stability and international security. This means, therefore, that SSF puts considerable emphasis on the understanding of political change within a country as the main determinant of international and internal migration, including the wave of refugees both as a cause and an effect of international conflict.

IPEF and SSF, however, have obvious similarities. Both have shifted from approaches which up until now have maintained that migration is a result of individual decision making to an approach which looks at migration in the context of wider social, political and economic changes. Both use an interactive framework that emphasizes the relationship between the processes of migration on the one hand and the processes of global change on the other.

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6   In 1998 Myron Weiner invited the author to join a workshop at MIT to discuss the broad theme of 'demography and security'. The papers presented at this workshop were later published as a book in 2001 by Berghahn entitled *Demography and National Security*. The author's Chapter in this book shows the security aspects of transmigration policy in Indonesia (Tirtosudarmo 2001). For a more expanded discussion on migration, development and security see Tirtosudarmo 2005b.

Both pay attention to the behaviour of a country and the importance of its national borders. Compared with IPEF, SSF emphasizes the importance of decisions taken by a country, whereas the role of a country is always treated lightly by IPEF, which is more likely to consider the global strength as the main determinant. Both concepts also present different arguments about aspects of international migration. They raise different questions, advance different explanations about international mobility and   provide different concepts of analysis. Although both reinforce or supplement each other, the lines of advanced argument are seldom the same. IPEF, for example, may use an analysis which looks at population mobility from a poor to a rich country as something of mutual benefit (the poor benefits from remittances while the rich benefits from the cheap labour which it requires).

SSF, on the other hand, may see the same population mobility as having political consequences, namely changes in ethnic composition in the receiving country, which may result in friction in the relationship between the two countries as a consequence of the conflict between migrants and the local communities. In another example, the IPEF approach can lead to a conclusion that migration leads to a brain drain from the sending country and worsens the unemployment and housing problems in the receiving country. Conversely, SSF looks at population migration as something that can improve the internal security of a country and international peace, because migrants from ethnic minorities who are not socially accepted in their countries of origin can be accepted in the host countries. A cost benefit analysis can therefore lead to a different evaluation and policies depending on the framework applied.

According to the analysis that was expounded based on IPEF, international migration often connotes two very important political elements: First, international migration usually occurs because it is supported or encouraged by governments for reasons that do not have any economic relationship at all to migration. For example, according to Weiner, the international migration that took place in Africa and South Asia had little or completely no relationship with global changes or politico-economic changes in the two regions; Secondly, if economic factors are the cause of population migration, it is the governments which determine whether these people should be allowed to leave their countries of origin, while the receiving countries ultimately decide whether to accept or reject these migrants. Government policy is not always based on economic considerations. Furthermore, there are variations in governments' abilities to control migrants entering their countries. A country may be able to use military power to defend itself from foreign aggression but may not have the power to defend itself from migrants entering it illegally to look for job opportunities. A country which endeavours to control the entrance of illegal migrants may not have the ability to stop them, but may consider it as a threat to its sovereignty. For this reason, therefore, an understanding of the political

dimensions of international migration is vital and crucial in analysing the phenomenon of international migration.

From Geopolitics to Eco-demographic Security Threats

In the last three decades, studies of the impact of immigration flows from the poor-south countries into the rich-north countries have flourished. These studies, eventually published as books, reports and journal articles, reflect the increasing tensions felt by governments and societies in rich countries regarding the likely negative impacts of immigration. The motivations of people who move to the rich countries vary, but they are generally prompted by economy related causes. Economic difficulties that are increasingly felt at home and the availability of migration channels already established among people from the former European colonies, provide the impetus for migration chains between countries of origin and destination. In this period, studies dealing with cultural implications began to emerge, in addition to those concerned with the more conventional economic and political implications of immigration.

In this academic-policy environment, immigration is still generally not perceived as a security issue. The perception that migration – particularly immigration to Western European and Nordic countries – contains a security threat was only developed after the tragic events in Bosnia and Kosovo where violent ethnic conflicts between Muslims and Christians erupted in the early1990s. The people in the rich-north countries started perceiving that conflict in poor countries might affect their sovereignty. The conflict in Rwanda between the Tutsis and Hutus[7] was another event that sharpened this perception. As a result of these and other conflicts, studies on communal and ethnic conflicts in various forms began to flourish.[8] These studies also show departure from, and the abandonment of, the formerly dominant modernization and development perspectives.

