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From “*Melayu Patani*” to “Thai Muslim”: The Spectre of Ethnic Identity in Southern Thailand

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**From “*Melayu Patani*” to “Thai Muslim”:
The Spectre of Ethnic Identity in Southern Thailand***

Patrick Jory

It would appear to be the simplest of questions: *Who* are the people at the centre of the violent conflict in Thailand’s “three southern provinces”?¹ Judging by the coverage of the issue by the Thai and international media, the statements by the Thai and Malaysian governments, and the work of a large number of academics, particularly those in the field of security studies whose opinions have been eagerly sought, most appear to have concluded: “Muslims”. The Thai government will often add an adjective to this collective name to affirm this group’s nationality, “Thai Muslims” (or, less correctly though a term still widely used, “Thai Islam”). The perception of the conflict as being religious in nature is particularly strong in Thailand. One has only to look at the Thai media coverage of the violence since early 2004, the regular seminars organized to promote inter-religious understanding, concerns expressed to the Thai authorities by the Malaysian government about the “Muslims of southern Thailand”, and visits to Thailand in 2005 by representatives of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) as well as the heads of Indonesia’s two major religious organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. Merely by the use of these religious labels to represent the actors involved in conflict, despite the Thai government’s attempts to characterize the conflict as *not* a religious one, it is difficult for the Thai public to imagine it otherwise. Since the conflict has tended to be viewed in Thailand predominantly in religious terms it is inevitable that the

* This article is an expansion of an earlier version, “Patani Melayu” to “Thai Muslim”, published in *ISIM Review* 18, Autumn 2006, pp. 42-3. A Thai translation of the earlier version, “Jak melayu patani su muslim: phap lon haeng atalak thang chatiphan nai phak tai khong thai”, (trans. Nipon Sohem and Prinya Nuanpiam), was also published in the Thai journal *Fa Dio Kan*, (Same Sky) Vol. 4, No. 2, April-June 2006, pp. 154 – 65. The paper has benefited greatly from discussions about Islam and identity with my colleague in Regional Studies at Walailak University, Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad. I thank also my colleagues Davisakd Puaksom and Jirawat Saengthong for comments and assistance. I am very grateful to the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore for the opportunity to revise and expand the paper while I was a visiting research fellow there in September – November 2006.

¹ “*Sam jangwat phak tai*”, the term most commonly used in the Thai commentary on this issue, referring to the three provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat. Occasional violence has also occurred in Songkhla province.

solutions that are offered tend to be based on religious considerations.² Yet if the conflict were religious it raises the question why hundreds of thousands of “Thai Muslims” who reside outside the three southern provinces where the violence has been concentrated have not shown greater solidarity with their co-religionists in their struggle with the Thai state.³ Why then is this conflict consistently represented today using religious terminology?

This paper is an attempt to present a brief historical overview of how the people in the southern border region have been represented. It will give particular attention to the struggle between competing discourses of Thai national identity, pan-Malay ethnic identity, Muslim identity, and a more localized “Patani Malay” identity centred on the memory of the former sultanate of Patani and its associated linguistic and cultural elements.

PRE-NATIONALIST DISCOURSES OF IDENTITY

If one examines the chronicles and other documentary evidence produced by the Thai court in the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries about the Patani sultanate as well as the Thai kingdom’s other Malay dependencies such as Kedah, Kelantan and Trengganu, it is striking that there is, in fact, relatively little reference to the cultural identity of the peoples of the region. The narrative is dominated by the king and his administrative officials and their counterparts in the vassal states. However, when the people or the region is distinguished in cultural terms the word that is used most frequently is *khaek*, and less

² See the recommendations contained in the NRC’s report, “Raingan khanakammakan isara phuea khwam samanchan haeng chat: ao chan khwam runraeng duan khwam samanchan” [Report of the National Reconciliation Council: Overcoming Violence through Reconciliation], available at the NRC’s website: <http://www.nrc.or.th/th/>.

³ The exact total for the Muslim population in the three southern provinces and the country as a whole is a subject of much conjecture. Calculated from the 2000 figures provided by the Islamic Committee Office of Thailand, Gilquin quotes extraordinarily high figures of 7,391,235 for the country as a whole and 3,454,300 for Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat combined; Michel Gilquin, *The Muslims of Thailand*, trans. Michael Smithies (Chiang Mai: IRASEC & Silkworm Books, 2005), pp. 39-40. Using the official figures, McCargo estimates that Malay Muslims make up approximately 80% of the total population of the three provinces of 1.8 million, ie. 1,440,000; Duncan McCargo, “Introduction: Rethinking Thailand’s Southern Violence” in *Critical Asian Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 2 March 2006, p. 3.

commonly *khaek melayu* or *melayu*.⁴ *Khaek* is a more complex term than is often understood. In Thai, the common literal meaning is “guest”. Sathian argues that it derives from a Hokkien word meaning the same.⁵ But the term *khaek* has also long been used by Thai officials as well as in popular discourse to refer to such diverse peoples as Malays, people from the Indian subcontinent (of whatever religion), Persians, Muslims generally, and others.⁶ However, today the term is regarded as derogatory by Muslims of the southern border provinces due to its association with the notion of “guest” status in the Thai kingdom. In official Thai discourse today *khaek* has thus been replaced with the term “Muslim” as a gesture of political correctness. Yet Muslims of the middle and upper southern region still often willingly identify themselves as *khaek* with no sense of the term being derogatory.

It is notable that in the Thai court documents of the nineteenth century, Islam scarcely receives a mention, and nor are the inhabitants referred to as “Muslims”. The chronicle (*phongsawadan*) of Patani written by a Thai official Phraya Wichiankhiri in the late nineteenth century contains a revealing passage referring to the famous legend of Lim Toh Khiam, a Chinese adventurer who settles in Patani some time in the sixteenth century, who becomes famous for manufacturing cannons for the Patani raja and eventually converts to Islam. But the Thai author of the chronicle renders his conversion in this way:

...the person who created these three cannons is thought to have been a Chinese from China. He was a Hokkien called Lim, first name Khiam. He settled at Kaseh village. This Chinese man Khiam married a Malay woman

⁴ See excerpts from the Thai dynastic chronicles of the First, Second and Third Reigns, as well as histories of Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu, and Pattani compiled by Thai state officials in Paramin Khruethong, ed., *Siam-Pattani nai tamnan kan to su melayu muslim* (Siam-Pattani in the History of the Struggle of the Malay Muslims) (Bangkok: Sinlapawathanatham, 2005). See also Chulalongkorn’s reference to *khaek* and *melayu* in *Raya thang sadet phra ratchadamnoen praphat thank bo thang ruea rop laem melau ratanakosin sok 109* (Royal Journal by Land and Sea Around the Malay Peninsula 1891), Vols. 1 & 2 (Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1964).

