

Defending Borders: States and Nation-States in the ASEAN 5

William Case

Abstract

Discontent simmers within social science over states and nation-states as units of analysis. Disputes over what even constitutes a state, whether simply an organizational apparatus, albeit with unique legitimacy, or a broader complex of social relations, have never been resolved. But it is not just its murky delineation with which the state is afflicted. It has lately come under attack from above and below, with causality seen to be draining away to transnational and sub-national forces. This paper begins by rehearsing the economic and social vectors along which assaults on the state and the nation-state are conveyed. It then turns to Southeast Asia, a part of the developing world in which the state would seem especially vulnerable, its powers having been usurped by transnational firms and corroded internally by connected rent-seekers and provincial “men of prowess.” However, this paper tries also to show that in Southeast Asia, national states and territorial borders have remained quite intact. Neither globalized markets, regional formations, local identity construction, administrative decentralization or migration have shaken the standing of the state and the nation-state as appropriate units of analysis. This is especially the case when addressing major questions about regime types and change in the region.

KEYWORDS: states, nation-states, borders, regimes, regime change, Southeast Asia, ASEAN 5

INTRODUCTION

DISCONTENT SIMMERS WITHIN SOCIAL science over states as units of analysis. Questions posed by scholars over what even constitutes a state, whether simply an organizational apparatus, albeit with unique claims to legitimacy, a bounded territory infused with sovereignty, or a broader complex of socio-economic relations and dominance (Hewison *et al.* 1993), have never been resolved. But it is not just unclear conceptualization with which the notion of states is afflicted. In real terms, whatever its guise, the state is widely viewed as having come under withering attack from transnational forces, therein leaking causal and analytical importance from above and below.

This paper is reflective in tone, rather than driven by new research. Its aim is mainly to recount the social and economic vectors along which transnational

assaults on the state are conveyed, then demonstrate the state's resilience. In doing this, the state is understood in two principal ways, as a governing apparatus and as a sovereign territory, in essence a conventional nation-state. Further, it focuses analysis on Southeast Asia, for it is in this region that the state would seem especially vulnerable. Southeast Asia's most developed countries, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore - often denominated as the "ASEAN 5" - are given particular attention, as their states are so exposed to the intense globalization of urban nodes, investment patterns, and labour and tourist markets. Other countries in the region are also addressed, however, for they too may be buffeted by sundry transnational currents.

Large, but often ramshackle, its offices unsupported by adequate taxes, yet beset by rent-seekers, the state apparatus in Southeast Asia has long been regarded as feeble at the top, shorn of bureaucratic insulation and policy coherence (MacIntyre 1994). Further, at its base, the state has been undermined by "men of prowess" (Sidel 1999) - big men, warlords, godfathers, and bosses who, at the intersection of local officialdom and gangster networks, tear at its administrative fabric with their gunmen, militias, and private armies in far flung provinces. And more widely, the state as an apparatus and sovereign territory has been tested by myriad ethnic and regional identities, crystallizing in communal pressures and militant separatist movements.

Thus, with the state in Southeast Asia bloated at its peak, vitiated at its base, and frayed at its territorial edges, it would seem ripe for dissolution by transnational forces, therein diminishing its real-world and analytical centrality. In Southeast Asia, many economies have deeply integrated into the global economy, with corporate and finance capital flooding in, then draining quickly away. These scantily regulated flows disrupt state planning, transfigure local bourses and workplaces, and revise class structures. They also haul away corporate profits, capital gains, and non-renewable resources. Running in low parallel, we find cross-border movements of large numbers of people, drawn by work opportunities and resettlement possibilities, or driven by criminal gangs of human traffickers. Their unmoderated migrations violate the sovereignty of territorial boundaries. And the new languages, religions, and other markers that they contain disturb the national and sub-national cultures that they encounter, either by subtly weaving new strands into indigenous patterns of identity or setting off sharp confrontations with local communities. Either way, bases for loyalty between the state and its steadily more diversified and irruptive societies grow strained, further eroding its capacity and control. Still more damaging is the probing by militant Islamists in the region, silently passing through borders, cultivating local favour, then flaring up to confront the state violently. And amid the intensification in demands for shari'a law and a cross-national caliphate that follows, the state is challenged profoundly in its role as the guarantor of its citizens' security and as even the rightful locus of policy making.

