

Applying Social Psychology: From Problem To Solution On Myanmar Community Conflicts

Ma Tin Cho Mar

Senior Lecturer

Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Abstract: The paper aims to find out possible solutions to the ‘hatred’ and ‘ethnic cleansing’ operations going on in Myanmar. Myanmar, the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia, is bordered by India to the west and China to the east. Drawing on works in the field of social and political instability, this study shows how ethnic cleansing has become a controversial issue in Myanmar and Myanmar Government policies to create the bulk of urban poor who are the victims of hatred and ethnic cleansing. It also discloses how certain structural features of the social and political system, including the power of the security forces and the business sector are facilitating and perpetrating, perhaps even encouraging the violence.

The study provides accounts of the social and ideological make-up of both the victims and the perpetrators of hatred and ‘ethnic cleansing’. It argues that the victims are targeted not because of their political views or activities, but because they are perceived as bearers of unwelcomed attributes, such as poverty, criminality and ill-health. It shows that many of the perpetrators of ‘ethnic cleansing’ are state agents, often members of the National Police or of paramilitary groups that operate with official license and backing. Members of the business sector are also deeply mixed up in the violence. Lastly, this study shapes two principal reasons for the persistence of hatred and ‘ethnic cleansing’: the failure to bring the perpetrators to justice and the matter on intentional violence, death, destruction and harm to a community, in part or in whole, simply because of some people’s religious faith, ethnicity or belief. Finally, the paper tries to proffer a lasting solution to the avoidable and preventable problems by applying a psychological solution through the use of path model developed by Buunk and Van Vugt (2007).

Index Terms: Myanmar, Rohingya, poor, hatred, negative thinking, love, Positive thinking, tolerance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Myanmar, the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia, is bordered by India to the west and China to the east. A British colony until 1948, it has one of the world’s oldest military dictatorships going on 50 years and ruling over 50 million people. In 1989, the military regime officially renamed Burma, the English colonial-era name, as Myanmar. When Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy won the 1990 election, the military nullified the results, and Aung San Suu Kyi has been under house arrest for much of the past 20 years.

Myanmar: Is a country which has been ravaged by killings and shattered by hatred and injustice. The country, which is currently officially called Burma, is situated in the south-east Asia, and it has a population of over 60 million. The country is bestowed with different kind of natural resources, but unfortunately, most of its natural resources are still untapped, simply because, the leaders are busy destroying the country. Meanwhile, they have no time for the abundant mineral resources found underneath and on top of the country. There are two main ethnic groups in the country, and it is a country with highest known instigated religious violence. Burma shares borders with China, Thailand, India, Laos and Bangladesh. It also possesses a coastline, which made the place strategic and attracted lucrative coastal activities. Its population of over 60 million people made it to be the second largest country in south east Asia in terms of man power. The country was colonized by British, but it is the last country around the region to exercise the so-called democracy which is not in any way similar to what is practiced all over the world. The military who rule the country since its independence, remain the main actors in the so called democratic dispensation. One funny thing about Myanmar is that, most of what is heard about it since independence is only one thing, killings! Then, violence, hatred and ethnic cleansing! If you hear a news about a technological invention, make sure it is not from Myanmar, or when you have a news of astronomers going to the moon/spaces, that must be from the neighbouring states, or an establishment of car industry, all these do not normally come from Myanmar. What you hear and see most frequently in Myanmar is genocide, killings of the minority, setting their properties on fire, and so on. Now Myanmar is synonymous to violence, Rohingya are synonymous to victims, while the Myanmar Buddhists, are synonymous to killers and perpetrators of injustice.

A. RESEARCH PROBLEM

1) DEFINITION OF ETHNIC CLEANSING

According to Wikipedia, *Ethnic cleansing*: is a the process or policy of eliminating unwanted ethnic or religious groups by deportation, forcible displacement, mass murder, or by threats of such acts, with the intent of creating a territory inhabited by people of a homogeneous or pure ethnicity, religion, culture, and history. Ethnic cleansing usually involves attempts to remove physical and

cultural evidence of the targeted group in the territory through the destruction of homes, social centres, farms, and infrastructure, and by the desecration of monuments, cemeteries, and places of worship.