⁵ Mala Rajo Sathian, “Rights over Men to Rights over Land: The Economy of Pattani and the Thai State (1880 – 1920)”, unpublished manuscript, p. 173, fn. 28.

⁶ On the use of the term *khaek* by the Thai court in the first half of the nineteenth century see Davisakd Puaksom, *Khon plaek na nanachat krung sayam nai khlung tang phasa thi wat pho (University in Stone): ngan khian choeng chatiphanwanana (ethnography) chin raek khong sayam* [International Strangers in Siam in the Verses on Different Languages at Wat Pho (University in Stone): Siam’s First Ethnography] (Bangkok, Sinlapawathanatham, 2003).

and so converted to the *Malay religion*. So the Malays refer to him until today as “Lim Toh Khiam”.⁷

It seems then that for the Thais the terms *melayu* or *khaek* already signified people of a different religion.

As the region was brought under closer control of the Thai court in the latter part of the reign of King Chulalongkorn, we see the first appearance of the idea of ‘Thai-ification’ as a tool of government. Among the recommendations that Prince Damrong, head of the Ministry of the Interior, made in a report to the King in 1896 was that the government should attempt to “cultivate” local administrators who were “Thai both in mind and manners”.⁸ Yet even after the abolition of the Patani sultanate, the exile and imprisonment of its last sultan, Abdulkadir Kamaruddin, and the definitive absorption of the territories of the former sultanate into the Thai state under the 1909 Anglo-Siamese Treaty, the Thai court could still refer to the region’s inhabitants as “Malay”. According to Kobkua, the King aimed to eventually achieve a situation where “*even though they are Malays and of a different faith ... [they] are Thais in sentiment and outlook just as any other Thai...*”⁹ Thus it seemed possible then, still under the Absolute Monarchy, for the Thai government to recognize dual identities within one state, “Thai” and “Malay” (or *khaek*).

As for the Patani historiographical tradition, the Patani chronicle known as *Hikayat Patani*, the most important source for subsequent Malay historiography about Patani’s early history, refers only rarely to “Malay”.¹⁰ It is essentially a narrative about Patani’s rajas and court officials, and its relations with Ayuthaya and the other Malay sultanates of the peninsula, not

⁷ Paramin, *Sayam-Pattani*, p. 42; my italics.

⁸ Panngam Gothammasarn, “The Administration of the Seven Southern Provinces during King Chulalongkorn’s Reign” (unpublished MA thesis, Department of History, Chulalongkorn University, 1976), pp. 159-175, quoted in Davisakd Puaksom, “Of a Lesser Brilliance: Patani Historiography in Contention”, in *The Plural Peninsula: Studies in the History of Ethnic Interactions in Southern Thailand and Northern Malaysia*, ed. Michael J. Montesano and Patrick Jory (forthcoming).

⁹ Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, “Question of Identity of the Muslims in Southern Thailand: A Comparative Examination of Responses of the Sam-Sams in Satun and of the Thai Malay Muslims in the Three Provinces of Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani to Thailand’s Quest for National Identity”, paper presented at the Workshop, “*A Plural Peninsula: Historical Interactions Among the Thai, Malays, Chinese and Others*”, Walailak University, 5-7 February 2004, pp. 178-92, my italics.

¹⁰ A. Teeuw, and David K. Wyatt, (trans.), *Hikayat Patani: The Story of Patani* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970).

about a “people”. While Islam is certainly a defining feature of the chronicle -- the conversion of the Raja to Islam is a major event at the beginning of the chronicle, as in the Thai chronicles referred to above -- there are very few references to “Muslims”. The *Hikayat Patani* is also noteworthy for the apparent lack of animosity its author displays towards Siam, and the close, if not always smooth, relations between Ayuthaya and Patani. In an early section, King Mudhaffar Syah deliberates with his officials regarding a proposed visit to Ayudhya: “What would you say if We went to Ayudhya, for the king is no stranger to Us, and after all, two countries are better than one”.¹¹ While the chronicle records Patani’s relations with Kelantan, Kedah, Pahang and Johore, there is little explicit sense conveyed of a common “Malay” identity. Indeed when Raja Léla of Patani makes a trip to Johore he admits to his host, “... I am a foreigner ... I do not know the Malay rules for conduct. If I make any silly mistakes I ask you to teach me the correct behaviour.”¹²

THE STRUGGLE FOR “PATANI MALAYS” AND “THAI MUSLIMS”

The representation of the people of Thailand’s southern border provinces changes significantly with the rise of nationalisms on both sides of the border from the 1920s and 1930s. In Thailand, following the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932, the new nationalist governments progressively sought to shift the concept of political loyalty from the person of the king to the Thai nation. Similarly, in the case of British Malaya the rise of Malay nationalism, particularly after the founding of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) in the 1940s, meant that the political loyalties of the Malays were owed to the *bangsa Melayu* rather than to the Malay sultans or the British colonial government.¹³ The peoples of the territories of the former sultanate of Patani thus appear to have been caught between these two nationalisms.

It is Malay nationalism that is the dominant theme in the most influential Patani Malay nationalist text that has been written, Ibrahim Syukri’s *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani* (“History of the Malay Kingdom of Patani”). For the author of this popular nationalist history

¹¹ Ibid., p. 155.

¹² Ibid., p. 192.

¹³ Anthony Reid, “Understanding *Melayu* as a Source of Diverse Modern Identities” in Timothy Barnard, ed., *Contesting Malayness: Malay Identity Across Borders* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2004), p. 17.

published in Malay in the early 1950s, the subject of his narrative was the “Patani Malays”.¹⁴ While Syukri relied significantly on the *Hikayat Patani* as a source, his protagonists have changed from the rajas of the Patani court to the Malay people. The dominant theme of the work is the antagonistic relations between the “Siam-Thai” and the “Patani Malays”. For Syukri, Siam is an imperial, colonizing power and the intention of its kings is to “subjugate Patani and enslave its people”.¹⁵ When the Patani sultanate is divided in the early nineteenth century, Syukri writes, “It was split up by the Raja of Siam with the intention of weakening the strength of the Malays in order to make it easy for him to rule and enslave the Malays according to the principles of colonization (imperialism); that is, “divide and rule”.¹⁶ The theme of national liberation is strongest towards the end of the book when Syukri calls for the recognition of the “nationality [of the population of Patani] as a Malay people”:

Among the 100 million Malay people of the world, the Malays of Patani are the most ill-fated. Even though the Malay people of Patani long have lived in the democratic world, because Siam-Thai democracy is limited, the fate of the Malay people is like a climbing vine unable to grow up the trellis.