In the Global North, where the politics and economies of countries have grown regionalized, the state has indeed ceded much control over national

organization and territorial circumscription. But in Southeast Asia, analysis will demonstrate that states and the borders within which they reside, though having been much more recently constructed, show greater resilience. Thus, notwithstanding their incipience, often marked by callow bureaucracies and non-hierarchical militaries, countries in Southeast Asia also feature political elites who, in making calculations about how most efficiently to perpetuate their statuses, have remained unswerving in their commitments to the modern state apparatuses and the nation-state models that they inherited through colonial rule. And using such levers as they command, these elites have since weathered the transnational challenges that have been mounted from on high and from below through globalized markets, regional formations, administrative decentralization, autonomous identity constructions, migratory influxes, and terrorist attacks. Indeed, where concessions or outright retreats might seem to have been made by elites, we find that on close analysis they are better understood as tactical adjustments, either deflecting challenges or effectively buying time.

However, one area in which elites in Southeast Asia have been episodically back footed involves pressures for democratic change, overwhelming governments and the regimes that they operates in the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia, while gathering force periodically in Malaysia and Myanmar. New literature has appeared that highlights the weightiness of external variables (e.g. Levitsky and Way 2010). But even on this count, we will see that while political elites in Southeast Asia have perhaps dealt less handily with these pressures for political change than with other challenges, the transitions that have sometimes resulted have been predominantly homegrown in their dynamics and, in important ways, finally rolled back. Accordingly, the state's resilience as a governing apparatus is signalled again by the continuities in many elite statuses.

The sections below address the transnational threats to states as governing apparatuses and sovereign territories in Southeast Asia. Analysis begins by evaluating the impact of foreign investors, probably the most potent manifestation of globalization. It turns next to the effects of migrant workers. After demonstrating that the state has withstood these challenges to its organization and space, analysis focuses on political regimes and democratic transitions. On this count, change has surely been greater, yet still limited. Dynamics have been driven far more by internal than transnational forces, and they have been blunted by the recovery of many pre-democratic elites. Accordingly, the state in Southeast Asia remains the central unit of analysis.

TRANSNATIONALIZATION AND FOREIGN INVESTORS

Though in the mid-17th century the dimensions of the nation-state were formalized, it was during the 19th and 20th centuries that societies were resolutely “stamped by processes of nation-building and nationalism” (Pries 2001: 16).

But we are reminded that borders and frontiers, though frequently held sacred, only exist as human constructs (Pries 2001: 3). As such, the “nation-state-bounded containers” that were forged appear vulnerable to transnational actors and forces. In particular, as globalization has proceeded, foreign investors and cross-national migrants have shaken state apparatuses and penetrated borders. States, in striving to bolster their economies, have themselves advanced these processes, courting investment flows while winking at rivulets of illegal migration.

Waves of foreign direct investment in Southeast Asia emanated first from Japan during the 1960s–70s, then from other countries in Northeast Asia, North America, and Europe (Bernard and Ravenhill 1995). Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia were initially favoured destinations, followed more recently by Vietnam, Cambodia, and at present, by Myanmar. On the heels of deeply penetrative investment in consumer electronics assembly, garments, pharmaceuticals, and automobile parts, Western governments and banking institutions prized open Southeast Asia’s capital markets, thus ushering in vast portfolio investment. Accordingly, during the 1980s–90s, many countries in the region came to generate breakneck records of industrial expansion, though punctuated by heart-stopping financial shocks.

In ways that were unseen or ignored by the state, economies in Southeast Asia grew distorted by overinvestment in manufacturing, property and equities, and a commensurate overvaluation of their currencies. Societies were transfigured in the region by the debut of the ‘new rich’ (Robison and Goodman 1996), often ethnic Chinese who, while distinguished by business acumen, but confronted by cultural suspicions, forged hidden conduits to national political elites (Studwell 2007). A new middle class appeared, heavily urbanized and, in maritime Southeast Asia, increasingly Islamicized (Embong 2002). And gendered ranks of factory workers gathered in free trade zones and development corridors. In this context, some globalization theorists contended that the state was sapped of its power, as effective decisional authority slipped from national capitals to faraway nodes of corporate and financial control (e.g. Ohmae 1994). It also gravitated to newly energised social categories whose members, at least at topmost socioeconomic levels, felt greater affinity with their counterparts in other national settings than with their increasingly distant countrymen in suburban terrace houses and factory dormitories.