The premise of modernization and development theories that societies would move towards modernity and leave their primordial sentiments behind and shift towards more class based societies have been shown to be generally unproven. The apparently pervasive role of ethnicity in many societies undergoing economic development shows the fundamental flaws of modernization and development paradigms. Among the most influential recent works that seek to explain conflict and population related issues are the research published by Thomas Homer-Dixon, a political scientist based at the University of Toronto - working closely with his former MIT colleagues in Boston - and the work of Robert Kaplan, a prolific journalist who works for the

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7   Mahmod Mamdani (2001) argues that the long historical processes of ethnic construction under European colonialism played a crucial role in the development of tensions and conflicts between Hutus and Tutsis

8   See among others, studies by Gurr (1993; 2000) and Varsney (2003)

Atlantic Monthly in New York.[9] In his influential essay, 'The Coming Anarchy: How Scarcity, Crime, Overpopulation, and Disease are rapidly Destroying the Social Fabric of Our Planet' Kaplan *conjured up a surreal picture of an African continent in the throes of an apocalyptic crisis: overpopulated, undernourished, and driven to barbaric acts of violence by irrational spirit power*. While Homer-Dixon represents the new voice of academia mirroring the emerging neo Malthusian perspectives, Kaplan's talent brings the horror of environmental problems caused by overpopulation in poor developing countries into the minds of people in the rich Western countries.

Homer-Dixon was invited to give a presentation on his population and conflict theory at the experts' meeting preceding the World Population Conference in Cairo in 1994, the proceedings of which were later developed into a book entitled *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence*.[10] According to Homer-Dixon, as well as Kaplan in more popular language, poverty in the developing world is still basically the root-cause of political conflict. Both Homer-Dixon and Kaplan strongly argue that uncontrolled population growth in the poor-south countries will eventually encroach into the surrounding environments. In the process of population encroachment into their surrounding environments, conflict over scarce resources - and anarchy – the term used by Kaplan -becomes inevitable and constitutes the major security threat and the order of the day. Homer-Dixon's theory on population and conflict interestingly continues reflecting the popular perception and concern of the people in the rich-north countries on the ramifications of unchecked population growth in the poor-south countries, particularly in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The contention on population issues was previously constructed within the context of a bipolarised world and the Cold War in which conflict was perceived as part of the geopolitical tensions between different ideological camps. However, since the early 1990s, the issue has shifted into a new centre of gravity, with ecodemographic security perceived as a new threat coming from the poor-south countries.

The spectre of conflict emanating from demographic changes as clearly theorized by Homer-Dixon is no longer associated with the world ideology and geopolitics, but with the issue of environment and resource scarcities. In other words, both Homer-Dixon and Kaplan shift the discourse on global security threats from the conventional political issues that concern state sovereignty and traditional warfare into more fluid and disguised ecodemographic interconnected security threats. The implication for foreign

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9   Robert Kaplan has traveled extensively in many 'trouble spots' in the 'third world'. His famous article, 'The Coming Anarchy', appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1994. Several books published by Kaplan focus on the contagious effects of deteriorating social fabrics in the third world, which he argues ought to sound the alarm for the rich Western countries, prompting them to take more serious action.

10   Among the contending views on both Homer-Dixon and Kaplan's arguments that relate population-environmental variables and violence and conflicts is a book *Violent Environment*, edited by Michael Watts and Nancy Peluso (2001).

policy, however, is clear, as articulated by Kaplan[11] *surging populations, spreading disease, deforestation and soil erosion, water depletion, air pollution, and possibly rising sea levels… - developments that will prompt mass migration and in turn incite group conflicts*. In a different vein, Homer-Dixon (1999:177), strongly notes that *…my key finding is straightforward: …scarcity of renewable resources – what I call environmental scarcity – can contribute to civil violence, including insurgencies and ethnic clashes…In the coming decades the incidence of such violence will increase*. According to Homer-Dixon, environmental scarcity has three causal forms: degradation (supply induced); increased demand (demand induced); or unequal resource distribution. The presence of any of these: *can contribute to civil violence* through *resource capture* (generally by elites) and/or *ecological marginalisation* of vulnerable disenfranchised people. Ecological marginalisation is often a result of resource capture. Population growth in this equation appears centrally as the driving force in all of these causal claims.