In truth the fate of the Patani Malay people should not be placed in the hand of the Siam-Thai government. Rather, measures to improve their fate and condition should be place in their own hands.¹⁷

The influence of Syukri’s work and the Patani Malay nationalism that inspired it cannot be underestimated. Patani Malay nationalism is the motivating theme for numerous other historical texts on Patani, written in both Thai and Malay and published on both sides of the border, as well as in English, up until recent times.¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibrahim Syukri, *History of the Malay Kingdom of Patani (Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani)*, Translated by Conner Bailey and John N. Miksic, (Bangkok: Silkworm Books, 2005).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁸ See for example Nik Anuar, *Sejarah Perjuangan Melayu Patani 1785-1954* (History of the Struggle of the Patani Malays, 1785 - 1954) (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia 1999), cited in Sathian, “Rights Over Men”, p. 15; Or. Bangnara, *Patani: adit lae patchuban* (Patani: Past and Present) (Bangkok: Chomrom Saengthian, 1976), cited in Davisakd, “Of a Lesser Brilliance”; and Tengku Ismail C. Denudom, “Politics, Economy, Identity or Religious Striving for the Malay Patani: A Case Study of the Conflicts between Thailand and the Malay State of Patani” (Dept. of East and Southeast Asia Languages, Lund University, 2005). On the competing Thai and Malay historiographies on Patani see Davisakd, “Of a Lesser Brilliance”.

Following the end of the Second World War, as Malay nationalism was gathering momentum across the border and Thailand was forced by the British to give up its irredentist annexations during the war (the Shan States, Laos, Cambodia, and the northern Malay states), a group of Malay leaders in the Patani region submitted a petition to the British requesting the British Government to “have the kindness to release *our country* and ourselves from the pressure of Siam,” since they did not wish to “remain any longer under the Siamese Government.” For Patani, they pointed out, “*is really a Malay country*, formerly ruled by Malay Rajas for generations”.¹⁹ The year 1948 saw the establishment in Kelantan of GAMPAR, the *Gabungan Melayu Patani Raya* or Greater Patani Malay Association, supported by Tengku Mahyiddin, youngest son of the last sultan of Patani, which sought political union with Malaya. And the political ideology of the most prominent of the region’s separatist organizations that sprung up soon afterwards, such as the Patani United Liberation Organization (PULO),²⁰ the Barisan Nasional Pembebasan Patani (Patani National Liberation Front or BNPP) and the Barisan Revolusi Nasional Melayu Patani (“Patani Malay National Revolutionary Front” or BRN), has been the national liberation of the “Patani Malays”.

Since the era of decolonization and the formation of nation-states following the Second World War we see the emergence of the “Patani Malays” as a subject of political and scholarly discourse. It is remarkable how little reference there is to their religious identity. How then, have the subjects of the conflict been transformed from “Malays” into “Muslims”? The answer can be found partly in the appearance of three new, though separate, discourses that have impacted upon the identity of the inhabitants of the former Patani sultanate.

Firstly, since the era of de-colonization and the rise of Malay nationalism in British Malaya, the Thai government has actively sought to avoid references to the Malay ethnic identity of the subjects of the region. It feared that with the new, post-colonial logic of nation-based states, recognition of the people of the region as “Malay” would give credibility to demands for a separate Malay state, either based on the territories of the old Malay sultanate of Patani, or through union with the other Malay states of British Malaya, who were now preparing for independence from Britain. In much the same way and for the same reasons, the Lao identity

¹⁹ Davisakd, “Of a Lesser Brilliance”, my emphasis.

²⁰ In Malay, Pertubuhan Persatuan Pembebasan Patani (PPPP)

of the inhabitants of much of the northeast was officially erased as the Thai state created a new name by which they would be formally known, “Isan”. Similarly, the Chinese were forced to declare their allegiance to the Thai state through a name change, by abandoning their Chinese names and replacing them with Thai ones. The State Cultural Directives (*ratthaniyom*) of the first Phibun government (1938-46) banned official references to ethnic identity.²¹ Under the assimilationist policies of national integration which began in Thailand during the Phibun period and held sway through to the 1990s, Malay ethnic identity as expressed in terms of language, dress, education, history and custom was consistently discouraged by the state.²² The government has attempted to replace it with a religious label, “Thai Muslims” or “Thai Islam” in the hope that this linguistic change would contribute to the overall goal of assimilation. Thus for the Thai government, the only possible identity officially acceptable for the former “Patani Malays” within the Thai nation-state since the Phibun era was as “Thai Muslims”.

ISLAMIZATION IN MALAYSIA

But discourses of Thai national identity and the government’s program of cultural assimilation are only part of the answer. Another is the politicization of Islam amongst the Malays in neighbouring Malaysia. Although this process first became clearly visible in the 1970s, its seeds were sown with the establishment of the state of Malaysia and the legal definition of Malayness. One of the components of Malay identity as defined by the Malaysian Constitution was “a person who professes the religion of Islam.”²³ Following Malaysia’s independence in 1957, therefore, to be a Malay - and thereby eligible to the special privileges accorded to “Malays” - legally one must be a Muslim.

²¹ See Craig J. Reynolds, ed., *National Identity and Its Defenders: Thailand 1939–89* (Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 1991).

²² The Thai education system played a crucial role in this policy of assimilation. A colleague from Narathiwat province once told me of his experience as a student in a Thai government school in Narathiwat, where in place of the legends of Malay cultural heroes like Hang Tuah he learnt about while in the *pondok*, he was obliged to read *Sang Thong* and other classics of the Thai literary canon.

²³ Article 60 of the Malaysian Constitution defines ‘Malay’ as follows:

“ ‘Malay’ means a person *who professes the religion of Islam*, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom and – was before Merdeka Day born in the Federation or in Singapore or born of parents one of whom was born in the Federation or in Singapore, or is on that day domiciled in the Federation or in Singapore; or is the issue of such a person.” (Virginia Matheson Hooker, “Malay and Islam in Contemporary Malaysia” in *Contesting Malayness: Malay Identity Across Borders*, ed. Timothy P. Barnard (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2004), p. 158; *my emphasis*)

Yet up until the 1970s, Islam was marginal to most discussions of Malay identity. Reading Mahathir's controversial *The Malay Dilemma*, published in 1970, it is striking that Islam receives hardly any attention. The bulk of the book concentrates on Malay cultural traits that were supposedly responsible for the "dilemma" in which, according to Mahathir, the Malays now found themselves.

The insecurity of the Malays, barely a majority "in their own land" and economically disadvantaged compared to the Chinese and Indians, received violent expression in the deadly 1969 race riots in which hundreds were killed in clashes between the Malays and Chinese. The government later enacted the New Economic Policy, which aimed to raise the socio-economic status of the Malays vis-à-vis the other races through a systematic affirmative action policy directed towards the Malays. Meanwhile student activism in Malaysia began to take on an Islamic face. The most prominent organization was ABIM, the Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement, led by the charismatic student leader, Anwar Ibrahim. The movement called for an end to the rural poverty and neglect of the Malays, and an enhanced role for Islam in Malay society and politics. Anwar's radicalism led to his arrest and detention under the ISA in 1974-75.

