

## CHAPTER VII

### GLOBALIZATION OF ISLAMIC RADICALISM

#### 7.1 Overview of Increased Islamic Consciousness

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, events occurring in the Islamic world such as the Iranian revolution; the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (the “Wars”) have shaken the religious consciousness of Muslims throughout the world. On the technological sphere, stupendous inventions of the instant newswire (particularly the Arabic ones like Al-Jazeera; Al-Arabiya etc) have brought the Palestine-Israeli conflict; the Wars and insurgency in Iraq; the Bali and Jakarta Marriot bombings into the living halls and sitting rooms of Muslims all over the world. Advanced inventions like the mobile telephone have also revolutionized not only communication modes but also enabled wicked acts like ‘trigger-bombs’. With oil wealth, Arabic Muslims have financed education in many parts of the world. Therefore, there is a new zest, a great intensity to live out the virtues and moral messages of Islam in Muslims worldwide. On the other hand, there is also a great consciousness of the injustice suffered by Palestine; Afghan and Iraqi Muslims.

The research questions applicable at this juncture would be: -

- (a) What is this phenomenon of the “awakened Islamic consciousness”?
- (b) What influence does the “awakened Islamic consciousness” have on the Malay Muslims in Southern Thailand and the perpetrators? Why

shouldn't these developments affect the religious consciousness of the Malay Muslims? Is there any valid reason to exclude the Malay Muslims?

(c) What did "The Nation" say about the connectivity between global Islamic extremism and local community?

## **7.2 The New Phenomenon of "Imagination"**

According to Appadurai (1996), migration and the electronic media have transformed the way communities "imagine" themselves and their worlds. The electronic media, newswire; videos provide instant and rapid flows of human history into the privacy of households. These speedy assaults on the "senses" and "reason" leave people to develop new ideas of "imaging" their existence, identities and space. In other words, people's minds are being "de-territorialized". Physical distances no longer restrict people's sentiments and "love" to their physical neighbors and immediate family members. Physical distance also no longer restrains their spiritual unity with fellow "brothers" of the faith.

Specifically, Appadurai noted that Pakistani cabdrivers in Chicago listen to cassettes of sermons recorded in Iranian mosques and Turkish guest workers in Germany watch Turkish films in Germany. These "de-territorialized" viewers no longer bind their emotions and spiritual affiliations within local and national spaces. National borders no longer exclusively command people's loyalties and sentiments.

The second far-reaching impact is that “imagination” is no longer an exclusive activity of the elites but has entered the logic of ordinary folks. The common person now deploys his imagination to his everyday communal life. As such, new images of his identity and neighborhood arise. Such new “imagination” of identities and neighborhood, when it becomes collective, can become agitators for action, be these merciful or charitable missions or “fights” for various causes. Appadurai, being a naturalized Indian American made a case study of the Indians’ emigration.

### **7.3 Islamic Concept of “Ummah”**

Apart from the five Pillars of Faith, a Muslim has three primary duties, that to Allah; the faith bearer’s family particularly parents and relatives; and “ummah”. Under Islamic rules, the Muslims have an understanding of “nation” that is unlike that of Western civilization. To a Muslim, he lives in “ummah”, variously translated as “brotherhood” or “nation” or “universal community”. The concept of “ummah” appears sixty-four times in the Quran (Hassan 2002, pp 85). In its theological context, it referred to co-religionists, fellow human beings, who regardless of nationalities, language or race, professes the same faith, Islam. These co-religionists are “brothers”, emphatically deserving of a Muslim’s love and protection.

Emmanuel Sivan (1985: pp 170) wrote about a survey of students from eight Arab countries carried out at Kuwait University between 1979-81 wherein most respondents, regardless of sex, ranked religion first in their hierarchy of group

affiliation, followed by family, nation-state citizenship, national origin (Arab), and political ideology.

Hassan (2002: pp 99-103) wrote about the results of his empirical research on “ummah” consciousness in Indonesia, Pakistan, Kazakhstan and Egypt wherein 84-91% of respondents (both male and female) pronounced a medium to high degree of their theological consciousness of “ummah”, except Kazakhstan.