Environmental scarcity that originates from the dynamics of ecodemographic interactions constitutes the main source of what Homer-Dixon defines as environmental security (ES). In this regard, as clearly pointed out by critics, Homer-Dixon treats environment-conflict linkages as automatic and simplifies the complex interconnection of *increased environmental scarcity*, *decreased economic activity* and *migration* that purportedly *weaken states* and cause *conflict and violence.* Peluso and Watts (2001) in the book they edited *Violent Environments*, strongly argue that violence as site-specific phenomena ought to be seen as deeply rooted in the societies' local histories and social relations that cannot be isolated from its larger processes of material transformation and power relations. Peluso and Watts' main point is regarding the entitlements by which differentiated individuals, households and communities possessed or gained access to resources within a structural political economy. It grants priority to how these entitlements are distributed, reproduced and fought over in the course of shaping, and being shaped by, patterns of accumulation. Conditions of resource scarcity do not, contrary to the claims of Homer-Dixon and others, have a monopoly on violence. In Peluso and Watts' view, abundance and processes of environmental rehabilitation or amelioration, rather than simply a shortage, are most often associated with violence.

Ethnicity and Nation-State Building

Ethnicity is generally defined as a sense of group belonging, based on the ideas of common origin, history, culture, experience and values. An ethnic group is a group with a common ethnic identity or ethnic consciousness. Among social scientists that study ethnicity, the notion of ethnic identity is usually perceived in two different ways: the so-called primordialist and the constructivist. While the primordialists perceive ethnicity as a natural result of biological differences, the constructivists, on the other hand, argue

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11   Quoted from Peluso and Watts (2001:3).

that ethnicity is constructed and reconstructed by social groups. Ethnicity is changeable and modified in response to external pressures. The primordialists argue that each group has a unique and fixed ethnic identity and normally resides in its own territory. On the ethnic boundary, Fredrik Barth (1969:14) noted that:

> *It is important to recognize that although ethnic categories take cultural differences into account, we can assume no simple one-to-one relationship between ethnic units and cultural similarities and differences. The features that are taken into account are not the sum of "objective" differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant. Not only do ecologic variations mark and exaggerate differences; some cultural features are used by the actors as signals and emblems of differences, others are ignored, and in some relationships radical differences are played down and denied'.*

The importance of actors in manipulating cultural features in defining what constitutes ethnic identity is emphasized in this concept. Ethnic identity in turn, plays a crucial role in dividing the population in a particular country into culturally different groups. There are almost no countries where their citizens belong to a single ethnic group. Most countries are multi ethnic, although in many cases there are one or more ethnic groups that are demographically dominant. While the difference in population size is crucial in determining the power relations among various ethnic groups, population size alone will not have any significant impact on the power relationship among ethnic groups. In this regard the processes of nation formation and state building in communities of colonies in Asia provide good examples in the interplay of ethnic group identities and other aspects of the societies.

The process of nation building in many postcolonial states in Asia is therefore always related to the problem of maintaining sustainable development in multiethnic societies. Ethnic pluralism is a social reality inherited from history but also continues to be part of the making of current and future societies in this region. As Esman clearly explains in his book *Ethnic Politics* (1994), ethnic pluralism can be traced to three factors: The first is conquest and annexation, when people are defeated and brought under the rule of the victor. Soviet Russia is perhaps the best example of this first type; the second is the process of European colonisation and decolonisation, which assembled and established administrative boundaries for the convenience of colonial powers. People who had mutual affinity were often split into two or more states governed by different colonial masters. Most states in Southeast Asia are of this second type; the third main contributor to ethnic pluralism is population movement as people cross-political boundaries in search of economic opportunities or religious and political freedoms. This third type of ethnic pluralism might be a very common social phenomenon in most

countries as movements of people, either for work or refuge, increase rapidly in conjunction with the vast process of globalisation and international labour migration.