Debates are longstanding over whether foreign investors or the governments of host countries have the upper hand. Dependency theorists once argued that governments in developing countries gain little from foreign direct investment in terms of new technology transfer, tax revenues or meaningful employee training. Thus, in submitting to the transnationalism that erodes its borders and exposes its markets, the state sells itself cheaply, diminishing its power and its worth as a unit of analysis. But Singapore shows how, especially during its critical transition to capital-intensive manufacturing and services during the 1970, the

state might by sufficiently strengthening its regulatory power attract a field of investors from which selectively to recruit (Rodan 1989). Rather than wilting, then, before any invidious trade-offs, the state in Singapore, in building capacity, drew foreign investors that conformed to its strategies of industrial targeting. Indeed, part of its approach involved the government's National Wages Council ordering a sharp rise in wage rates during the mid-1970s, swiftly replacing garment and textile makers with higher value-added producers of machinery and pharmaceuticals. In Malaysia, after helping pioneer a free trade zone strategy during the early 1970s through which effectively to exploit, but also to delimit foreign investment in export manufactures, the government embarked during the next decade on a national car project. And after finding that Mitsubishi, its overseas partner, was reluctant to transfer new technologies, the government recruited yet another partner, Daihatsu, deftly strengthening its leverage through a second national car project (Jayasankaran 1993). In New Order Indonesia, the government steadily issued contracts for infrastructure projects to foreign firms. But even if less committed to building autonomous capacity with which to further development than to pursuing lucrative rents, one is struck by the terms that President Suharto was able to impose on foreign investors in order to enrich his family. As Jan van de Fliert (2001: 29) succinctly observes, "...one way the Suharto clan [made] money [was] by being an agent for foreign firms." Thus, he records that in allocating telecommunications contracts during the 1990s, eldest daughter Tutut's company partnered with Motorola, eldest son Sigt's with Mitsui, and second son Bambang's with Hughes, Deutsche Telecom, and Siemens. Thus, even if it could be shown that the state's power was compromised by its admission of massive inflows of foreign investors and firms, it retained a pivotal role, determining the amounts, sites, and participants in the many deals that were struck.

It is difficult, then, to see how during this period globalization and transnationalism, whatever their transformative properties, might have diminished the state's power and analytical worth. But, if the state remained unruffled by massive inflows of investment, what about capital flight? Here, we recall the financial crisis, contagion, and herd effects which, in reverberating throughout the region during the late 1990s, led to the ousting of the government in Thailand, the upsurge of a potent social movement in Malaysia, and a violent process of authoritarian collapse and leadership transfer in Indonesia (Haggard 2000; Pempel 1999). But if states in Thailand and Indonesia turned humbly to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for help, Malaysia rebuffed the IMF's embrace in order to impose capital controls, anchored firmly by a currency peg and an asset management agency, but more distinctively hallmarked by restrictions on even foreign portfolio investors repatriating their capital returns (Kaplan and Rodrik 2002; Pepinsky 2010). In addition, though despairing briefly over the bankruptcy of many of the indigenous entrepreneurs who, under the country's quotas and programs of reverse discrimination had been

puffed up into a coterie of favoured “Malay millionaires” (Gomez 2003), the state simply re-nationalized the assets that had been privatized, sooner than letting them slip at low cost to local Chinese or foreign investors. The Malaysian case thus illustrates well how economic shocks, while sometimes so constraining states that decision making is ceded to cross-national organizations, they in other instances rouse states from their complacency.

But even beyond imposing capital controls and re-nationalizing assets, some states in the region extended these measures to new levels of dirigisme. Taking its cue from Singapore’s longtime operation of sovereign wealth funds, Temasek and Government Investment Corporation, Malaysia’s government, while selling some of the assets it had acquired after the crisis, injected many others into its respective sovereign wealth fund, Khazanah Holdings (Agung 2007). More generally, in adopting the labelling used in neighbouring Singapore, Malaysia rebadged its state-owned enterprises as GLCs (Government-linked Corporations), then set out to revitalize them. Vietnam too has gathered its state-owned enterprises under a government holding company, the State Capital Investment Corporation (Agung 2007), formed in 2005.

In Thailand, though a more liberal tradition ensured at first that many of the assets of now bankrupt business groups fell to foreign investors (Natenapha 2008), policies were later reordered during Thaksin Shinawatra’s prime minister-ship in ways that amounted to new forms of state intervention. Thailand never approached the levels of state ownership attained in Singapore and Malaysia. But the state did begin to discriminate against foreign bidders on infrastructure projects. Indeed, through processes that Thanee and Pasuk (2008: 259) conceptualize as “policy corruption”, large concessions in telecommunications, media, and property were steered regularly to firms controlled by Thaksin himself. In addition, through cheap health care programs, rural debt moratoriums, and village development funds, the state famously energized mass-level loyalties across the countryside (Montesano 2002).