2) HATRED IN MYANMAR SOCIETY

This is an unnecessary utter despise of something especially without any reason. Social disorder and underdevelopment are among the major factors which affect our society, however these impediments do not create itself. Some forces which are physical, social or even mental, develop it. It is noteworthy that, our country has been segregated and divided by hatred. One thing leads to another! Hatred among the good citizens leads to total distrust, unharmonious leaving, and inevitable killings and frowning at each other. According to Navarro, Marchena, and Menacho (2013, p. 10):

“One of the characteristics of hatred is the need to devalue the victim more and more (Staub, 2005). At the end of the process, the object of the hatred loses all moral or human consideration in the eyes of the hater. When hatred intensifies, a certain fanatical obligation to get rid of the person or group that is the object of the hatred can easily arise (Opatow, 1990). Getting rid of that person sometimes means inflicting considerable damage or, taking it to an extreme, physical disappearance or murder: a frequent recourse in situations of intense hatred.”

There is a need to salvage our mindset. We need to change our psychology, we need to change our attitude, and we need to upgrade our social values and behaviors for the betterment of the society and the safety of posterity. The way people live in a thriving world, in developed societies, is completely far away from the way we live and look at things. There is a need for societal overhaul, to have the courage of facing the realities of the world, and to develop our nation, the way other nations prosper, progress and develop. Living in harmony and trust between one another brings endless happiness to all. Additionally, there is a need of embracing the teachings of our scriptures truthfully and wholeheartedly.

There are vital things that we need to take into cognizance, in order for the society to be better. It is not only food and water that develop the biology of human being, but rather, other things equally play an important role in the integration of the society. Societal re-orientation base on mutual trust and understanding, development of human mind to avoid all biasness and hatred towards one another, are the main prerequisite of a prosperous society. Development is beyond religious affiliation. Development means living together to accommodate others' differences, to tolerate and understand the deficiencies of others, and help them to correct their standard of living.

Various psychological ways are explained, which can definitely help the society in realizing its aim of living in peace and harmony. The mainstream media always portray the people of Myanmar as living in pieces and distrust. What others see and hear about us is only killings and crisis and that is the reality. Then why are we killing each other? What are the ways to change this conception to a more accepted attitude, so that every other person will look at us as a better society?

3) COMMUNITY NEEDS

Those who want to have peaceful and harmonized society are all in the journey while building with the little we have. We stumble, fall but get up. Our struggle continues, and never will it cease until when justice is done. That is what we do in peacebuilding. Even the word-speller doesn't know how to spell the word "peacebuilding" - try it in any Word Processor. So, it's somewhere we've never been in our life. We never had its full experience but only trying to pursue it by walking towards its vision.

The Dalai Lama stated that we need to be clear which emotions are harmful and which are helpful; then cultivate those that are conducive to the peace of mind. Often, due to lack of knowledge, we accept anger and hatred as natural parts of our minds. This is an example of ignorance being the source of our problems. To reduce our destructive emotions, we strengthen the positive ones; such emotional hygiene can contribute to a healthier society. Psychology has a long history of informing important social problems.

The Malala's famous quote should be inscribed and engraved not only on the walls of Burma but in the minds of all, rich and poor, big and small, rulers and ruled, Rovingya and Buddhist and all and sundry in the Burma nation. She once pointed out to all perpetrators of evils that:

If You want to end the War,
Then “instead of Sending Guns, Send Books.
Instead of sending tanks, send Pens.
Instead of sending soldiers, send Teachers”.
(Malala Yousafzaiclinton Global Citizen Award Honoree 2013)

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. BUDDHISTS

These are the people who follow the teachings of Buddhism religion. These are the major ethnic and religious group in Myanmar. They are assumed to be more than 80% of the countries population and they consist of different ethnic groups. Buddhism is known to be a peaceful religion around the world especially in places where it is observed. It is a religion of enlighten. It teaches its advocates enlightenment, wisdom and humbleness to its adherents. According to Mahathera and Narada (1997); “Every aspirant to Buddhahood passes through the Bodhisattva Period that a period of intensive exercise and development of the qualities of generosity, discipline, renunciation, wisdom, energy, endurance, truthfulness, determination, benevolence and perfect equanimity.”, Mahathera and Narada (1997, p. 26).