On becoming Prime Minister in 1981 Mahathir, began to implement his own policy of Islamization. A year later he co-opted Anwar into the government. Between them a policy emerged which viewed Islam as the answer to "social ills" – corruption, laziness, materialism, drug addiction, promiscuity, incest, child abuse – which appeared to be more prevalent among the Malays than the other ethnic groups, and which were blamed on the government's policy rapid economic development.²⁴ It is from this era that the government began to promote Islam as a solution to these problems and to extol Malays to obey and live out the teachings of Islam. Islamic discourse in Malaysia, therefore, became dominated by the government, a task that was made easier by UMNO's stranglehold on political power due to the racialized nature of Malaysian politics and its control of the mass media. Ironically, therefore, the two key figures in the Islamization of Malay society were politicians, Mahathir and Anwar, rather than trained Islamic scholars. Indeed, it is interesting that neither Mahathir nor Anwar, the authors of the government's Islamization campaign, had had any solid Islamic

²⁴ Hooker, "Malay and Islam", pp. 153-56.

education, but rather received their schooling in the Western educational tradition. Mahathir graduated from Singapore's King Edward VII Medical College in medicine, while Anwar attended the prestigious English public school, Malay College Kuala Kangsar, rather than a *pondok*, before entering the University of Malaya where he read Malay studies, not Islam. Malaysia's official Islamization under the UMNO-led government is, therefore, the product of Western-educated politicians, not Islamic scholars.

It could have been possible for the Malaysian government, like the governments of other developing countries, to promote "traditional values" as a remedy to the social problems associated with economic modernization, yet Islam was chosen instead. Why? Even as a Malay nationalist, Mahathir in fact had a problematic relationship with Malay identity.²⁵ It could be said that no-one was more critical of the Malays than Mahathir. He was especially scathing of traditional Malay values – modesty, self-effacement, adherence to good manners, lack of interest in material advancement, which, according to Mahathir, had led to Malay "backwardness" in comparison to other ethnic groups, especially the Chinese, and could even be seen as having contributed to the colonization of the Malays by the British.²⁶ So he turned to Islam - but not any Islam. The Islam promoted by Mahathir and Anwar, according to Hooker, was more akin to a "civil religion", "expressed in a language that is more secular than Islamic". Hooker compares it to the Christianity of America since the industrial revolution, that is, a religion that was "activist, moralistic and socially oriented, rather than being contemplative, theological and innerly spiritual [...] There are no references to Islam as a means to salvation in the next world – the focus is on what Islam can do for its followers here and now."²⁷ In this respect, as Kamaruzzaman shows, the Malaysian government's new campaign of *Islam Hadhari*, or "Civilizational Islam", announced by Mahathir's successor Abdullah Badawi, is in the same spirit of the early campaigns under Mahathir.²⁸

²⁵ Perhaps also partly due to his own mixed ancestry.

²⁶ Mahathir Mohamed, *The Malay Dilemma*, (Kuala Lumpur: Pelanduk Publications, 1970).

²⁷ Hooker, "Malay and Islam", pp. 159-63.

²⁸ Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad, "Voices of Islam in SEA after 11 September : 'Islam Hadhari' and 'Islam Liberal' ", Workshop Proceedings, *Voices of Islam in Europe and Southeast Asia*, International Workshop, Walailak University, Nakhon Si Thammarat, 20-22 January 2006, pp. 86-100. The ten principles of *Islam Hadhari* are the following:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Faith and piety in Allah; | 6. Good quality of life for all; |
| 2. Just and trustworthy government; | 7. Protection of the rights of minority groups & women; |
| 3. Freedom and independence to the people; | 8. Cultural and moral integrity; |
| 4. Mastery of knowledge; | 9. Protection of the environment; |
| 5. Balanced and comprehensive economic development; | 10. Strong defence policy. |

However for Mahathir, Islam also fulfilled another important function. It provided a useful *alternative* ideological basis for a Malaysian critique of Western “imperialism” and neo-colonialism, in place of the Marxist conceptual framework and language that was common to anti-colonial movements and sentiment in most newly independent Third World countries, and to which Mahathir was vehemently opposed. Mahathir later emerged as a leading “Third World” critic of the West, using a mixture of anti-colonial rhetoric – that appealed to postcolonial societies globally – and calls for a revival of Islamic values – that appealed to Muslim countries in particular. This critique only increased in appeal after the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 and especially following the end of the Cold War.

At the same time, besides the official UMNO brand of Islam developed by Mahathir and Anwar and sponsored by the central government apparatus, an alternative Malay political party and UMNO’s main rival for the Malay vote, the Parti Islam se-Malaysia or PAS, was also promoting its brand of Islam. Significantly, this Party’s heartland was in Kelantan, which is geographically, linguistically, not to mention historically, closely related to the Patani Malays. This link is important. Close ties between the two peoples go back at least as far as the late seventeenth century when, following the fall of the Kota Maligai dynasty, Patani came under the rule of rajas descended from the Kelantanese dynasty. In 1842, following a decade of revolt and turmoil in Siam’s Malay dependencies, the Thai rulers themselves installed a member of the Kelantanese dynastic line as raja of Patani. And following his imprisonment in Phitsnulok after the abolition of the Patani sultanate in the early twentieth century, the former sultan Abdulkadir Kamarrudin went into exile in Kelantan, where he died. Today the border with Kelantan is marked by the Kolok river and people can cross the river and the border with relative ease. Close kinship ties exist between the peoples on both sides of the border, and many PAS leaders in Kelantan have relatives there.²⁹ Separatist organizations have long enjoyed close links with Kelantan.³⁰

If one changed just one word - “Allah” to “God” - then these ten principles could be the wish-list for virtually *any* modernizing country in the world, no matter what the religion of its citizens.

²⁹ “Bahrun”, *Yihat si thao: khrai sang khrai liang fai tai* (Grey Jihad: Who Started and Who is Stoking the Southern Fire) (Bangkok: Sarika, 2005), p. 93.

³⁰ International Crisis Group, *Southern Thailand: Insurgency, Not Jihad*, Asia Report N°98 – 18 May 2005, pp. 7-10.

