



Mutual Independence: Countering Exclusive Nationalism Through the ASEAN Way

By Jason Condi

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Nationalist fervor is on the rise in the Asian continent. Whether it is a diplomatic fight between Korea and Japan over the issue of “comfort women,”¹ or militarization in the South China Sea, nationalism is being utilized to drive increasingly aggressive actions and justify increased division amongst the various players in the region. Historically, nationalism has been used as a tool to increase the political power of a particular ruling party, but when that power indulges in exclusivity, it becomes a dangerous and destructive engine that has fueled some of the most horrific conflicts in human history. While much attention has been given to the fact that exclusive nationalism has a causal effect on war, little attention has been given to a means to scale back its severity. This paper will attempt to explore a possible solution in the emerging notion of social epidemics.² Nationalism will first be defined as either exclusive or inclusive with two historical examples of the almost unfathomable destruction that it breeds. Exclusive nationalism will then be tied to the deeper psychological mechanism that drives human capacity to kill. Next, the “ASEAN Way”³ will be discussed as a

¹ Katherine Brooks. “The History Of ‘Comfort Women’: A WWII Tragedy We Can’t Forget,” (November 25, 2013) accessed April 19, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/25/comfort-women-wanted_n_4325584.html.

² Malcom Gladwell, *The Tipping Point* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2000), 258.

³ Jose T. Almonte, “Ensuring security the ‘ASEAN way’,” *Survival*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Winter 1997): 81.

possible counterweight to exclusive nationalism due to its very inclusive nature. That will be discussed through the lens of Malcom Gladwell's theories on contagious social behavior and will explore its connection to the social change in Myanmar. Finally, the paper will propose solutions to reinforce ASEAN and drive towards a more collective future not just for Southeast Asia, but for the world.

In his paper on nationalism entitled "Hypotheses on Nationalism and War," Stephen van Evera proposed a series of theses on what differentiates a nationalist philosophy that leads to conflict versus one that does not. He proposed four key statements:

- 1) The greater the proportion of state seeking nationalities that are stateless, the greater the risk of war.
- 2) The more that nationalities pursue the recovery of national diasporas, and the more they pursue annexationist strategies of recovery, the greater the risk of war.
- 3) The more hegemonistic the goals that nationalities pursue toward one another, the greater the risk of war.
- 4) The more severely nationalities oppress minorities living in their states, the greater the risk of war.⁴

First, it is important to define terms. While these terms are not completely original, the definitions are the author's own. Exclusive nationalism was selected in order to simplify some of the common threads of Dr. van Evera's theories and will be defined to mean any myth created for the purpose of reinforcing a particular government's political legitimacy that is centered on keeping others out. Inclusive nationalism is the opposite and seeks to not just promote the national cause, but seeks to include as many external actors in the nationalist narrative as possible. It also, by definition, includes mechanisms for integration into the larger whole for minority groups.

From those initial hypotheses, the paper elaborated further on those statements, developing proximate and remote causes of the more dangerous varieties of nationalism. As the author of this paper analyzed his theories, a series of terms emerged that shed light on the problem. Some are direct quotes and some are paraphrased, but those terms are: racism, exclusivity, lack of acceptance, contested diaspora, self-glorification, whitewashing,

⁴ Stephen van Evera, "Hypotheses on Nationalism and War." *International Security* Vol. 18, No. 4, (Spring 1999): 8.

nationalist myth, desire for hegemony, treatment of minorities, desire for secession, political legitimacy, demands on citizens, economic crises, availability of weapons, education, homogenous population, sense of victimhood, lack of an established border, national resolve, and war crimes.⁵ These terms lend themselves to categorization that can be used to produce an effective causal-loop diagram as shown below. Of note, the “S” in the diagram stands for “same,” which denotes a relationship of direct relationship and the “O” denotes a relationship of inverse relationship. The terms are neutral, so, for example, “governance” could represent negative or positive versions of the term.