They also explain some of the nobliest attributes of the religion which are expected to be strictly abided by its followers, thus stating;

“Buddhism possesses an excellent code of morals suitable to both advanced and unadvanced types of individuals. They are:

- a) The five Precepts – not to kill, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to lie, and not to take intoxicating liquor.
- b) The four Sublime States (Brahma-Vihāra): Lovingkindness, compassion, appreciative joy and equanimity.
- c) The ten Transcendental virtues (Pāramitā): generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, resolution, loving-kindness, and equanimity.
- d) The Noble Eightfold Path: Right understanding, right thoughts, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.”

Mahathera and Narada (1997, p. III).

Unlike Buddhism in some Asian countries especially where it is observed with its purest form, in Burmar it is perceived by many to be observed with highest degree of extremism and transgression. It may simply be the reason why tolerance is not observed among the different religious groups in the country, especially where minorities are involved. The monks play vital roles in shaping the societies’ way of life, and sometimes they come into direct conflict with some of the government policies.

B. ROHINGYA

A brief history of the Rohingya, the word Rohingya is believed to be an historical term derived from the word Rohang an old word of the Rakhine State that is said to be used during ancient times when the country was known as Rohang Tahir B.T et al (2017). The Rakhine state is located in the southwest of Myanmar bordering next to the Bangladesh, Chin State, Magway and Bago Regions and the Bay of Bengal and has been said to be autonomous due to the mountainous buffer in between it. The most dominant ethnic group in Rakhine State is the Rakhine ethnic minority and various other groups, which also includes the Kaman Muslims, which are recognized as sub-groups. It has said that the Rohingya ethnic has consume up to a population of 800,000 people heavily located in areas such as Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Rathedaung townships (Mayu Frontier) of Rakhine State while another 300 thousand reside in Bangladesh Tahir B.T et al (2017). The Rohingya claim to be a national minority, yet up to this day they are referred as immigrants and treated as a ‘metic’ group by the State and their adversaries which lead to the term of ‘Rohingya’ is itself has politically charged and rejected by government, other Buddhists and Rakhine’s ethnic despite they have been accepted as national citizen of Myanmar in 1950 and 1960’s.

These are mostly the Muslim minority of Burma. It is a minority ethnic group who speak Rohingya as their language. They are the victims of different kind of atrocities. Records show the Royingyas are the most persecuted people on earth. It suffices every sane person to understand their situation by what the UN said. According to the UN, “Royinghas are one of the most persecuted minorities in the world”. As Alam (2005, p. 1) put it;

“The Rohingya of Burma are the world's most persecuted and vulnerable ethnic minority. Due to their racial and religious differences with the Burman Buddhist-majority, they have been officially declared by Burma’s ruling military regime as non-citizens of Burma, making them legally stateless people*”. Ashraf (2011).

According to Zawacki (2013), he opined that; between June and November 2012, the Rohingya bore the brunt of communal violence, human rights violations, and an urgent humanitarian situation in Rakhine State, and still faces an uncertain future.

C. SITUATION IN MYANMAR

Currently, Myanmar’s reputation as one of the ASIAN countries as known by outsiders, is misleading. A commitment of the disjuncture between the formal and informal structures of political power takes us some way towards an explanation of such incident of “ethnic cleansing,” and of human rights violation and manipulation more commonly. In fact, Burmese military leaders began their genocide of the Rohingya - 35 years before the transition began - in February 1978. The political role of the security forces has been particularly an important dimension of this problem. The Myanmar security forces appear to have achieved a considerable degree of the autonomy from any civilian interference. The connection between the autonomy of the security forces and the persistence of “ethnic cleansing” is clear. Many of the perpetrators are drawn from the security forces, or are members of paramilitary groups that operate with their acquiescence. To the extent that they are given the freedom to commit such crimes without fear of punishment. In fact, there is no reason to believe that they will stop. People are killed every day, people are murdered, their houses burnt, their properties destroyed, the ladies raped, their children maimed, their life shattered, devastated and traumatized, and nobody cares to listen to their cries or come to their rescue, both physically and psychologically.