Farish Noor has discussed the changes in PAS's political ideology and the rise of the party "from the ashes" under the presidency of Yusof Rawa in the 1980s.³¹ From the party's roots in anti-colonialism, Malay ethno-nationalism and even leftism, Yusof Rawa began a major transformation of the party's ideology by promoting what is now popularly called an "Islamist" agenda. Secular "ethno-nationalism" (Arabic: *asabiyyah*) came under severe criticism as having demonstrably failed the Muslim world in the decades following decolonization. It was said to be un-Islamic, a product not of a primordial essence but a remnant of colonialism that had divided the *umma*. Ethno-nationalism should thus be seen as a throwback to the age of *jahiliyyah* (ignorance) before the coming of Islam. In one speech he argued:

The Malay people have become backward thanks to the practice of *asabiyyah* which is oppressive and corrupt. Efforts to help the Malays will fail because of the corruption and oppression (that accompanies this form of communitarian politics), and so such corruption must be resisted and destroyed for good. This tyrannical form of *asabiyyah* is the root cause of the backwardness and suffering of the people.³²

He argued that the party's previous adoption of "forms of communitarian politics had merely led to divisions within the Muslim *ummah* and were the cause of the Islamic Party's lack of direction during the 1970s".³³ PAS's rejection of ethnic politics from the 1980s thus clearly distinguished PAS's political ideology from the Malay nationalism of the ruling UMNO party. Yusoff Rawa's presidency also saw the rise of the *ulama* to positions of power in the party apparatus, giving them a much more prominent role in the party than ever before.³⁴

Under PAS, which has been in power since 1959 for all but 9 years, Malay society in Kelantan has been Islamized to a greater extent than ever before. Shadow-play, once one of the traditional icons of Malay culture throughout the Malay world, has almost disappeared, discouraged by the religious authorities on the grounds that it is un-Islamic. The rare

³¹ Farish A. Noor, *Islam Embedded: The Historical Development of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party PAS (1951 – 2003)*, Vol. 2 (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 2004), pp. 349 ff.

³² Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 354.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 350-56.

performances that do take place, once an official permit has been obtained from the government, have been cleansed of their Hindu-Buddhist symbolism. Yet as Noor argues, PAS's policies of Islamization could not have been possible without UMNO's state-sponsored Islamization program.³⁵ He describes the situation as an "Islamization Race" between UMNO and PAS which has reduced the "discursive space" for other conceptions of Malaysian society and politics, especially in the Malay Muslim community.³⁶ The debate about the implementation of *shariah* and especially PAS's professed desire to bring in *hudud* penal law can thus be seen in this context of trying to "out-Islamize" its rival, UMNO.³⁷ It was out of this competition with PAS that Mahathir was able to controversially claim in September 2001 that Malaysia was now an "Islamic State".

Thus when Patani Malays look today to their Malay brothers and sisters in Malaysia, whether in neighbouring Kelantan³⁸ or Malaysia as a whole, they see a more Islamized Malay identity.³⁹ And in the case of PAS's Kelantan the ethnic basis of Malay identity has been all but rejected politically in favour of an Islamic identity.

THE "ISLAMIC REVIVAL"

A third factor behind the representation of the conflict in the south in religious terms has been the so-called global "Islamic revival" that has taken place since the 1970s. Part of this has to do with the process by which post-colonial nationalist political elites, most of them very Westernized by virtue of their education and political 'coming-of-age' in the era of Western cultural hegemony, have gradually been forced to give greater expression to the non-Western religio-cultural mentality of the nations they claim to represent.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 751.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 724-25

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 725-30.

³⁸ I am unaware of any scholarly study that has looked closely at PAS's influence in the provinces of southern Thailand, despite the fact that PAS leaders frequently comment in the media about the situation in southern Thailand, and party leaders including PAS Chief Minister in Kelantan, Nik Aziz Nik Mat, are well known in the southern Thai provinces and have traveled there on numerous occasions.

³⁹ A poll taken of 1029 people in peninsular Malaysia by the Muslim Identities Public Opinion Survey in 2006 revealed a surprising result: when asked if one had to assume a single identity 73% of respondents saw themselves as "Muslims", 14% as "Malaysian", and only 13% "Malay"; "Poll shows 73% think we are Islamic state", *The Sun*, September 05, 2006, in *World Wide Religious News*, <http://www.wwrn.org/article.php?idd=22626&sec=33&cont=all>

Politicized Islam today is a product of the rise of Arab oil wealth, particularly following the “oil shocks” of the 1970s; the escalation of the Israel – Palestine conflict; and especially the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 and the establishment of the first modern Islamic state. The latter should not be underestimated. Ideologies of resistance in most of the world over the last century had been expressed in two main idioms, national liberation and Marxism - and usually a mixture of the two. The apparent success of Islam in providing an alternative political ideology that could overthrow a regime which was backed by a superpower like the US sent shock-waves throughout the Muslim world. This only increased when over the next decade and a half, as guerrillas fighting under the banner of Islam against godless Communists, albeit backed by massive US military and financial aid, were able to drive the Soviet army out of Afghanistan and eventually to seize power and establish their own version of an “Islamic state”. Islam thus became an ideology of resistance. Its prestige grew even further with the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union and with it the end of international Communism, which dealt a deathblow to most Marxist-inspired resistance movements in the developing world. It enabled Osama bin Laden to claim, with a logic that would have been understandable to millions, that Islam had brought about the defeat of Communism. The extraordinary political and economic consensus we live under today that Fukuyama termed with a troubling sense of finality, “the end of history”, that is, liberal democracy and free market capitalism, means there is no longer a credible or effective Leftist program of resistance available to groups for whom the existing status quo is unbearable. With the spectre of Communism finally put to rest as an idiom of resistance, for certain groups of Muslims radical Islam has taken its place.

Despite the fact that some Patani Malays are known to have trained overseas in “jihadist” guerrilla warfare, and that people in the region have links with “Islamist” movements elsewhere in the world, as almost every serious study of the conflict shows, the grievances that have given rise to the conflict are entirely local.⁴⁰ The fact that Islam plays a much more prominent role in the rhetoric of the people of the region is certainly related to the global “Islamic revival” that has also influenced the Muslims of the southern Thai border provinces. But it is even more closely related to the critical problem of the need to find an effective ideology of resistance in this new, post-Cold War, globalized environment, to help provide meaning and perhaps also a resolution to, a conflict that is, after all, centuries old.

⁴⁰ See International Crisis Group, *Southern Thailand: Insurgency, Not Jihad*, Asia Report N°98 – 18 May 2005.