States in Southeast Asia also affirmed their power by preparing for additional financial shocks. Initially, in seeking an alternative to the IMF, perceived as primarily in the service of the West, they took a regional approach. Thus, under the Chiang Mai Initiative inaugurated in 2000 Southeast Asian countries agreed on currency swap lines and credits, enabling those whose currencies came under pressure to draw upon a pool of foreign reserves (Eichengreen 2003). However, for states to avail themselves of this scheme, though likely summoning less onerous conditionalities than those imposed by the IMF, they would nonetheless have incurred obligations that risked leaking decisional autonomy to a new multilateral body. On this count, we recall more broadly that the key to the persistence of ASEAN’s regionalism has been codes of consensus and mutual veto that tread only lightly on the prerogatives of its members (Narine 2008). Thus, while uplifting governments whose economies were stressed, the advance in cooperation that the Chiang Mai Initiative marked would also

expose them to political pressures from others over a widening range of issues. We are not surprised, then, to find that since its inception, no country has made use of the Chiang Mai Initiative's facilities. Indeed, the scheme's lack of urgency is declared by its signatories requiring a decade of negotiating before even adopting it.

Hence, in guarding against any cession of autonomy, states as governing apparatuses have sooner displayed new vigilance in avoiding the conditions that bring downward pressures on their currency pegs. Specifically, in defending, indeed heightening their power, governments have managed their trading relations in ways that have vastly enhanced their foreign currency reserves. More than gaining in unilateral capacity to prop up their respective currencies when pressured, they have grown able to resuscitate local markets when exports have faded. Thus, in responding to the financial crisis in 2007–2009 that has so roiled the West, governments in Southeast Asia have partially broken from the trade dependency with which they have long been lumbered, launching internal stimulus measures. Within the region, Malaysia took the lead, increasing the spending on infrastructure that had only been partly resumed after the earlier financial crisis (Channelnewsasia 2009).

In sum, transnational forces, though arriving from on high, have not in any substantial way eroded the organizational coherence and power of the state in Southeast Asia. Whether coping with capital inflows or flight, states have adapted in ways that have perpetuated their apparatuses and affirmed their territorialities. If anything, in subscribing to the highly selective liberalization modelled by China and embodied in the so-called Beijing Consensus, enabling them to manage their currency valuations, invigorate state-owned enterprises, and modulate exports and domestic markets, they have better defined, indeed fortified their power and the territorial ramparts behind which they operate.

TRANSNATIONALIZATION AND MIGRANT WORKERS

More than transforming economies, it is in altering identities that transnational forces are held to challenge state power. In resetting the expectations to which governments have long responded, these forces strain traditional loyalties. To be sure, transnationalism does this from above, with investment flows converting some local managers, accountants, and engineers into the functionaries of multinational corporations, therein attuning them to new power centres, status structures, and professional norms. But the orientations of many villagers are equally transmuted as they are uprooted from rice paddies and fishing grounds and posted to factory places and assembly lines. But notwithstanding the startling spatial and attitudinal shifts that result, traditional outlooks are heavily revised, but not wholly transposed. Indeed, changed trajectories may be countered by undercurrents of cultural revivalism, made manifest in the Malaysia context by such constructions

as the ‘new Malays’ (Melayu baru), ‘Towering Malays’, and ‘new Chinese’ (Cina baru). Hence, with countervailing forces at work the net changes in sentiment that take place within a particular community demarcated by nationalist allegiances, formal borders, and citizenship may remain modest enough that states can retain or regenerate constituent fealties by reordering their appeals and programmatic resources.

Thus, it is when new cohorts of migrants breach the container of the nation-state that in their outer world conditioning, they awaken the nativist assumptions of the citizens with whom they now compete. Theorists of trans-nationalization thus focus closely on the challenges that through migratory flows are delivered from below, hence attesting to shakiness of the state, the porosity of borders, and the now unregulated production of social identities. Accordingly, writes Stephen Castles (2000), as migrants take root, but look back upon their places of origin with cultural longings, they gather in ‘trans-national communities.’

In this way, Castles (2000) continues, the “controllability of difference” is eroded. Seeking to maintain its grip over the people whom it rules within the borders that it asserts, the state first reacts by trying to exclude migrants, admitting them into lowly sectors of work, but denying them political rights, welfare, and even the security of permanent residence. But states must also reproduce the loyalties of their citizens. To do this, they may democratize politics, respect human rights, and systematize welfare benefits. And in these circumstances, entrepreneurial migrants are able gradually to better their conditions. Further, they are aided in this by citizens who have internalized liberal values. At the same time, the state patrols its borders less stringently, finally opening the door even for family reunion. It then falls back on managerial strategies of passive assimilation, even multiculturalism, wagering respectively that social difference will abate or remain encapsulated. But as Castles shows next, such “myths” are quickly dispelled, leaving the state steadily more challenged in its efforts to manage the migrants, transnational communities, and diasporas that at most offer up semi-loyalty.