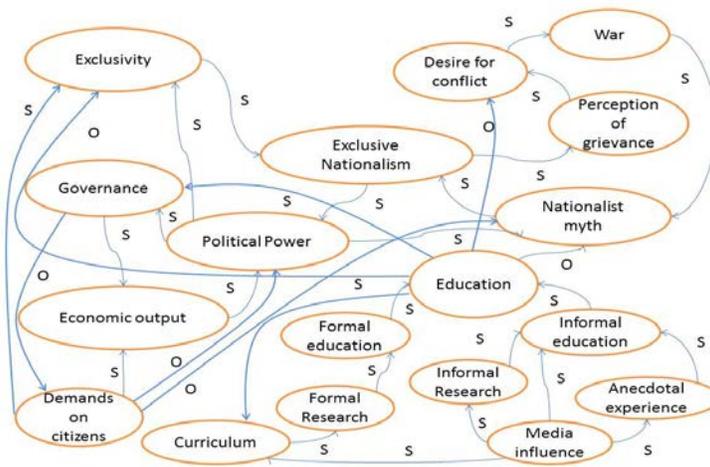


Figure 1: Exclusive nationalism causal loop

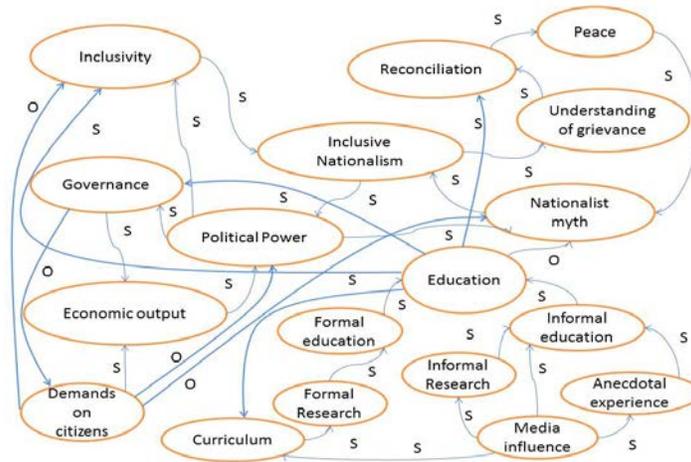


Figure 2: Inclusive nationalism causal loop

⁵ Ibid, 8-33.

Looking in detail at the two loops, one key point is the reinforcing loop (as determined by 0 or an even number of “O’s” in the loop) in the upper-right hand corner of Figure 1. Exclusive nationalism, because it seeks to establish the primacy of a particular race or ideology, does not have the ability to vent past injustices by external actors, if those injustices have occurred. Injustice can occur in the course of conflict, such as previous of war crimes, or in the course of diplomatic interaction, such as unfair trade agreements. It is impossible to generate dialogue without being willing to include and acknowledge the other side of the story, thus the cycle of conflict continues to perpetuate itself when an exclusive ideology is utilized. Ultimately, this perception leads to a desire for conflict to right the wrongs of the past and has historically resulted in catastrophic results. If the war does not result in the total destruction of one side, the war itself will often feed back into the nationalist myth, further increasing animosity and contributing to future conflict. In the inclusive nationalism causal loop, the opposite is true. Because an inclusive nationalist narrative inherently creates pathways for dialogue it prevents the perception of grievance from gaining credibility. As a result, even when conflict occurs, it tends to naturally drive events towards reconciliation vice a desire for conflict. This contributes to overall peace and security.

The second concept found in the loop is the criticality of education. In Figure 1, it is shown to reinforce governance and counter exclusivity, nationalist myth, and desire for conflict. In Figure 2, it reinforces inclusivity and reconciliation. It quickly becomes evident that the ability of transparent education to reinforce inclusivity and counter exclusivity drives the system towards more favorable outcomes.

Third, it can be observed that when demands on citizens are high governments will tend to use nationalism as an outlet to relieve tensions in society. China and Russia are perfect examples of this dichotomy. In an article in *Foreign Affairs* magazine Robert Kaplan states, “As conditions worsen at home, China and Russia are likely to increasingly export their troubles in the hope that nationalism will distract their disgruntled citizens and mobilize their populations.”⁶ This model of national power is reflected in the causal loop diagrams.

⁶ Robert D. Kaplan. “Eurasia’s Coming Anarchy: The Risks of Chinese and Russian Weakness,” (February 24, 2016.) accessed June 06, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2016-02-15/eurasias-coming-anarchy>.