“DE-CULTURALIZATION” OF ISLAM IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

The citizens of the world’s two hundred or so nation-states are a mixture of identities: their sex, gender, family, class, nationality, ethnicity (or “race”), language, religion (or, indeed, lack thereof) together constitute who they are. Only some of these identities are, however, politicized. The clearest of all is nationality. National identity is the basis of the current world political order, as humanity is divided theoretically (though often not in practice) into sovereign nation-states. Other identities, of course, have also, at one time or another, become politicized. For much of the last 150 years, one of the most politicized of identities has been class. Communist parties all over the world urged the working class to rise up and throw off the yoke of the capitalist class and their feudal allies. Since the end of the Cold War, however, without its main advocate, class identities have receded into the background, or have been drowned out by new identities. Feminists also constructed a new model of interpreting politics, the patriarchy, in which one’s gender determined one’s place in the political order. Gay liberation political activists has attempted the same with their critique of the concept of “hetero-normative sexuality” in order to demand social and political rights. In culturally diverse postcolonial states, ethno-nationalist leaders have appealed to people’s ethnic loyalties, supposedly more “primordial” than the artificial national identities they were forced to assume following independence, sometimes at the barrel of a gun. Within certain countries, governments have legislatively recognized racial identities enabling them to grant special rights and privileges to certain races – the Malays in the case of Malaysia being the most prominent example – a policy which is regarded alternatively as affirmative action to its supporters, racial discrimination to its critics. Now, for reasons I have tried to explain above, Islam appears to have become a politicized identity for sections of the population of Thailand’s “three southern provinces”.

Amidst the Thai policy of assimilation and Malaysian programs of Islamization across the border one might well ask, to what extent a Patani Malay identity still exists among the locals of the “three southern provinces”? There is little empirical data on which to base an answer to this important question. In fact, the very problem of the lack of primary data from the region due to the on-going violence is a crucial methodological obstacle hindering a better

understanding of what is actually happening in lower southern Thailand.⁴¹ Anecdotally it is said that fluency in the Patani Malay (or *Yawi*) dialect among the young has decreased compared to a generation ago, and that competence in Thai has increased. Students from the southern border provinces studying at Walailak University where I teach will usually affirm (out of habit?) their “Thainess”. While most are fluent in Thai, their *Yawi* accents are quite noticeable and they will speak in that language to friends from the same region. Some anthropological work suggests that the Muslim youths from the Thai border provinces working in Malaysia will talk to each other in Thai.⁴² A half-century of assimilationist policies carried out by the Thai government must surely have had some effect. Yet many people from the region travel to Malaysia and some to Indonesia for educational and employment purposes, which exposes them to an alternative “Malay” cultural milieu. Another cultural influence in the region that has increased is Arabic, as students return from their studies in the Middle East, or as a result of funding provided by Arab states for religious and educational purposes.⁴³ Some female Muslim students at Islamic colleges in the southern border provinces have adopted the full veil that covers the whole face except the eyes, a uniform that derives from a particular Saudi Arabian reading of Islam, and which was previously unknown in the local Malay culture. The influence of so-called “Wahabi” religious orthodoxy, for example, in the performance of daily prayers, has in some cases clashed with “traditional Malay” religious practices. It has split some communities and in cases led to people praying in separate congregations.⁴⁴

⁴¹ The difficulties are manifold: the uncertain security situation; fear on the part of the locals of the consequences of divulging information to unknown outsiders, and the lack of familiarity with the local dialect and culture on the part of most researchers. Given such methodological obstacles, one would wish for more humility on the part of many academics in their representations of the situation in the south.

⁴² Mala Rajoo Sathian and Saroja Dorarajoo, “Being *Melayu* the Thai Way: Perceiving the Thai-Malay Border from a People’s Perspective”, Paper presented at the 9th International Thai Studies Conference, Nakhon Phanom, 9-12 June 2002.

⁴³ Here we should be just as careful not to essentialize a monolithic, unchanging “Arabic” culture that is sometimes inherent in critiques of the so-called “Arabization” of Southeast Asian Islam. It should come as no surprise that Arabic cultures are diverse, and are also undergoing considerable change, particularly amongst the young, as a result of the same factors that are affecting cultures everywhere, among them globalization, consumerism, and liberalism.

⁴⁴ Personal communication, Abdulrazak Panaemalae, who is currently undertaking a research project on this issue. While the term “Wahabi” has recently come into use, other terms used to indicate “modernist” Islamic practice in the region include the Malay “*kaum muda*”, or in Thai, “*khana mai*”.

Numerous studies point to social problems prevalent among the youth in the region, including drug addiction, and involvement in violence and petty crime. One wonders whether one of the sources of the violence might be an identity crisis among young men of the region resulting from the obliteration of Patani Malay identity over the last hundred years, the resistance to the full adoption of a Thai identity given its association with discrimination and oppression, and the attraction of a radicalized Islam to fill the void. The French scholar of Muslim society in Europe, Olivier Roy, argues that one of the reasons for extremism among some young European Muslims is their rejection of the traditional culture of their parents, their inability to find acceptance in the mainstream cultures of Europe,⁴⁵ and their refuge in a purified, reconstruction of an ‘imagined’ Islam. “The more radical the terrorists, the more they do not embody a traditional culture or a culture at all. Islamic radicalization is a consequence of “de-culturalization” and not the expression of a pristine culture.”⁴⁶ Roy’s argument thus raises the question whether a similar phenomenon of deculturalization, albeit caused by different factors, may be a contributing factor to the radicalism in Thailand’s south:

“The generation gap, coupled with a sense of disenfranchising [...] individualization of faith, self-teaching, generation gap, rejection of authority (including that of religious established leaders), loosening of family ties, lack of socialization with a broader community (including the ethnic community of their parents, and withdrawal towards a small inward-looking group akin to a cult: all these factors show the extent of the process of deculturation of the radicals.”⁴⁷

If a Patani Malay identity is indeed in crisis, then that may also explain why the separatist organizations such as PULO, the BRN, and Bersatu, whose political ideologies were originally based, as argued above, on national liberation rather than Islam, seem only tangentially involved in the conflict that has erupted since the beginning of 2004.⁴⁸ Despite

⁴⁵ In fact, these “mainstream cultures” have themselves been undergoing a transition at the very moment of large-scale Muslim immigration, with the gradual weakening of the nation-states and the national identities they nurtured as a result of the project of European integration, and more generally, globalization.

⁴⁶ Olivier Roy, “A Clash of Cultures or a Debate on Europe’s Values?,” *International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) Review*, 15 Spring 2005, pp. 5-6.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7

⁴⁸ Nidhi Eeosiwong, “Understanding the Situation in the South as a “Millenarian Revolt”, *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia* 6, available at <http://kyotoreview.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/issue/issue5/>

repeated claims by the government, it is quite unclear to what extent, if at all, separatism is a goal of the militants. Indeed, one of the puzzling aspects of the conflict is the ambiguity regarding the objectives of the militants, which is perhaps a symptom of the confused ideology of the movement in the midst of the void left by the obliteration of Patani Malay identity.