The political circumstance of nation-state building in the post colonial states, however, is very problematic. Esman (2004) argues that …*as the duty of state elites was to build a united and homogenous nation, the duty of ethnic minorities was to assimilate; the only acceptable alternative to assimilation was passivity.* Yet, some cases in Asian states show that minority groups are not only passive participants in the process of nation-state building, contrary to the Esman observation. Majority-minority ethnic group relationships constantly haunt postcolonial states in Asia. The ethnic based conflict that has often broken out in the Asian region more often than not constituted the minority group, responses to the imposing centralistic and hegemonic policies from the major ethnic groups. The current ethnic tensions that in some cases erupted into violent conflict in Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines and Papua New Guinea, were generally related to the majority-minority ethnic group relations.[12] Ethnic conflict therefore, always entails consideration of the size of groups, the growth rates of which are low or negative and who are threatened by assimilation. These groups, feeling besieged, respond by cultivating a collective consciousness and this frequently includes *pronatalist* campaigns – non-violent conflicts fought over the long term. This kind of demographic ethnic conflict - a culture war about numbers - harms no one, but as soon as cynical politicians and their followers try to take a shortcut and redress the imbalance by forcible eviction of another ethnic group, demographic conditions become lethal.

Bookman (1997) in *The Demographic Struggle for Power* is perhaps the first in locating demographic variables as the major determinants in power politics. Bookman shows the importance of group size and how the state, engineers demographic conditions for its economic and political interests. The term 'demographic engineering' was introduced to explain the intricacies of demographic factors within national policies.[13] According to Bookman, group size is important because size translates into greater political power within a multi ethnic state, and group size can give legitimacy to demands for political autonomy and ultimately the creation of secessionist ethno states. Greater group size also facilitates resource competition within multi ethnic states, at least partly because of increased ability to manipulate the political process. Multiethnic states tend to become arrayed as competing groups battling over scarce resources and it is rare for different ethnic groups to have the same size and control of resources at any given time. Although there is correlation between group size and economic and political power, there are glaring exceptions to the rule, the most common being the exploitation of larger

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12   See comparative studies by Gurr on the contentious politics of minority groups and the state (1993, 2000)
13   On this issue of demographic engineering as a technique of conflict resolution see also McGarry (1998)

groups by smaller groups with greater access to the forces of social control. Bookman also notes that particular groups, such as overseas Chinese living in Southeast Asia and the Jews, have often been exceptions to the general pattern, at times showing disparities between economic and political power, and often obtaining high levels of economic or political power despite of a small group size.

Nation-state building and modernization bring with them increased ethnic conflict as different groups begin competing in larger economic and political systems in which, at any given time, groups differ in their numbers and their control of resources. In such a new political circumstance, people are forced into new social relationships and the logical place to begin to look for such relationships and to identify oneself as a member of a larger something, based upon those attributes that one carries around, namely one's language, historical place, race or religion. Ethnicities in a broader sense become very important cultural identifications that are played out within the context of power relations and the new politics of identity. This tendency may be exacerbated by elites who utilize these tendencies to satisfy their own individual interests who may or may not coincide with the interests of the group as a whole. In this complex situation the demography of ethnicity has been manipulated to serve the powerful elites' political and economic interests.

Southeast Asia: Spectre of Conflict and Displaced Populations[14]

The nation-states in Southeast Asia emerged from a combination of nationalist movements and negotiations among the former colonial powers strongly influenced by the United States as the major super power after the Pacific war. Following the contestations between the super powers in the Cold War, clearly manifested in the Vietnam War, are perhaps the first major causes of forced population displacement in Southeast Asia through which many Vietnamese decided to leave their country to seek refuge in other countries. The forced migration event that is epitomized in the so-called *boat people* can be seen as the beginning of a refugee crisis in Southeast Asia. The flows of Vietnamese refugees into their neighbouring Southeast Asian countries provoked the international agencies and Western countries to deal with this major humanitarian issue. Again, the rich-north countries played a major role in solving the refugee crisis in Southeast Asia, resembling the experience of solving the problem of the displaced population in Europe after World War II. While the experience of the Vietnamese boat people shows the critical role of

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14   The discussion in this section is partly drawn from my other recent paper on the issue of refugees and displaced people in Southeast Asia (Tirtosudarmo 2006a) and my Introductory Chapter in the special issue on Forced Migration in Southeast Asia in the *Asian Pacific Migration Journal* (Tirtosudarmo,2006b).

the West in solving the Vietnamese refugee problem in Malaysia and Indonesia by assisting the refugees to resettle in Western countries (USA, Canada, Australia); the Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians that were displaced and took refuge on the Thai borders remain in limbo until today. This displaced population is almost unprotected by any state and therefore very vulnerable to various external threats and manipulations. Human trafficking is one of the major problems experienced by these displaced people. Forced migration is clearly constantly lingering in the lives of the people taking refuge in the Thai-Vietnam-Cambodia-Laos border regions (Anh, 2004, 2006).