There are many factors which directly lead to this. These factors may not be known by the teaming majority who are blinded by arrogance and ignorance, but through proper dissemination of knowledge. We tend to be optimistic, because education can change any carnage and destruction. Before introducing the PATH model, let’s identify two of the destructive attitude of the killers in Myanmar society: ethnic cleansing and hatred.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. TOWARDS A VIABLE SOCIETY BY PATH MODEL APPLICATION

Is it possible for our society to be set free of the psychological illness? Hatred is a psychological disease, which never allows any society to develop. That is why we are heading to destruction every day. If you kill and destroy others’ properties, that is tantamount to killing and destroying yourself. Never will you have peace of mind while the blood of innocent civilians pursues your being. Nemesis must be a friend of a bloodsucker.

Path Model is introduced here as a form of psychological solution to what bedeviled our society. Different discourses concerning Myanmar and its teeming victim populations were developed and forwarded, however very few suggest any viable solution to bring an end to the problem, hence, the application of Path Methodology.

B. PATH MODEL

Path model has been developed by Buunk and Van Vugt (2006), and has been used in solving a case of Aids, by following its simple and clear steps. PATH is an acronym of four methods, which when used and applied, should be in a chronological order for solving societal problems. It refers to; Problem, Analysis, Test and Help. These steps are what is going to be considered in respect to the bedeviling problem of hatred and ethnic cleansing that faces Myanmar society. The model as its name implies, is a model of solving specific and general problems that are bedeviling and hampering the progress of a society.

IV. FINDINGS

According to Buunk and Van Vugt (2006), to understand the methodology properly, one has “to learn about the four phases of the PATH methodology, which are:

- a. **Problem** - From problem to problem definition: Identifying and defining the problem;
- b. **Analysis** - From problem definition to analysis and explanations: Formulating appropriate concepts and developing theory-based explanations;
- c. **Test** - From analysis to process model: Developing and testing an explanatory process model;
- d. **Help** - From process model to interventions: Developing and evaluating a programme of interventions.

A. THE PROBLEM

There is no any problem that will match killing an innocent person. This is mostly known even to the outsider and strangers. That Myanmar faces ethnic cleansing and extinction is no longer a news to the whole world. Innocent people, the Rohingyas, are killed every day by the Buddhists and everybody knows this. The state of Rakhine, is now becoming a daily-blood-spilling site in the world, most astonishingly and sadly, a so called government is said to be found there. These killings and destructions are now spreading to various places. However in a nutshell, one of the salient causes of this barbarism is hatred. Hatred is not being measured according to its proper weight, because it is both directly or indirectly taught and promoted among the youth. It is the root cause of almost all the misunderstandings, killings, destructions and the entire crisis that occur between communities in Myanmar. If the Myanmar people are able to stop the frowning against each other, and face this little but heinous, poisonous and monstrous attitude, the society will definitely prosper and progress in a near future.

B. ANALYSIS; FINDING EXPLANATIONS TO THE PROBLEM

Sometimes strong leadership can spark the fire of hatred, Ezekiel (2002). In the case of our society, hatred comes from different angles; almost everyone in the society has a hand in this poisonous behaviour in one way or another. The society lacks one concrete, strong and sincere portion which will call and put it to order. Nearly all are involved in the heinous crimes starting from; the religious leaders, political leaders, teachers in schools, parents at home, and other common people everywhere. All are responsible. When hatred penetrates the minds of an individual, if cure and care are not provided, it may result to disastrous attitudes towards the opponents. Although Staub (2003), opined that, hatred has direct relationship with love and that hatred can easily be transformed to love, but this takes a careful and proper application of certain desired remedies.

Analyzing this negative phenomenon of daily massacre, based on the assumption of Staub (2003), it should be assumed that a negative feeling can be transformed into a positive one, such as; from hatred to love. Therefore, psychologically, all these barbaric killings can be stopped simply by turning around from the earlier bad behavior of wanton killings and destruction in the society to, breeding life full of peace and mutual respect and understanding. This will be definitely done when leaders rethink and focus their precious time on the real development. Then the followers must accept and adapt to a better life.