This model, along with Dr. van Evera's four hypotheses, provides a framework through which to examine previous historical incidents. Nazi Germany in World War II was a near-perfect example of exclusive nationalism. Nazism was characterized as an "anti-intellectual" movement. Its policies centered on making Germany "great" again through the subjugation and destruction of the Jewish "race." It was "grounded" in the notion of the German "Übermensch" (Superman). In the lead-up to World War II, the National Socialist party began by conquering German-speaking populations, but quickly turned its attention to more hegemonic aims.⁷ This meets three of the four criteria for nationalisms that contribute to conflict. It also directly correlates to 18 of the 20 terms previously listed as contributing to the causal loop (the only exceptions being "lack of an established border" and "desire for secession," although arguments could be made for those, as well). Of those, "economic crises," "sense of victimhood," and "education" are vital. The perception of grievance stemming from the Treaty of Versailles and the Great Depression contributed enormously to the rise of the Nazi party.⁸ The anti-intellectual nature of the movement precluded transparent education to serve as a balancing force against radical Nazi ideology. This was by design for Adolf Hitler. The devastation of this ideology is undeniable. Estimates for the total death-toll of World War II across all theaters range from 35-60 million military and civilian victims.⁹

For a more modern and lesser known example, the genocide in Rwanda in 1993 demonstrates the validity of the exclusive nationalist model. In the first half of 1994, close to 1 million people were savagely and brutally slaughtered in a 100 day span.¹⁰ The hostilities could be traced back to Belgian colonization, where the Belgians created a division between the generally more light-skinned Tutsi minority and the darker skinned Hutu majority. The Belgians, assuming that lighter skin was superior to darker skin, placed the Tutsis in places of authority relative to their Hutu peers. When the Hutu regained power in 1973, they began to immediately displace the Tutsi minority and exact retribution against their former oppressors. This culminated

⁷ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "National Socialism," (March 22, 2016) accessed April 25, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/event/National-Socialism>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. "World War II," (February 14, 2016.) accessed April 25, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-II/Hiroshima-and-Nagasaki#toc53607>.

¹⁰ Romeo Dallaire, *Shake Hands With the Devil* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2003), 262.

in the formation of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), a Tutsi rebel group who sought to repatriate the Tutsi minority to their native land.¹¹ Over time, a “Hutu Power” movement formed around the extermination of the Tutsi *Inyenzi* (“cockroaches”) and found favor within elements of the Rwandan government. They executed a concerted radio propaganda strategy to implement the plan.¹² This resulted in almost 1 million deaths in 100 days. Analysis of this conflict from the perspective of the exclusive nationalism model demonstrates that at least three of the four conditions from Dr. van Evera’s paper are clearly met. Condition number three is also justifiable, and one can argue that, in fact, all four conditions were met in the Rwanda conflict. Also, nineteen of the twenty terms can be easily validated, with economic crisis being the only factor not readily apparent. Although these are only two examples, most conflicts appear to meet van Evera’s conditions and feed into the exclusive nationalist causal loop. However, the most important question is why exclusivity is so central to history’s greatest atrocities?

In his seminal book, *On Killing*, Lt. Col. David Grossman investigates what drives human beings to kill. At the beginning of his treatise, Grossman gives the statistic that only 15 to 20 percent of infantrymen in front line combat during World War II even fired their weapon at the enemy, let alone aimed.¹³ He goes on to say there exists, “the simple and demonstrable fact that there is within most men an intense resistance to killing their fellow man. A resistance so strong that, in many circumstances, soldiers on the battlefield will die before they can overcome it.”¹⁴ The book articulates why this is and goes on to discuss how governments since World War II have leveraged psychology to increase not just firing rates, but aimed shots. He theorizes that a small number of factors are causal to breaking the ingrained resistance to killing. One is the demand of authority complimented by group absolution before, during, and after the killing act.¹⁵ The final critical pathway lies in the concept of “distance”. Physical distance applies, but the most critical piece is “emotional, moral, and cultural distance”.¹⁶ Tellingly, he states that:

¹¹ *Ibid*, 47.

¹² *Ibid*, 142.

¹³ David Grossman, *On Killing* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 181.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 142.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 156.