While Thailand seems to enjoy being a nation-state that has never experienced Western colonialism, its east and northern border regions have become the sanctuary for people fleeing from persecution – most notably from Burma. The unresolved internal political problems stemming from the unsettled nation building process in Burma have become the source of protracted conflict between the military junta and the opposition group led by Aung San Suu Kyi as well as the secessionist minority ethnic groups basing their armed struggle in the border areas with Thailand. At present, thousands of displaced people residing in the Thai-Burma border areas, most notably the Karen, constantly call for both humanitarian assistance and political solutions.[15] The Muslim Rohinga also escaped and took refuge in Malaysia from political persecution in their home, Burma. The Malaysian government seems more tolerant toward Muslim refugees, especially the Rohinga, and to a lesser extent the Acehnese and Patanis. The unfinished project of nation building in the postcolonial states of Southeast Asia also flared up in the Southern Philippines in Mindanao, Indonesia's West Papua and Aceh and recently in southern Thailand.[16] Conflict and political upheaval following the independence and separation of East Timor from Indonesia in 1999, were also marked by the dislocation of people. Thousands of former East Timorese were forced to leave East Timor and cross the border to Atambua in West Timor, Indonesia. This East Timorese displaced population is caught between two nationalities as East Timor and no longer part of the Republic of Indonesia. Their demographic status poses legal problems as they can be either IDPs or refugees.[17]

These conflict hot spots have produced both refugees and internally displaced people that strongly reflect the failure of Southeast Asian states to deal with their own domestic politics and their interstate issues especially with regard to the problem of cross border forced population movements. The discourse on the so-called 'internally displaced population' in the region

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15 On the displaced population in the Thai-Burma borders see the intriguing paper 'The Silence and Violence of Forced Migration: The Myanmar-Thailand Border' in Grundy-Warr (2004)

16 On the political demography of nation-state building in Indonesia, see the Chapter on demography and conflict by Tirtosudarmo (2005a).

17 On the East Timorese displaced people see various publications by JRS and Human Rights Watch.

is relatively new. In the Indonesian and Filipino languages, for example, the term that is used is *pengungsi* (Indonesian) and '*bakwi*' (Filipino) or 'refugee' if we translate into English. While in the international communities the term refugee constitutes a totally different meaning from 'internally displaced population', in the Indonesian context it is used interchangeably. *Pengungsi* is a very common usage in Indonesia, meaning people that are taking refuge in a (temporary) safe place as they were forced to move from their usual residence. The reasons for their move range from natural disasters (earthquakes, volcanic eruptions) or manmade disasters (flooding, development projects, local government eviction from public areas, communal conflicts, and war). The forcefulness of circumstances that instigate the movement constitutes the main characteristic of the *pengungsi* phenomena. Seen from this broader understanding of causes of the movement, the so-called *internally displaced population* could be something that is nothing new in Indonesia (before and since Independence). On the historical perspective of forced migration in Indonesia, see Hugo (2006).

The Southeast Asian states' border areas are now representing a spectre of forced population displacement arenas in which various refugees related issues such as statelessness, citizenship, human trafficking and identity politics are calling for more rigorous academic understanding and more viable policy actions. Since then IDPs have been quickly entered into public discourses, various institutions, both foreign and local, began to follow the UN steps in *capitalizing* the plight of *displaced people* that flourished as communal conflicts became one facet in the wider context of political changes in the region. The displaced population – in terms of their label category - reflects the process of forced geographic movement. The critical feature in this event, however, is the process of how human beings are compelled to be dispossessed – of their material as well as social and cultural belongings. The dispossession process is in fact the crux of the matter of any form of forced displacement. At present for instance hundreds of Papuans estimated still resided in PNG border areas resulted from the military operation against the OPM during the New Order. The incident in mid January 2006 concerning the arrival of 43West Papuan people (36 adults and 7children) by boat to Far North Queensland seeking asylum in Australia is only an indication that the security situation in Papua is far from resolved. As the signatory of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, Australia is obliged to process the future refugee status of these people. The case, however, will likely be handled by the Australian government very carefully to avoid an irritating reaction from the Indonesian government.