According to Hassan, “ummah” has evolved from a purely theological term to an ideological concept with political emphasis. Being so, it becomes a ‘frontier’ term, separating “us” and “them”. Under the ideological “ummah”, Muslims share collective memories of the political grandeur of Islamic history as well as the persecution and oppression of their faith, particularly in the last few centuries by Western political and military domination.

Qutb, an Islamic scholar of the Dar al-Ulum College of Cairo and ideological theologian of the Muslim Brethren (the Cairo-based organization that is deemed the “seed” of radicalized Islam) wrote about the “enmity” of Europe towards Islam :-

“When we speak of the hatred of Islam, born of the Crusading spirit, which is latent in the European mind, we must not let ourselves be deceived by appearances, nor by their pretended respect for freedom of

religion.....There is this deep-seated and inherited hostility to Islam in the European nature itself.” (Qutb (Revised 2000): pp 270-279))

Qutb and the Muslim Brethren berated the then Egyptian regime for having borrowed Western thoughts and customs and for ruthlessly stomping on Islamic values. The Egyptian regime might be Arabic but was deemed un-Islamic. Radical Islam became ideologically a contest between “believers” and “non-believers” (and this would include even Islamic regimes deemed un-Islamic in their puritanical sense).

Sivan reached far back into the 1950’s and also noted Islamic scholars’ tirade then against the intrusion of Western decadence – unbridled individualism, moral decay – into Islamic societies, particularly in the Arabic world. In their opinion, Western modernity was negating Allah’s sovereignty in Islamic lives. They launched, what Hassan, called “jihad by heart” and “jihad by word” – appeals to people’s piety and spiritual struggle for purity and the spreading of Islamic values by education or instruction in order to halt negation. The ‘great struggle’ of the soul against unbelief and vices is the more fundamental nuanced meaning of ‘jihad’ in the Quran. There is also the “jihad by hand” – a pious Muslims’ actions for good against evil in terms of going on a haj (pilgrimage), funding activities for Islam etc.

The Afghan war was a great turning point in Muslims’ fear for the Soviet destruction of their “ummah”. Osama bin Laden, the spiritual leader of the Al-

Qaeda organization was known to be incensed to find American troops in Saudi Arabia. All these Western campaigns were seen as grave intrusions into the “ummah”.

What then are the loyalties of a Muslim to “ummah”? Apart from the five Pillars of Faith, a Muslim has three primary duties, that to Allah; the faith bearer’s family particularly parents and relatives; and “ummah”. To ‘theological’ Muslims, “jihad by heart” and “jihad by word”, both peaceful struggles, are justified in order to bring oneself and fellow believers close to Allah and walk in his path. To those Muslims who uphold the “ideological” notions, “jihad by sword” (the violent struggles taken in self-defense against aggressors and those hostile to Islam) is in order. To these jihadis, loyalty to “ummah” overrides any other ethnic, linguistic and geographical loyalties. Hence, his loyalties to a sovereign state, as understood in the Western civilization sense, lie outside of his religious ambit. He would reach out to his Muslim ‘brothers’ in a global village for help or run to a Muslim brother’s pleas for assistance against aggressors. The Iranian revolution and the Afghan war proved that ‘jihad by hand’ can succeed.

Che Man (1990, pp 161-163) noted that many young Malay Muslims from the southern provinces studied abroad particularly in the Middle Eastern Arabic countries. According to his doctoral research, these large overseas Malay Muslim communities had been a source of finance and manpower for the separatist activities abroad. He had then already observed the transformation of separatist leadership from former Patani aristocrats to the religious elites due to rising Islamic consciousness. These religious elites are contrary to common assumption amongst Thais that the

Malay Muslims generally lack educational motivation. Despite the fact that many international Muslim states do not condone the separatists' objective, they provide tacit support, motivated by the desire to preserve "ummah" and to see that their Muslim brothers are properly treated. It is interesting to note that Kadir Wan Che Man, who obtained his PhD from the Australian National University of Canberra, is now an exiled leader of Bersatu, an umbrella group comprising militants from PULO, New PULO and the Barisan Revolusi Nasional.