There is no need of pointing fingers at each other or shifting the blames to one another. However, calling a spade with its name will not amount to injustice. In as much as we agreed that hatred has polluted our society, therefore, we have to collectively analyze what is the root cause of this societal mess! Most of our elites and elders are not helping matters, in making real dialogues between all the warring factions. The elders should be encouraging the younger generation in the society to love and tolerate one another and live in peace and harmony.

Not only hatred, the belief that “mine is always right” causes fatal injuries to the society. Part of realizing a problem is when an individual, at whatever caliber, is found guilty, his ethnic group, kinsmen, clan and relatives, should not in any way try to hide his atrocities, simply because he is one of them. When we maintain such a negative attitude, we will always be returning back to the status quo, as the figure one shows below:

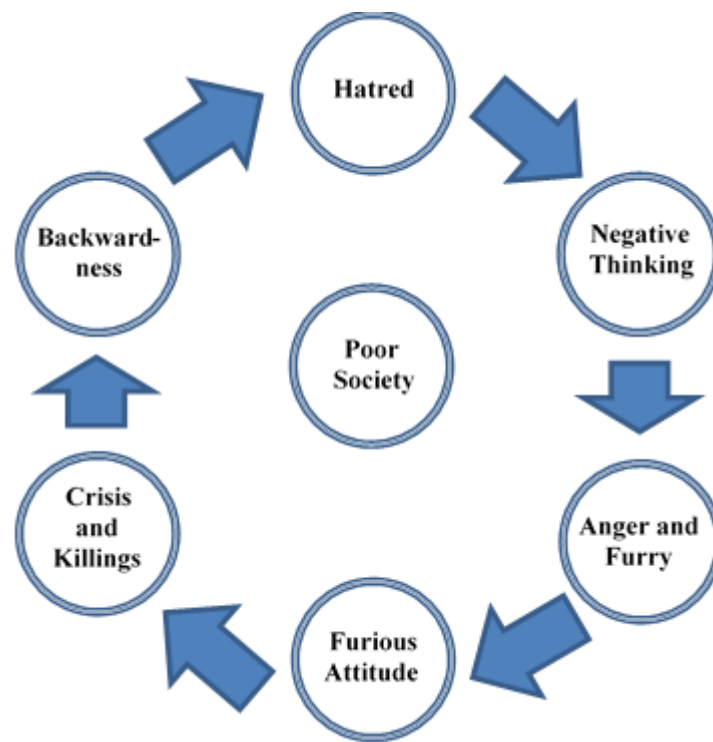


Figure 1 Showing How Society Becomes Backward And Poor As A Result Of Hatred

The figure above shows how the life cycle of a poor society will eternally be. Any kind of verbal campaign of development will remain where it comes from. No society will concentrate on killing others and think or anticipate any development. You kill those who may contribute positively for the development of the society, how else will the society be developed? The massacre will psychologically make the youth to be inhuman in their attitude and thinking.

As shown, hatred leads to negative thinking towards its victim. The hater, on no cause will be distressed and lack focus in his mind, and that will lead to anger and furious attitude. Furious attitude may come in terms of quarrelling, heated arguments and misunderstanding which can easily culminate into crisis. Killings and destructions follow crisis and that leads the society to become poor and backward forever. The negative temperament of the individual members of the society will continue to be at its peak. Thus, poverty and anger facilitate more somber and inhuman attitude among the youth.

C. TEST: DEVELOPING AND TESTING THE PROCESS.

When a problem is identified and analyzed, according to the PATH methodology, the next thing to do is testing all the available variables in order to proffer a proper solution. In the case of the problems at hand, the ideal ways to the solution should be using positive thinking psychologically, to arrive at the desired result. Equally, these problems which are identified here, affect the populace in a psychological manner.