While the pressing needs of the displaced people always have to be given immediate priority, such as their safety, their need for shelter and other basic needs, yet there are several more fundamental matters that should be given serious attention both by scholars and practitioners if long term and viable

solutions are to be sought in dealing with displaced populations caused by conflict in Southeast Asia. The forcefulness of circumstances that produce a displaced population should be seen as part of the longer processes of yet unfinished and perhaps failed nation-state building whereby some groups of people are firstly being dispossessed and secondly being displaced. As the displaced constitute a dispossessed group of people then the more fundamental issues are related to the need for recovering what have been lost: their political, property and cultural rights.

Looking from this broader perspective of the displaced peoples' rights as citizens then what we should envision is perhaps an approach that could genuinely provide room to convey the creation of these displaced peoples' own perspectives. In order to facilitate the creation of such a perspective, the discourse on refugees and displaced people in the Southeast Asian region should be critically assessed and shifted from the current heavily adopted programmatic approaches. As Nordstrom and Martin (1992: 15) correctly note, *social scientists, no matter what their field of study, will in all likelihood confront some instance of socio-political violence in the field* and they need *viable field methodologies and theoretical frameworks* if they are to understand the processes that involve them as possible victims as well as observers.

Given the increasingly important interconnections that transcend state boundaries a more holistic approach is needed in situating Southeast Asia in an integrated space rather than separating it into different entities. Such a vision actually is nothing new as for example, has been lamented by Wang (2001):

> *With very few exceptions, the scholars avoided portraying the local reality as integral parts of the unique border-less maritime world of the Malay Archipelago. In that world, people were mobile and migratory to a greater extent than we realized. It was a world of commerce, including trade over long distances. The trade was not only among the Malays themselves, but one that, continuously and for centuries, attracted maritime neighbouring peoples from the west and the north, including those from mainland Asia.*

Wang certainly is not alone in longing for a new light to be shed on studies of this region. As Anderson (1998) from a different angle, argues, no other region of the world, not Latin America, not the Near East, not Africa, and not South Asia, had such a kind of alarming profile as the region that will always be an arena for global powers and their interests.[18]

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18   On the impact of major global powers on Southeast Asia's displaced population see Hedman (2006).

Concluding Remarks

Demography and population studies lag behind other social science and humanities disciplines in responding to the call for studying the emerging issues of ethnicity and conflict. The initiatives currently taking place among the experts and organizations such as IUSSP (The International Union for the Scientific Study of Population), is looking into the question of whether ethnicity and conflict should be strengthened and expanded. Ethnicity is likely to become a more important dimension on many fronts of human affairs as a movement of people becomes the main feature of the current global transformation. In such fluid global dynamics old conventional ideological tensions will be replaced by new more subtle politics of identity in which cultural markers such as ethnicity, religion and race will become major influential factors in human affairs. The ethnic diversity of the population in every country in Southeast Asia will always challenge the respective state to strike a balance among different groups. In this context, demographic change resulting from fertility differentials between ethnic or racial groups, could have long term serious and political implications in countries like Singapore and Malaysia. While the natural increase will have a long term and indirect impact, migration will have a more immediate and direct impact on the racial and ethnic composition of a country.

The significant contribution of demography and population study in its ability to dissect the society based on its composition and distribution of culturally defined groups will be instrumental, particularly in our attempt to create sustainable development in the near future. The Asian region, Southeast Asia in particular, provides an excellent place for our study of the relationships among population, ethnicity and conflict. Throughout its history the region has become the arena of negotiation between culturally different groups of people as a cross border movement strongly characterizes this region. The region will also be continuously influenced by economic and political global powers and interests. The nation-states apparently will continue to be the locus of contention between the global power on the one hand and the ethno-nationalist as well as indigenous people movements on the other. Group interaction – either conflict or cooperation – that is the main feature of politics – becomes the norm and value of the Asian region. Movement of people between regions provides the social space where different values and norms are confronted and in turn result in new hybrids that make regions culturally very rich and politically very dynamic. ●

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