One of the most trenchant critiques of Patani Malay identity comes from a former militant, now a columnist writing in Thai for the national news magazine *Nation Weekly* under the pen-name, “Bahrun”.⁴⁹ Unlike most Thai academics whose target was the Thai government and its insensitive treatment of the local community, Bahrun’s main target is the Malay nationalist ideology of the resistance movements in southern Thailand involved in the violence. To illustrate the deep roots of Malay nationalism in the region in one of his columns he recalls his days as a student in a *pondok* in Patani, where his seniors would warn him never to trust the Muslim students from other provinces who could not speak Malay. It was not surprising, therefore, that the Muslims of the three southern provinces should see themselves as distinct from the rest of Thailand, a mind-set that supports separatist sentiment. Bahrun sees exclusivist attitudes such as these as the legacy of values instilled by Patani’s former traditional rulers.⁵⁰ He is particularly critical of academics (both Muslim and non-Muslim) for their continual resort to history, particularly “Patani’s glorious past”, to explain the troubles in the south. He regards history as one of the main factors behind an enduring Malay chauvinism (*khlang chat*) that fuels militancy.⁵¹ An even more serious charge he makes is that it is the influence of such radical Malay nationalism that has led to the distortion of Islamic teaching, seen for example in the controversial manual used by some of the militants, *Berjihad di Patani*.⁵²

index.html

⁴⁹ See especially “Ngao atalak melayu patani” (Shadow of Patani Malay Identity) in “Bahrun”, *Yihad si thao: khrai sang khrai liang fai tai* (Grey Jihad: Who Started and Who is Stoking the Southern Fire) (Bangkok: Sarika, 2005), pp. 29-40.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36, 105-106, 161. He is particularly critical of the government-appointed National Reconciliation Council, which he views as “lost in the history of the Malay kingdom and Malay identity”; p. 121.

⁵² “Bahrun”, *Yihad si thao*, p. 109.

The most important aspect about this mobilization involving all those Muslim leaders and organizations is that they do not seem to realize that they are being ideologically led to create a distorted picture of Islam, caused by the force of the collision of Malay nationalism. This is one of the worst sins.⁵³

In several of his columns one can see the influence of the Islamic discourse that rejects ethno-nationalism, the prominent theme in PAS's political discourse discussed above. Bahrun even refers explicitly to the well-known commentary on the Qur'an by the Egyptian Islamist ideologue Sayyid Qutb, where this idea is developed.⁵⁴ The danger is in letting Islam become "enchained" by Malay identity.⁵⁵ Thus at the very moment that prominent Thai academics such as Nidhi Eeosiwong⁵⁶ and Chaiwat Satha-Anand⁵⁷ are calling for the Thai government as well as the general public to accept the Malay ethnic identity of the people of the three southern provinces as part of the solution to the conflict, a view deriving from a liberal, multicultural critique of the Thai state's chauvinistic policies of assimilation, Bahrun regards the persistence of that ethnic identity (at least as an element in the ideology of the militants) as one of the principal factors behind the conflict. In is ironic therefore, that the position of Bahrun, a former militant and presumably a local Muslim of Malay ethnicity, is actually closer⁵⁸ to that of the Thai state: he sees the necessity of de-ethnicizing the conflict and affirming the people's Islamic identity, shorn of the Patani Malay nationalism that has been so dominant over the last fifty years.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁵⁶ In 2006, Nidhi Eeosiwong's "Midnight University" network of academics, students and social activists organized an informal course in "Malay Studies", with lectures delivered by Thai academics on Malay society as well as the conflict in the south. Some of these lectures were posted on the network's website: <http://www.geocities.com/midarticle/newpage330.html>. In May 2006, a seminar on Malay Studies was organized by Midnight University at the College of Islamic Studies at Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani.

⁵⁷ Chaiwat is regarded as being the main influence in the report of the National Reconciliation Council released in May 2006, which among other things called for the government to recognize the local Malay dialect as a "working language" by the government. The chairman of the NRC, former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun, has also publicly called for the recognition of the Malay ethnicity of the Muslims in the border provinces in contrast to then PM Thaksin Shinawatra's more nationalist line. Following the publication of the NRC's report, Gen. Prem Tinasulanond, Chairman of the politically influential Privy Council and popularly regarded as the King's spokesman, publicly rejected the proposal of using Malay as a working language. For Bahrun's critique of the National Reconciliation Council see "Bahrun", *Yihat si thao*, pp. 75-82 and "Mong prawatisat duai ta nuea" in *Fa Dio Kan*, Vol. 4, No. 2, April – June 2006, pp. 107-111.

⁵⁸ The difference being, however, that the objective of the Thai state is fostering an Islam over which it has administrative control.

CONCLUSION

The extent to which the spectre of Patani Malay nationalism still haunts representations of southern Thailand can be judged by its appearance in an internationally influential report published by the International Crisis Group (ICG) in May 2005, “Southern Thailand: Insurgency, not Jihad”. Near the beginning of the report the author states:

The Muslims of southern Thailand are mostly ethnic Malays and speak Malay, rather than Thai. They were once part of an independent sultanate of Patani, comprising the present-day provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and parts of western Songkhla, that flourished from 1390 to 1902. That history as a separate political entity and the second-class status and political neglect the Malay minority has endured ever since within independent Thailand, provides the backdrop to the violence today.⁵⁹

These sentiments might have come straight out of Ibrahim Syukri’s *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani* published fifty years earlier. Such a misleading statement on the crucial political question of “independence” completely fails to account for the long history of Siam’s overlordship over Patani - albeit a contested overlordship, as was the case with Siam’s relations with all its vassal states. The ICG goes even further than Syukri, dating Patani’s loss of “independence” to 1902, rather than Syukri’s late eighteenth century.⁶⁰ The first sentence, for which no evidence is cited, also ignores the diversity and complexity of “Muslim” and “Malay” identity in southern Thailand, and fails to take into account those Muslims who do in fact identify themselves as “Thai” and speak Thai on a daily basis. It also omits the millions of Muslims in southern Thailand who live outside the region mentioned who speak no Malay and have no relationship, sentimental or otherwise, with the former sultanate of Patani. The Thais appear in the report mainly in the form of oppressive state security officials,

⁵⁹ International Crisis Group, *Southern Thailand*, p. 2.