This schematic drawn by Castles may be borne out in the Global North. But in Southeast Asia, the state adheres rigorously still to strategies of exclusion. Indeed, they defend their borders far more effectively today than in the colonial past. In operating extractive economies, authorities in territories labelled as British Malaya, for example, recruited vast numbers of migrants from southern China and South Asia to serve as labourers and artisans (Armstrong *et al.* 2001; Purcell 1951; Reid 1996; Sandhu and Mani 1993; Suryadinata 1997). They then ceded control over these workers to compatriot “captains” and headmen. By the late 1930s, ethnic Chinese formed a majority in the Straits Settlements and the Malayan protectorate. Colonial authorities in the Netherlands East Indies likewise recruited Chinese, although on a proportionately smaller scale. In British Burma, the administrative capital of Rangoon grew populated predominantly by migrants from Bengal (Tinker 1990). The

Kingdom of Thailand, though avoiding formal colonization, permitted large numbers of Chinese to open new rice lands on the central plains. And while less actively recruited, Chinese also migrated in large numbers to the Philippines, even gathering in the groups that spearheaded the country's independence movement.

But with decolonization and the formation of nation-states, new political elites defended their borders with greater ardour. Indeed, claims made on one another's territory led to skirmishing and even minor invasions during the 1960s, some of them fuelled with irredentist desire to reincorporate dispersed ethnic communities. Thus, while near equilibrium was reached within the region's claims over territorialities by the 1980s, states continued to guard jealously the borders that had been sketched by colonial powers. And yet, for many of the same economic reasons by which colonial officials had earlier been guided, political elites continued to seek out migrant workers. However, in formal and informal ways, they regulated entry more closely, shrewdly modulating its impact on the state and nation-state.

This transnational sourcing of workers has been most vigorously undertaken in Singapore. And its government's treatment of at least some categories of migrants has come to parallel that of the Global North. Specifically, in enlarging its small pool of skilled labour in order to keep its position in the global economy, Singapore seeks talent from overseas for its financial industries, sophisticated manufacturing sectors and bio-technology laboratories (Iredale 2000). And far from excluding the migrants who are selected, the state holds out the prospect of permanent residence, even citizenship, while informally adopting receptive strategies that meld assimilation with multiculturalism. Threads of Western, South Asian, and Southeast Asian culture thus colour inner-city business premises, places of entertainment, and prime residential areas. But the state has little fear that its permitting difference to flourish will feed back in any direct way to weaken its apparatus or borders. This category of migrants remains sated and hence, politically disabled by earnings and conditions so superior to their place of origin or earlier postings that in their contentment, they mainly lend new forms of support to the state. To be sure, a few such migrants are so negatively charged by their exposure to Singapore's authoritarian controls and vacuous lifestyle, habitually dismissed as 'superficial' and 'sterile', that they vent discontents, especially through academic or journalistic outlets. But no matter how stealthily posed, their critiques soon summon the controls against which they rail, made manifest in lapsed contracts and defamation suits that force swift expulsion or withdrawal.¹

Thus, it is only obliquely that the state's power in Singapore may be undermined, with the generous terms extended to globally recruited migrants

¹The travails of the academic economist, Christopher Lingle, at the hands of the Singapore government in 1994 are well-documented. See *The Economist* (1994).

commensurately deepening the resentments of local citizens who, amid steepened competition for positions and residences, feel overlooked in job placement and disadvantaged by price inflation. But so long as sufficient numbers of local aspirants find accommodation in Singapore's reliably expanding, though hierarchical economic order, the voice of those who fall by the way is easily muted.

At lesser levels, the state in Singapore treats the migrants that are drawn to its building sites, workshops, road maintenance, and maid services in more ordinary ways, ensuring that migrants remain rootless. Day workers return by the causeway to Peninsular Malaysia each evening; domestic helpers fret over the brevity of their contracts and threat of expulsion (Huang and Yeoh 1999); over-stayers are jailed, caned, and fined. In sum, through its intense globalization, Singapore has attracted great inflows of migrants. But if at exalted occupational levels a transnational community diffuse in its origins has been permitted to cohere, it poses little threat to the might of the state. To the contrary, in its felt appreciation and economic contribution, it offers the state apparatus that oversees its employment and the island borders that ensure its security new forms of approval and surpluses.

In neighbouring Malaysia, the state mimics Singapore's approach, though, operates with less purposive policy intensity. Hence, the scope that it extends to professionally skilled migrants in the economy's globalized sectors, though significant in finance and resource extraction, remains much narrower. Its skilled migrants more bitterly whisper their contempt for the government, especially over its Islamist commitments and "pro-Malay" quotas. They also have far fewer prospects for permanent residence and virtually none for citizenship. Whatever their grievances, then, that reinforce their sense of alien identity, the state in Malaysia finds them easy to contain.