D. HELP

It is obvious, without help and helping each other, no society on earth can prosper. Everyone needs someone in order to survive. No man is an island of his own. Helping each other has been encouraged by all the sane reasonings and by all faiths around the globe. Below are some of the key methods that can help us to achieve the aim of helping one another;

- a. Tolerance; after we are certain that killing each other, destroying the properties of others, or dominating, subjugating and segregating others will not work in any society. No record is found of any society which progresses by instigating crisis among its populace. Tolerance and mutual understanding must be sustained. Each member of a society has to live with the other without prejudice or any look of inferiority.
- b. Honesty; each and every individual member of the society has to be honest by and to himself, and try to act in accordance to the accepted norms of the society. To be honest means to become trustworthy, doing nothing, no matter how little, to harm others.
- c. Trust; this is also applicable in all our daily life activities, whether engaging in private or public work.
- d. Sincerity of purpose; in addition to being honest and trustworthy, sincerity of purpose is equally important. Whatever we do, we have to put Myanmar first. We have to put the development of our society first. We have to be sincere whether we are supervised or monitored in our works or not.
- e. Hard work; hard work for the sole aim of developing our nation, so that we compete with any country around the globe.
- f. Love; we must love each other, irrespective of tribe, ethnic group, region or religion or whatever can bring division and chaos within us.
- g. Knowledge; without knowledge, there will be no development. Schools have to be established and subject that will be teaching good behaviors and tolerance, should be the priority especially among the youth.

All these can be seen as shown in figure two below;

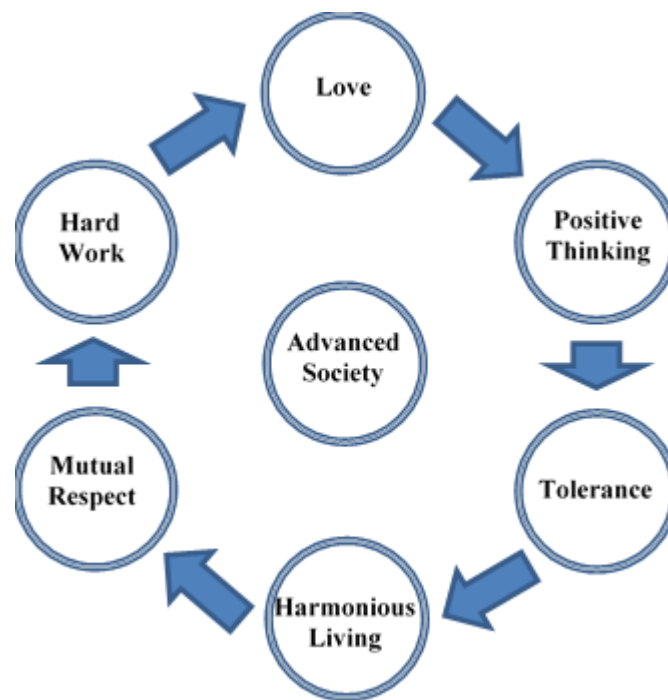


Figure 2 Showing An Advanced Society As A Result Love, Tolerance And Mutual Respect

V. CONCLUSION

It is agreed by everyone that Myanmar society is sick. The society is full of bloodshed every day. Innocent civilians, old and young, male and females are killed daily, mostly in the sight of the authority, that is expected to protect the lives and properties of all. Such a situation is repeating itself every day. Amnesty international and all concerned organizations around the world have been saying this for a long time; however no solution is found to be provided.

Conversely, the path model is used here in this paper as developed by veteran psychologists, Buunk and Van Vugt (2006) to cater for the psychological needs and solutions to the social problems. We should not relent and wait for others to come and solve our problems for us. We suffer and therefore, we must find the solutions. We become like a mockery of ourselves, when we wait for others to come and solve problems for us. Thus, we have to start acting and stop killing. It is not about the subject of identity, ethnicity, or any city, but it is a matter of being together as one family.

Reaching the Point of Saturation: The way people have been living in our society, has shown more negative impact amongst them than any benefit. The hatred and ethnic cleansing have reached its peak. The killings have gone haywire, the skirmishes, clashes, and crisis, have reached the global sight. Our predicaments and problematic issues are known by almost everybody around the globe, and all these things are not sending good signals about our society. The only way forward, is for us to come back to the dressing table and the designing cupboard, in order to restart and reform our life to a better one. Our society has reached the point of saturation, it has reached its peak in crisis, therefore, it is time for us to come back, meditate, think wisely and formulate a way to better our lives and that of our society, for the sake of posterity. For sure, by applying the PATH model approaches, such societal problems will be solved and crushed.

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