⁶⁰ Syukri, *The Malay Kingdom of Patani*, pp. 57-8. According to Teeuw and Wyatt, “The Malay story [in the *Hikayat Patani*] makes it implicitly clear that Patani acknowledged the sovereignty of Ayudhya already in the time of Sultan Mudhaffar Syah [in the sixteenth century] ... The story as it runs ... suggests a relationship of dependence and inferiority rather than of equality”; Teeuw and Wyatt, *Hikayat Patani*, p. 230. Even Che Man, leader of the umbrella group for Patani separatist organizations, Bersatu, writes, “Ever since the establishment of Muslim dynasties, the kingdom of Patani seems to have experienced alternate periods of independence and Siamese control”, Wan Kadir Che Man, *Muslim Separatism: the Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 34.

while the ethnic Chinese, whose presence on the peninsula is ancient and continuous, are invisible.⁶¹

This exclusionist conception of the “Malay Muslims” of southern Thailand associated with a historically powerful Patani state, which is characteristic of Patani Malay nationalism, is central to the ideology of separatism. It can be seen, for example, in a map produced by the Bersatu separatist organization, which depicts the “state” of Patani (*Negara Patani*), coloured in green, covering the *entire* region of southern Thailand. The existing provinces, whose present-day boundaries are retained on the map, are renamed in Malay.⁶² Underneath the map is the rallying cry, *Bersatu, Berjuang, Merdeka* – “Unity, Struggle, Freedom”. Bahrin refers to similar extravagant claims made by the BRN over the southern Thai peninsula to as far north as the Kho Khot Kra district in Ranong province, on the basis that these lands once belonged to “Melayu”.⁶³ The historical evidence for this claim would seem to be either the pre-Islamic state of Langkasuka, supposedly centred in the Patani region, or the larger “Malay” empire of Sri Vijaya, which is believed to have extended as far north as Chaiya in Surat Thani province, near the northernmost point of the separatist group’s claim. Thus we see a confused conflation of the notions of “Malay”, “Islam” and “Patani” within the framework of Patani Malay nationalist discourse.

Seen in this light, Thailand’s policy of national integration in the south may be regarded as an attempt to exorcise this ghost. The official Thai concept of national identity has stood out from that of many of its Southeast Asian neighbours. Whereas Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, even Myanmar, have accepted the theory (if not always the practice) of dual identities, national and ethnic, since independence, Thailand maintains an essentially assimilationist model of national integration. It is revealing that one of the responses to the crisis in the south was to renew official nationalist campaigns to promote “Thainess”. In the words of one of the most popular nationalist propaganda songs: “underneath the Thai flag the

⁶¹ On the history of ethnic diversity on the middle part of the peninsula see papers included in the Workshop Proceedings, “A Plural Peninsula: Historical Interactions among the Thai, Malays, Chinese and Others”, Walailak University, 5-7 February 2004.

⁶² The map is included in Bunkrom Khongbangsathan, *Kan to su khrang sut thai khong phon ek Chavalit Yongchaiyudh* (Gen. Chavalit Yongchaiyudh’s Last Struggle) (Bangkok, Offset Press, 2005). The map is unpaginated, it appears following the table of contents.

⁶³ Bahrin, *Yihat si thao*, pp. 172-73. Historical artifacts supposedly dating from the Sri Vijaya period have been found at Chaiya.

whole population is Thai”.⁶⁴ Within this Thainess while there is a place for Muslims, it appears there is no place for Malays, despite the greater tolerance of the state for cultural diversity since the end of the Cold War and the best efforts of some of Thailand’s academics.

Fraser’s study of “Malay villagers” in the Patani region in the 1950s, caught between assimilationist Thai educational and cultural policies on the one hand and Malay separatist sentiment on the other, sums up their predicament nicely:

[...] The most readily available means of signifying his distinctiveness in the face of increasing contact with the Thais is the Malay villager’s membership in the Islamic world community. He is unable to rally around linguistic differences, for these are under direct attack by the government. Although he insists he is first a Malay and then a Muslim, he is unable to use his Malay culture as a mark of distinctiveness, for either he is branded as an irredentist, or he is unable to define clearly what the distinctive elements of Malay culture are – other than religion...⁶⁵

Unlike the Malays of the other states of the peninsula, the Patani Malays were also unable to rally around another traditional source of belonging, their sultan, since the Patani sultanate had been abolished by Chulalongkorn at the beginning of the twentieth century – and in any case the original sultanate had been divided up into seven districts with their own ruling houses early in the nineteenth century. Bereft of these markers of communal identity, it would appear natural that religion should take on an added significance. Fraser had already

⁶⁴ The crisis in the south since 2004 has led to a nostalgic revival of nationalistic propaganda songs from the military dictatorship era, including “Rak Kan Wai Thoet (“Let’s Love Each Other”), whose title is somewhat reminiscent of the name of Thailand’s former ruling party, ‘Thai Rak Thai’. A re-mixed (but artistically inferior) pop version of this assimilationist classic of the 1960s by assorted artists (affiliated with an entertainment company with close business links to the Thai Rak Thai party) in response to the crisis in the south can be listened to at <http://www.kapook.com/musicstation/newmusicstation/play.php?id=4240> (Incidentally, this is a good example of how decades of statist discourse has created its own mass market, now exploited by Thailand’s culture industry, which is today far more efficient at producing and disseminating cultural product than its predecessor, the bureaucracy). On the subject of Thai rock music and nationalism see Suradet Phakphian, “Rok rak chat tae chat (chai) mai jam pen tong rak rok” (“Patriotic Rock, but the Nation Does Not Need to Love Rock”) *Wathanasala* <http://www.wtnsl.net>, December 10 2005. A Malay version of the song complete with Malay lyrics is also available for the benefit of Malay-speaking Thai nationalists, produced by the Ratchaphat University of Yala and sung by the artists from the same university and the Public

Relations Department (see http://www.thaisnews.com/prdnews/peace_song/song_south/song_1.html)

⁶⁵ Thomas M. Fraser, Jr., *Fishermen of South Thailand: the Malay Villagers* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1966), p. 89.

noticed the increasing role that religion was playing in the lives of Patani men at the time of his writing. He finishes his study by noting an observation of the “old men” in the village: “[...] the young men today are better than we were – they like to talk about religion and to go to *makan pulot*. They know that religion is good, especially in hard times.”⁶⁶

Given the Thai government’s policy of suppressing Patani Malay identity and assimilating the population as Thai Muslims on one side of the border, and Malaysian government programs (implemented by UMNO nationally and PAS in neighbouring Kelantan) of Islamizing the Malays on the other, it is thus not surprising that the language of the resistance movements in the region has taken on an Islamic hue. Yet since September 2001, and even more so since the outbreak of violence in the south in January 2004, this Islamic identity that the Thai state had sought to foster with increasing confidence until quite recently, has itself come under great suspicion, from the Thai government, other governments involved in pursuing the “war on terror” and the international security studies community. Thus, the population of the “three southern provinces” find themselves in what must be a difficult predicament, in which a Patani Malay identity is out of the question; adopting a mainstream Thai identity involves surmounting numerous cultural and religious obstacles; and embracing an Islamic identity, if expressed too overtly, places one at acute risk of being branded an “Islamic extremist”.

It is tempting to conclude, therefore, that the radicalism that is a feature of the Islamic discourse of the militants in the southern border provinces today is a logical outcome of the denial of Patani Malay identity and the inherent difficulty involved in fully accepting mainstream Thai identity. But in this Islamic discourse that circulates in southern Thailand one can still sense the presence of the spectre of Patani Malay identity.

⁶⁶ Thomas M. Fraser, Jr., *Rusembilan: A Malay Fishing Village in Southern Thailand* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), p. 248.

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