But more damaging might be the unskilled migrants who, despite Malaysia's middle-income standing, still flock from Indonesia, the Philippines, Myanmar, and South Asia to gather in construction, rubber tapping, oil palm harvesting, and lowly urban services. Many of these workers, especially Muslims from Indonesia and the southern Philippines, share strong cultural and phenotypical markers with local Malays, allowing them partial assimilation. Many also arrive undocumented, then burrow into the local economy's informal interstices, seemingly placing them beyond regulation. Accordingly, in their robust transnationalism, bridging indigenous and external identities, they might seem potently to resist the state's control over social forces and its maintenance of borders.

Yet it is precisely because they lack legal footing that the labour provided by migrants can be so readily be exploited by local employers, withholding wages that are already low or by summoning officials in order abruptly to terminate positions (Jones 2000). At the same time, the state with which these employers are at least structurally in cahoots turns a blind eye to the inflow of these migrants. Indeed, there is evidence that officials in the security forces and immigration department, in responding to more personal incentives, facilitate migrant

sojourns, taking payment from human traffickers who staff the country's sex marts and sites of forced labour (Case 2010: 408). Thus, while more strongly defending borders than the colonial state did, officials do this in part because, in reproducing a logic of extortion, they enhance the returns on migrants whose statuses are kept illicit. Casual, often abusive, enforcement is thus left to Malay vigilantes, loosely organized as the People's Volunteer Corps (RELA) (Hedman 2008; NTS Alert 2010). Initially set up to combat Communists during the 1960s, RELA is now more than half-a-million strong. Hence, while the state finally deports few of the migrants who are apprehended by RELA, its recruitment of Malays into this organization aids it in the strengthening of constituent loyalties and the suppression of difference. It thus bolsters the state as an apparatus and territory, even while preserving influxes of low-cost labour.

But more than economic incentives, the state finds political advantage in consenting tacitly to inflows of Muslim migrants. With borders so much more permeable under the colonial state than under the contemporary nation-state, the steady migration of Chinese and Indians that the British encouraged forged the transnational communities of which Castles writes. Indeed, Chinese migrants replicated in Malaya the sociopolitical cleavages of the mainland, with Kuomintang supporters pitted against Communist adherents. But if the Chinese community grew divided, it gained in vitality and unity when, through post-War dislocation, and later rapid urbanization, it entered collectively into steadily more competitive, sometimes violent dynamics with the Malays. Accordingly, since decolonization, the new state, dominated by the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), has calibrated migration in ways that have redressed what it perceives as the imbalances created by colonial overseers. Specifically, rather than fully throwing open its borders, as the colonial state had nearly done, or shutting them tightly, the post-colonial state has taken a semi-formalized discriminatory approach. Thus, it has often turned a blind eye to the quiet influxes of Muslims from Indonesia and the Philippines. Despite their having no claim to indigene status under the modern day terms of the nation-state, they share such cultural markers with those whose indigenesness is celebrated that the state can count upon them to bolster the demographic hegemony of the Malays over local Chinese and Indians, negatively branded as a "non-Malay" residual. But the state, more than relying on gradual assimilation to smoothen such Indonesian and Filipino edges as migrants still bore, has sometimes granted political rights in order to maximize the benefits of their presence. Though not carried out in any systematic way, local officials in the state of Sabah, for example, have granted national identity cards and hence, voting privileges to Filipino migrants prior to elections (Chin 1994).

Thus, while these migrants acquire the dual identities and sets of loyalties that hallmark transnational communities, officials have remained confident that the ballots they cast bolster the majorities of the incumbent UMNO-centred state government over the parties that oppose it, demarcated as local Chinese

or indigenous Kadazan-Dusun. We see, then, that the state, in gaining strength from the new loyalties displayed by Muslim migrants from the Philippines, remains undiminished by transnationalism. To the contrary, the state fortifies its apparatus and its borders by selectively *lowering* its borders. It thus better controls difference by summoning new, more manageable differences. In its capacity, then, to reconfigure societal dynamics by filtering in migrants with deliberateness and design, the state in Malaysia demonstrates a resilience and self-renewal of which much transnational theorizing remains oblivious.