“In the section ‘Killing in America’ we will examine the methodology a U.S. Navy psychiatrist developed to psychologically enable assassins for the U.S. Navy. This ‘formula’ primarily involved classical conditioning and systematic desensitization using violent movies, but it also integrated cultural distance processes in order, “to get men to think of the potential enemies they will have to face as inferior forms of life [with films] biased to present the enemy as less than human: the stupidity of local customs is ridiculed, local personalities are presented as evil demigods.”¹⁷

It is within this previous quote that the initial theories of this paper come full circle. After condensing van Evera’s four hypotheses into a causal loop model, the reinforcing cycle of exclusive nationalism can be observed. The last quote emphasizes the need for propaganda, vice education, to perpetuate the exclusionary cycle. That exclusive mentality, or “distance” as expressed by Grossman, is *the* central requirement in bringing humans to kill other humans. This is the deep-seated psychological mechanism that is being utilized by exclusive nationalist regimes to further their agenda. Without this distance, the vast majority of human beings wouldn’t even show up to the fight.

Problems require solutions. That is why the concept of the “ASEAN Way” is vital to overcoming the exclusive nationalist narrative. ASEAN is built on three pillars: Political-Security, Economic, and Socio-Cultural Community.¹⁸ The notion of community cannot be understated. It is built on negotiating methods based on “*musjawarah*’ and *‘mufakat*’ – Malay-style consultation and consensus”.¹⁹ These ideas run contrary to exclusion at their core. Just the pillar of “Socio-Cultural Community” implies the blending of cultures in a way that respects the individual contributions of unique social groups. Consensus-style governance acknowledges the equality of all stakeholders’ claims. It is possible for these countries to embrace what is great about their individual role, yet contribute to the greater collective from a place of equality.

This matters because social behavior is transmissible. In his book, *The Tipping Point*, Malcom Gladwell articulates a theory of socially contagious behavior. Gladwell states as the first lesson of his book that:

¹⁷ Ibid, 160-161.

¹⁸ Association of Southeast Asian Nations, “About ASEAN,” (n.d.) accessed April 26, 2016, <http://www.asean.org/asean/about-asean/>.

¹⁹ Almonte, “Ensuring Security,” 81.

*“Starting epidemics requires concentrating resources on a few key areas. The Law of the Few says that Connectors [people with broad social networks], Mavens [experts on a topic], and Salesmen [master social influencers] are responsible for starting word-of-mouth epidemics.”*²⁰

In the chapter, Gladwell highlights the example of raising breast cancer and diabetes awareness amongst females in the black community. Initially, Georgia Sadler, a nurse, began the campaign in black churches. However, she couldn't get enough people to stay and listen to the message. Recognizing that people generally didn't want to stay after church because they were tired and hungry, she shifted her message to a place where she had a captive audience that was relaxed and receptive to her message. She chose beauty salons. Because of the unique relationship between the hairdresser and client and the fact that hair appointments could last from two to eight hours, she had a perfect venue. By tailoring the message to the environment, she took a failing program and turned it into a complete success.²¹

Gladwell addresses the second lesson of *The Tipping Point* as, “The world – much as we want it to – does not accord with our intuition.” He states:

*We like to think of ourselves as autonomous and inner-directed, that who we are and how we act is something permanently set by our genes and our temperament... We are actually powerfully influenced by our surroundings, our immediate context, and the personalities of those around us.*²²

There are two critical assertions that can be drawn from these statements. First is that our minds are not completely our own. We are very directly influenced by our surroundings, especially if those surroundings are given effective context through marketing and our social networks. The second critical aspect is the fact that social epidemics are driven wholly by individuals. It is crucial to understand that the rules that apply to individuals can also be applied to larger groups. This cannot be understated. In the context of nationalism, it is possible to frame the problem by discussing human anger. In fact, in academic article entitled “Diffusing the Angry Patient: 25 Tips”, one of the suggestions is, “Speak softly and with a steady and relatively slow tone.”²³ The paper elaborates that if you shout, the patient will “concentrate on the verbal battle”. The opposite is true if you lower your voice. What if these techniques could be applied to entire nations and regions? What if you

²⁰ Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, 255-256.

²¹ Ibid, 254-255.

²² Ibid, 258-259.