A Malaysian government lawmaker, Annuar Musa, was reported by "The Nation" (10 December 2004) as having urged the Kelantan state government to investigate the Malaysian Islamic Welfare Organization because the welfare organization channeled 120,000 ringgit to the rebel group, Pulo, operating in Southern Thailand. If this allegation rings true, it will have a link with Islamic consciousness.

Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), the terrorist group responsible for the Bali and Jakarta Marriot Hotel bombings, also holds the ideological belief that injustices suffered by Afghan, Chechen, Kashmiri and Iraqi Muslims require the struggle of every Muslim (Batley 2003: pp 7).

#### **7.4 Revised "Imagination" of Neighbors in Southern Thailand and Muslims' Ethical Duties to "Neighbors" and "Enemies"**

The next logical question that follows the above thought is : What should then be a Muslim's attitude to his neighbor? In terms of his ethical responsibility to a neighbor, he must do good (Quran 4:36). But who is a "neighbor"?

To the Malay Muslim in Thailand, is a compatriot (a Buddhist countryman or a North-eastern Thai resettled to the South or a Chinese descended from early immigrants) who lives next door, a “neighbor”? In the Malay Muslim’s new “imagination” has the old neighbor become an “enemy” in view of his long-standing grievances against the Thai state? Or is a co-religionist in Malaysia, Pakistan, Indonesia or any member of the Islamic world a “friend” who deserves his good neighborliness more than his physically situated unbelieving (that unIslamic) neighbor?

As we have seen, the new tools for “imagination” can enable Muslims to develop long-distance empathy and sympathy for their brothers in “ummah”. The electronic media enables the “ummah” to synchronize and homogenize sentiments amongst its members. An “imagination”, therefore, has become a “reality”. Would these distant “brothers” implore the Malay Muslim to act against those who are deemed hostile to Islam? In other words, will the new collective identity become an agitator for action against unbelievers who are hostile to Islam? Islam discriminates clearly against those who are hostile to it and enjoins Muslims not to be “good” to them.

“God does not forbid you from being good to those who have not fought you over religion or drive you from your homes, or from being just towards them. God loves those who are just. God merely forbids you from taking as friends those who have fought you over religion and driven you from your homes and who supported your expulsion.



Any who take them as friends are wrongdoers” (Quran 60 :8-9) (Yahya 2003, pp 48).

Hence, the ‘smaller’ defensive jihad-by-sword is compulsory against enemies or transgressors of the faith (Gunaratna 2002: pp 85). “Jihad by sword”, however, is a temporary phase. Jihad must stop when peace is offered : “When the enemy inclines towards peace, incline also to it” (Quran 8:61). There are also firm rules for engagement such as avoiding misappropriating booty; respect pledges of protection, killing of non-combatants unless they fall under the category of conspirators. However, “jihad” has been radicalized when civilians like women and children are transgressed; martyrdom is promised to those who fight infidels at all costs, drop-by bombings are conducted; peaceful gestures are rebuffed. This puritanical interpretation seemed to have superseded Islamic principles of morals and ethics. Hence, some Islamic scholars have rejected the use of jihad but urged the use of “hirabah” – “waging war against society”.

The violence in Southern Thailand has taken a very vicious turn – from shootings to slitting of throats to beheadings. To the militants, it would seem that a ‘neighbor’ has become an ‘enemy’ with evil properties that must be religiously executed.

### **7.5 What Did “The Nation” Say?**

The long discourse from headings 1 to 4 is really my attempt to provide some strands of theological insight regarding the question of “connectivity” in “The Nation”’s opinion report on the 22 November 2004 :-

“The ongoing violence in the Muslim-majority South has Thailand’s intelligence community in above their heads as they try desperately to get a better understanding of this generation’s insurgents, who appear to be inspired by Islam as much as long-standing resentment towards the Buddhist state. But as they flip through the pages of books on Islam to see if there is any connectivity between the insurgency in the South and the religion that is embraced by one billion people worldwide, another Army or police unit is fired upon or a phone call goes....”