At the same time, where migrants bring few economic or socio-political benefits, arriving instead as refugees or asylum seekers, the state again demonstrates muscularity by often expelling them. Malaysia and Thailand have been the major receiving countries of refugees in Southeast Asia. And constrained only lightly by the human rights conventions and legal protections that generally prevail in the Global North, the state in Malaysia has harshly treated refugees who have entered its waters and crossed its borders. During the 1970s–80s, ships bearing refugees from Vietnam were on many occasions re-provisioned by Malaysia's navy, then towed back to sea in a “pushback” campaign (Hedman 2008), a stunning repudiation of the globalization that had begun during these years to accelerate. Refugees who made it to shore were interned in brutal, prison-like conditions either on coastal islands or on the Malaysian peninsula, there to wait interminably for resettlement in the more thoroughly transnationalist West. In Thailand too, though episodically democratic, the state has deported Khmer refugees and Hmong hills “tribes”, while quarantining refugees from Burmese minority groups in border camps which, though accessible by United Nations officials, pose wretched conditions. Indeed, it is less the Thai state that is threatened by the transnationalism of the border camps than it is the border camps by the transnationalism of Burmese security forces, their operatives entering on missions of abduction and killing (Bowles 1998). But even more viciously, the state in Thailand has defended its borders by also forcing ships laden with Vietnamese and Rohingya refugees back to sea, often after disabling their engines in order seemingly to ensure their drowning (Holliday 2009).

In sum, while migration activity pulses throughout Southeast Asia, receiver countries are limited in their numbers to Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Brunei. But even among the main sender countries of Indonesia, the Philippines, and Myanmar, though migrants outflows are large, state power is unscathed. Though hardly wanting the citizens upon whom they make claims to decline in numbers, officials find compensation in the exit payments, associational fees, and remittances made by migrants who, in their transnationalization, retain ties to their consulates and kinship groups. Indeed, it was Ferdinand Marcos, the Philippines' most centralizing executive, who after institutionalizing the country's trade in “domestic helpers”, then made remittances compulsory (Siracusa and Acacio 2004).

POLITICAL REGIMES AND TRANSITIONS

Transnational threats to state power and national borders, posed from above by foreign investors and from below by migrant workers, have been ably managed, even cunningly exploited by states in Southeast Asia. States have screened foreign investors in ways that have increased their power and hastened economic expansion. And spared the constraints posed by strong rule of law and human rights treaties, they have selectively assimilated or bluntly repulsed migrants, therein firming their social bases. It is difficult to show, then, that the state's capacity to manage difference in Southeast Asia has been eroded by transnationalism.

But one important way in which states have been shaken in Southeast Asia involves the democratization of their regimes through processes of popular upsurge. Political regimes can be defined as the "organization, exercise, and transfer of executive power" (Higley and Burton 1989: 17). As such, they must not be regarded as part of the state, but instead as an ensemble of procedures by which top policymaking positions in the state apparatus are attained and used. In Southeast Asia, regime types famously display great diversity. And while most can be plotted along an authoritarian spectrum, democratic change has in some cases taken place. Further, where this has occurred, quite in contrast to the transitions that have unfolded in Europe, Latin America, and Northeast Asia, adhering to routes that were classically illuminated by Samuel Huntington (1991) as top-down transformation or laterally negotiated "trans-placements", it has been instigated in Southeast Asia by popular forces. Irrespective, then, of the kind of authoritarianism that had existed, bottom-up processes of replacement have erupted, driven by protean coalitions of students, lawyers and journalists, NGO activists, religious figures, and urban workers. Thus, while originating in different conditions and varying in fine dynamics (Boudreau 2004), the region's most recent transitions have involved "people power" in Manila in 1986, the street-level confrontation of Black May in Bangkok in 1992, and student processions and mob rioting in Jakarta in 1998. Moreover, even if failing to complete transitions to democracy, mass-based pressures in Myanmar in 1988 prompted the military government to hold elections two years later, while potent social movements in Malaysia led to the opposition's making great gains in elections in 1999 and 2008. And democratization may again be on the march in both these country cases today.

Thus, in the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia, with governments left reeling and political regimes democratized, how much of the blow delivered through popular upsurge might have been nurtured overseas, then ignited by transnational forces? And how much might the state as apparatus have in consequence been changed? External factors were traditionally placed by transitologists at the bottom of the list of what seemed crucial in precipitating democratic change. But in observing how countries in southern and eastern Europe and Latin America appeared to democratize in concert, Huntington

(1991) wrote of diffusion and demonstration effects that he labelled as “snowballing.” More recently, Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way (2010) have shown how “linkage” to the Global North, involving geographic proximity, colonial legacies, asymmetrical economic and security relations, media penetration, education and tourism markets, and cultural resonance, can better democracy’s prospects. In particular, they contend that

“...by blurring the distinction between the international and the domestic, and by converting international norms into domestic demands, linkage generates democratizing pressure that is more systematic, and often more effective, than the punitive measures taken by Western powers.” (Levitsky and Way 2005: 33)

Levitsky and Way provide numerous illustrations, including Mexico, Serbia, and Taiwan, where linkage aided local elements in advancing democratic transitions.