²³ Laura Hills, "Diffusing the Angry Patient: 25 Tips," *The Journal of Medical Practice Management* (November/December 2010): 161.

could take an angry nation and placate its anger through the quiet influence of another, calmer nation?

Connectors, mavens, and salesmen are individual people and can be targeted with the correct message. While the hairdressers in the previous example comprised all three, a model can also be drawn where the maven informs the salesman, who pitches the idea to the connector. From there, anything is possible.

While *The Tipping Point* emphasizes rapid change, it is also possible to achieve gradual change through the same mechanisms. This can specifically be observed in the transition to democracy in Myanmar. In one of the first examinations of its type, Mikio Oishi and Nina Ghani attempted to study the linkage between ASEAN and the democratic transition in Myanmar. The paper theorized that the democratization of countries such as the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia led to a greater drive for democratization within the ASEAN sphere.²⁴ Through this democratization, ASEAN slowly came to change the definition of “non-interference” to allow for “enhanced interaction.” This would allow member states to “comment on the domestic affairs of other members that would generate negative impacts on other members or ASEAN as a whole.”²⁵ This eventually led to a framework to allow ASEAN to constructively influence Myanmar through meetings of senior leaders at the ASEAN foreign minister’s retreat.²⁶ They also used a combination of unwavering external support (such as forcing the issue of Myanmar’s inclusion in the Asia-Europe Economic Summit in 2005) and internal condemnation through comments and punitive measures (such as Myanmar’s forfeiture of the ASEAN chairmanship in 2006) to facilitate the transition.²⁷

ASEAN has also had positive influences in Northeast Asia. In fact, ASEAN has frequently been viewed as a “bridge” between the states of Northeast Asia.²⁸ According to Dr. Alex Vuving, ASEAN should be credited with assisting in the creation of the Trilateral Cooperation between Japan, South Korea, and

²⁴ Mikio Oishi and Nina Ghani, "Developing a Way to Influence the Conduct of the Government in Intrastate Conflict: The Case of Myanmar," *Contemporary Conflicts in Southeast Asia* (2016): 91.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 95.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 96-97.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 101-102.

²⁸ Alex Vuving, "What Explains ASEAN's Centrality and Will Disunity Derail ASEAN's Success?" (Stanford University: DKI-APCSS, 2015), Powerpoint Presentation, 11 Slides, 5.

China.²⁹ While their role is currently limited, given the proper support, it is conceivable that ASEAN could once again hold the ability to influence events elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific.

In conclusion, this paper has identified the critical issues associated with nationalism, specifically exclusive nationalism, and has proscribed an antidote of counter-balancing social influence. This can be achieved through a variety of means. Collaboration on joint textbooks, educational and business exchanges, targeted marketing campaigns, and joint pledges to not utilize exclusive nationalism as a tool to stabilize political legitimacy are all potential programs available for use. In exchange for limitations on exclusive nationalism, other nations will resolve to not only refuse to interfere with internal affairs, but also seek to maintain stability in transitioning countries. While bodies such as ASEAN can influence effective and gradual democratic transition, such as the case with Myanmar, they should not seek to exclude a country from the global commons, even when that country's behavior is problematic. The only way to exert positive influence and to facilitate peaceful change is to be the example, influence rather than interfere, and to support the transition when that time comes, not before. While many deride ASEAN for its slow-moving ways and seeming inability to arrive at rapid decisions, I believe that we have misjudged it. I think this experiment in consensus regional governance is ahead of its time and needs to be reinforced rather than insulted. Climate change is looming. By some estimates, as many as 150 million people could be displaced by 2100.³⁰ Exclusive nationalism will only feed the problem set. As resources grow scarce, populations grow larger, usable land recedes, and potable water is reduced, any fissures in human society will lead to war, strife, and eventual destruction of humanity. Our best chance for survival is to find a way to work together. An experiment like ASEAN is one of the few laboratories where a cooperative future is being built and tested. It's time we gave them our support.

²⁹ Ibid, 6.

³⁰ Brian Kahn, "Sea Level Could Rise at Least Six Meters," (July 9, 2015), accessed April 26, 2016, <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/sea-level-could-rise-at-least-6-meters/>.

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