A thorough reading of the paper’s editorials, opinions and daily reports clearly shows that “The Nation” is certain that Islam has a bearing on the conflict – there is some connectivity. My detailed analysis is set out in Appendix X.

A short summary, however, of the main ideas are provided here :

Date	Summary of Idea
29 Oct 2004	The Thai state is advised not to take lightly the possibility of international Islamic militant groups joining forces with their local counterparts to widen the conflict beyond the three provinces.
3 Nov 2004	In both the Krue Se and Tak Bai incidents, the instigators seemed to be young and religious language was used to rally Muslims.
7 Nov 2004	Too much materialism, politics, economics but too little spirituality has been used by the state to solve the problem. There is an inability to perceive the subtle issues pervading the Islamic mindsets.  Ministry of Interior’s survey of 17,000 residents indicated that differences in ethnicity, religious beliefs, cultural and historical reasons were the root causes.
15 Nov 2004	No evidence has been found that foreign militants are involved on the ground but a link (in a uncertain form) with Islamic militancy is certain.
22 Nov 2004	Many Malay Muslims receive funding for education at overseas Islamic learning centers. The Prime Minister appealed for these overseas countries to help to ensure that funding is not misused and students are not taught deviationist teachings. This generation of militants seemed inspired by Islam.
8 Dec 2004	The Office of Chularatchamontri, the state’s highest Islamic authority, issued a white paper to ‘correct’ distorted Islamic teachings contained in documents seized from militants, who had used them for recruitment purposes.

14 Dec 2004	“The Nation”s’ editorial opined that the violence is a domestic problem but the stage has been set for international intervention by foreign groups.
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Short of an empirical study, “The Nation” would not be able to show the direct connectivity between Islam and the insurgency. My research on aspects of “imagination”, Islam and Islamic developments is to augment and advance the strands of “connectivity” between Islam and the violence.

If the cumulative local grievances against the Thai state are ‘push’ factors, then the attractiveness of ‘ummah’ is the ‘pull’ factor for the Malay Muslims to reach out to their co-religionists. The successful “jihad by sword” campaigns in Iran and Afghanistan could be a source of inspiration to the armed perpetrators. The “ummah” could possibly provide both financial and spiritual support for the militants’ campaign against the state.

Even though the “connectivity” between globalized Islam and the violence could not be clearly established by evidence, it stands on a reasonable theological basis. By virtue of the concept of “ummah”, overseas Islamic communities must respond to the situation in Southern Thailand. Peaceful responses, offering of prayers; and “jihad by word” via education or preaching on human brotherhood (viz-a-viz Islamic brotherhood) and love for peace are valid. The grain of doubt is about violent struggles in “jihad by sword” - its correct interpretation; its inter-play with other provisions of the Quran on peace, justice, enmity, respect and love for human brotherhood and not only Muslim brotherhood etc.

It is noteworthy, however, to highlight 3 key points developed by “The Nation”. Firstly, the conflict cannot be resolved without international help from moderate Islamic countries. Secondly, that Thailand should spruce up its preparations against violent attacks outside of the 3 provinces. Thirdly, “The Nation” wrote a long editorial on the efforts by the Office of the Chularatchamontri, Thailand’s top Muslim leader, to correct the false teachings of Islamic militants. “The Nation” applauded this attempt by moderate Muslims to promote peace but decried that more could be done. This editorial clearly presupposes some connectivity between Islam and the violence.

As the Ministry of Interior’s survey indicated that religious tensions is one of the root cause of the conflict, my research turns the newspaper issues back to a suggestion that an Islamic affairs ministry is needed to defuse the conflict. This was reported in the 16 November publication and the suggestion came from a senior education inspector.

In conclusion, to solve the conflict, the authorities and the nation must come to grips with Islam, its preachers and its followers. If radical Islam is heretical, then only Islamic religious authorities, which unfortunately have no strict central clerical hierarchy like the Roman Catholic Church, can wage an ideological war against the militants. The State must work with the Malay Muslim community and their local religious leaders to resolve religious interpretations of ‘jihad’; ‘neighbors’; ‘enemies’; martyrdom; and ethical duties to civilians and the nation-state.