

CHAPTER 6

THE SOUTH OF THAILAND IN GLOBALIZED WORLD

The Cold War was replaced by globalization as the most cliché and under-specified explanation for various events in international relations. Globalization is sometimes said to represent a natural progression towards a 'borderless world' signalling the end of the modern international state system. Globalization generates terror and resistance. Four definitions are used to identify the word “globalization” in common use in both the scholarly and the policy community. Firstly, globalization as historical period; secondly, globalization as the confluence of economic phenomena; third is globalization as the triumph of American values; and fourth is globalization as sociological and technological revolution.³⁰ Globalisation processes provide new incentives and opportunities for non-state political entrepreneurs to build transnational political movements.³¹

Since 1970s the strife in Southern Thailand shifted from the ethnic character to religious character.³² Barisan Nasional Pembebasan Patani (BNPP), led by Tengku Abdul Jalal was said to be the first religious group in the South. Islam was part of its policy and they wanted to use it to exploit the support from the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the Arab League. After that there emerged another group called the Pattani United Liberated Organization (PULO) or Pertubohan Persatuan

³⁰ Richard Higgott and Simon Reich, “Globalisation and sites of conflict: towards definition and taxonomy” (CSGR Working Paper 01/98, Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation, March 1998), http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=146972.

³¹ Fiona B. Adamson, “Globalization, Transnational Political Mobilisation, and Networks of Violence,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 18, no. 1 (April 2005), p. 1.

³² S.P. Harish, “Ethnic or Religious Cleavage? Investigating the Nature of Conflict in Southern Thailand,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 28, no. 1 (April 2006), p. 16.

Pembebesan Pattani. It was officially formed in 1968 and led by Tungku Bira Kotanila. PULO is a political organization for the people of Pattani. PULO aims; firstly to unite all active political parties among the people of Pattani against the Thai imperialist and secondly to unite and actively fight for freedom, world liberty against prevalent colonialists, both old and new. PULO has its own history and ideology which constitute a particular political, military, economic order which is most conducive to the hope, custom, and wish of the people of Pattani. PULO placed a greater emphasis on 'Islamic' rather than 'Malay' identity in the conflict. This allowed it to maintain the uppermost hierarchy of its organisation in the holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia and also enlist members and sympathisers during the yearly haj pilgrimage.

Development of the content and form of Muslim politics in Thailand and elsewhere has been influenced by external events. While Islamic resurgence and militancy were on the rise from the 1970s onwards, attempts to mobilize Muslims all over the world for a jihad in one area of the world such as Palestine or Kashmir were unsuccessful until the 1980s. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a turning point, as it revived the concept of participation in jihad to expel an infidel occupier from a Muslim country as a personal duty for every capable Muslim. The success and experience of *mujahidin* in Afghanistan in the late 1980s undoubtedly helped popularize the radical meaning and practice of jihad in many Muslim societies.

At a regional level, the radicalization of Islamist politics worldwide had given birth to new, more radical Islamist movements and parties in Southeast Asia: whereas the Muslim opposition politics of the 1960s and 1970s in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines was led mostly by secular-educated leaders, the 1980s and 1990s witnessed the emergence of more radical movements whose networks were increasingly expanded and ideologies and discourses more heavily colored by the ideas and values of religion.⁴⁹ Even in countries like Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia, where Muslim politics had long been moderate, the 1990s saw efforts by jihadi militants to expand their radical networks.

In southern Thailand since the 1990s, the rise of Islamic radicalism has helped revitalize a flagging separatist movement, which also received a much needed boost from veteran Afghan mujahidin.⁵⁰ The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq

and the continuing presence of foreign troops in many Muslim societies have further radicalized many Muslims in Thailand and increased their awareness of global Muslim grievances. Furthermore, one must say that in this globalization era, the 9/11 incident in the U.S effected globally, including Thailand. The resurgence in violence by Pattani separatist groups began in 2001. Some experts have suggested this occurred under the influence of foreign Islamist groups such as al-Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah, though such connections have never been fully substantiated and remain highly contentious. In other word, the international situation has inflamed the local ones.

Transnationalism is said to directly and indirectly cause and influence this violence in the Southern part of Thailand. The violence takes place under the global trends in which people and their ideas are moving more freely back and forth across global borders than ever before. This ebb and flow, through easy travel and growing communications technology, may be reshaping the traditional concept of a nation. In fact, some people with homes in two countries are showing an amazing capacity to maintain dual identities with strong cultural ties and contributions to both places. One should not ignore the practice of border-crossing and the transnationalisation of social space which involves two or more countries and may, through multiple networks and cultural contact over wide geographical distances, extend to plurilocal spaces, sometimes spanning continents.³³

Moreover, according to the book “Minor Transnationalism”, one should be conscious of the fact that to acknowledge cultural pollution does not mean that one ignores the current trend towards a hardening of minority identity. But one then has to work transversally or horizontally, connecting minorities across nation-states, examining transdiasporic or transcolonial lives, and be aware of the new global multiculturalism.

³³ Alexander Horstmann , “Incorporation and Resistance: Borderlands, Transnational Communities and Social Change in Southeast Asia” (working paper WPTC-02-04, Sociology of Modern Southeast Asia, Research Institute of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2004), <http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working%20papers/WPTC-02-04%20Horstmann.pdf>.

Thailand's active role in the US-led war on terrorism and obtaining the status of a major non-NATO ally has also alienated the Muslims who see the global conflict as a war on Muslims. Some reports suggest that a number of Pattani Muslims have received training at al-Qaida centres in Pakistan. However some believe that the Pattani separatism has little or nothing to do with global jihadism. Others have claimed that the Pattani insurgents have forged links with groups such as the religious-nationalist Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines and the quasi-secular Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in Indonesia.

At first the Thai government blamed the attacks on "bandits," and indeed many outside observers believe that local clan, commercial or criminal rivalries do play some part in the violence in the region. In 2002, the Prime minister has come to regard the insurgency as the local front in the global War on Terrorism. In 2005, Bangkok Senator Sophon Supamong accused the United States of being the mastermind behind bombings in Hat Yai. His accusation was supported by Perayot Rahimmula, Democrat MP and professor at Prince of Songkhla University (Pattani campus). In 2006, Thai Army chief Sonthi Boonyaratglin suggested that former communist insurgents might be playing a role in the unrest. Governors of the southern provinces showed some skepticism over his suggestion, but investigated the connection.

Transnational media and networks also play significant role in the problem of religious violence and struggle, in the sense that "it facilitates the transmission of information independent of distance"³⁴. Globalization builds the new forms of transnational networks. Globalisation creates incentives and opportunities for political entrepreneurs to operate transnationally, focusing on how the mobility of people, capital and ideas provides resources for building new forms of transnational networks.

³⁴ Jon B. Alterman, *New Media New Politics? From Satellite Television to the Internet in the Arab World* (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/print.php?template=C04&CID=2>.

New forms of global communication technologies and the fit between national cultures and territorial spaces becomes more tenuous. Satellite dishes and the internet allow individuals access to the media and information sources of their choice. Viewers around the globe during the war in Iraq could choose to receive their information from a variety of different news providers, whether CNN, the BBC or al-Jazeera.³⁵

It can be concluded in this chapter that the globalization and transnationalism in combination can increase religious conflict at local and international level. For the case of Southern Thailand, most Scholars view that the rebellion groups do not have the linkage with other transnational terrorists but their patterns or styles can be influenced by external transnational groups through the channel of transnational media.

³⁵ Fiona B. Adamson, "Globalization, Transnational Political Mobilisation, and Networks of Violence," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 18, no. 1 (2006), p. 36.