However, in Southeast Asia, notwithstanding a prevailing pattern of bottom-up replacement, activists have scarcely learned much from their counterparts in closely neighbouring countries. Only in Malaysia during the late 1990s, when social forces were galvanized by Indonesia’s “reformasi” groundswell, can any such diffusion be detected. But even in this case, Malaysia failed ultimately to replicate Indonesia’s progress, thereby sooner contributing to the remarkable diversity of regime types for which the region is better known than to any homogenizing wave.

But if countries in Southeast Asia have failed to learn from one another in ways that have advanced democratization, what about pressures that emanate through linkage to the Global North? As Levitsky and Way acknowledge, the density of military and economic relations between Southeast Asia and the world’s most developed countries have thinned over time. And though the United States still has ties with Singapore based on educational exchanges and common consumer tastes, and with the Philippines based on colonial legacies, migrant communities, and some cultural resonance, these have contributed little to democratic change. Despite elections gaining recently in competitiveness, Singapore has remained unyielding in its authoritarian rule. And though the Philippines formally democratized its politics through people power, the U.S. government opposed this progress, until finally agreeing to evacuate Marcos once the transition had grown unstoppable. Further, the ceaseless oscillations in Thailand’s political record have owed more to economic dislocation and local confrontation than to any productive trading and investment relations with the United States.

The diversity of political regimes in Southeast Asia, then, indicates that political dynamics unfold within the territorial container of the nation-state. And though the bottom-up character of democratic transitions that take place may evince the frailty of governments, we observe that old political elites, after

sacrificing their executive, whether Marcos, Suchinda, or Suharto, soon find their feet. While made to share power with new elites in the parties and parliaments that democracy has thrust up, elites in the bureaucracy, military, and connected conglomerates often use the state apparatus to regain their standing, commensurately eroding their new democracy's quality or even rolling it back completely. In Southeast Asia, then, where democratic change has occurred, it has been far more homegrown in its dynamics than driven by transnational forces. But in any event, despite a modal pattern of bottom-up replacement, the state's resilience as governing apparatus and sovereign territory is evinced by its aiding pre-democratic elites in their rapid recovery.

CONCLUSIONS

With transnationalism in all its forms, but especially foreign investment and migration, having impacted so powerfully on Southeast Asia from above and below, there is perhaps no better region in which to demonstrate the resilience of the state as governor and container. On this count, Castles concedes that with respect to migration:

“...governments in the region are highly unlikely to recognize transnational communities in the foreseeable future. The perception of migrants as temporary workers who will not settle is still very much the conventional wisdom for Asia Pacific elites. Immigrant settlement is not officially permitted anywhere (with some exceptions for people with high levels of financial or human capital)” (Castles 2000: no page numbers available).

However, Castles also contends that over time globalization must work in Asia just as it has in more developed parts of the world, pummeling state apparatuses and borders. He might also have added that mounting challenges to public health, the environment, and society demand policy responses that are at least regionally conceived. Yet expectations based on such teleological and functional logics have feet of clay. We cannot be assured that even if globalization persists, it will take the forms that it did in its heyday during the 1980s–90s, marked by unhindered capital movements and freer labour transfers. Today, we are confronted instead by a resurgence of state-owned enterprises, sovereign wealth funds, “managed” currency systems, and more tightly structured intra-regional exchanges. Indeed, globalization may even sputter in the way that democratization has, the avowed inevitability of which in a modernizing world now seems so misplaced in its hopefulness amid the renewal of the state capitalism and innovation associated with “rationalized” authoritarianism. Equally, the need for at least regional solutions, regardless of how pressing on multiple fronts, cannot in itself guarantee their appearance. Governments are loathe to overcome enduring problems of collective action by yielding the sovereignty which, while

possessed in the West for centuries, has come only so recently to be enjoyed in Southeast Asia. We are reminded, then, of the decade it has taken to finalize the Chiang Mai Initiative, as well as the stillborn proposals over the incendiary land clearing and haze that seasonally bedevil Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

In sum, there is little evidence that the state and nation-state are wasting away in Southeast Asia. Though the region may still pulse with foreign investors and migrant workers, what stands out is the state's capacity to make use of these flows in ways that invigorate its governing apparatus and sovereign territoriality. Indeed, it seems that the contours of globalization will sooner be altered, perhaps even diminished, than will the defining features of the state. Thus, as much as in the real world, the state's causality will ensure that it continues to loom large for Southeast Asianists as a central unit of analysis.

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