WHO DO THEY THINK YOU ARE?
IMAGINED ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES, THAI RACISM AND VIOLENCE IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

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This paper begins to explore the role of imagined and constructed formations of identity and difference, sameness and otherness, ethnicity and religion and the role they play in generating political violence in southern Thailand. It is argued that attachment to exclusive and particularistic identities, incited by militant Buddhist and Muslim nationalist politics, causes division and conflict. Formations of Thainess and Malayness and ways of being Buddhist and Muslim need to be understood as being as used, lived and performed in a particular time and place: a conflict situation in the instance of southern Thailand. After briefly glossing and evaluating some influential accounts of the role of ethnicity and religion in explaining the southern conflict, I focus on the situational performance of Thai Buddhism and its implication in racism against Malay Muslims. At stake is a human right to dissent or exit from a particular version or tradition of religious and cultural practice if it has oppressive and violent consequences. It is power-knowledge relations and socio-political forces that fix forms and experiences of Thainess as Buddhist and Malayness as Muslim. Lastly, I suggest in order to secure a durable peace we need to disable ethno-religious identity politics by a practice of tolerance through being indifferent to differences, constructed otherness and recognizing the deep south as a zone of hybridity, wherein people share in common multiple and mixed identities, cultural and religious practices.
How are we to make sense of the complex causes and dynamics of the continuing violence in Thailand’s deep Southern states of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat? Violence took victims, claimed to be over 6,097 deaths in the period January 2004-April 2014 (Deep South Watch), who are Malay Muslims and Thai Buddhists. This paper addresses that portion and aspect of political violence which is related to insurgency and security issues- not crime, lawlessness, local politics (Askew, 2010:121-3). Violence was generated by mobilizing individuals and populations through imagined ethnic and religious differences as belonging to exclusive ethno-religious communities in a zone ‘Patani’ marked by multiple and mixed hybrid performances of culture, religion and identity. I argue it is constructed differences and otherness that function to set people apart and against each other in an identity politics. Individuals ethnic, cultural and religious identifications, displays of loyalty and affiliation are read as a national security issue and threat by the Thai State and the stakes of a righteous insurrection by Muslim militants. My assumption in this paper is that it is the enforcement of particularistic identities and interests drives xenophobia and racism. Islam and Buddhism can be peaceful and tolerant of difference but also can support and generate violence. We must understand how are they performed in a specific situation, particular time and place; how they are lived and used by actors: How are people Buddhist and Muslim in the south of Thailand? My focus shall be on the performance of Buddhism and its implication in racism against Malay Muslims.

At stake is how both state and non-state actors engage in a identity politics of religion and ethnicity prescribing what individuals ‘true authentic identities’ and ‘real interests’ are. This struggle over identities posits and presupposes primordial experiences of religious, cultural and national identity and belonging: Thainess and Malayness, and ways of being Muslim and being Buddhist. That is, divisions, identities and differences as pre-given causes, rather than constructed effects of power-knowledge relations. In the south people are interpolated by the Thai state, monks, Buddhist militia, Muslim Malay insurgents, imam, to identify with a ‘side’, a ‘cause’, and ‘join us or disappear’. The actions and incitation of Buddhist security forces, peacekeepers and separatist Muslim rebels divide Southern populations into two hostile ‘camps’ of polarized racialised and religious identities: dark Muslim un-Thai strangers- ‘Khaek’ and Siamese occupiers, non-believers- ‘Kafir’. Ethnic and religious differences become absolute and fixed together, so that to be a ‘true Thai’ you must be Buddhist, and to be a ‘real Malay’ you must be Muslim; this self-other relationship not only denies any sameness, but makes each other into an Other, the enemy within, enemy-others. Buddhist and Muslim friends and neighbours living in peaceful co-existence become transformed into feared and hated others: one of ‘Them’, not one of ‘Us’, the enemy (Jerryson, 2011:79).

A critical question is whose and which normative version of Islam and Buddhism, Thainess and Malayness is being imposed in Southern Thailand and with what socio-political consequences? A majority or minority version? An ‘elite’ Thai or Malay, or, militant group’s version of culture, religion and tradition? What do ordinary individuals
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and communities of the deep South think? What are their versions and lived experiences of religiosity and ethnic identification? What controls ways of interpreting, living and enacting Buddhist and Muslim traditions, customs, beliefs and spiritual practices? Do individuals have freedom of choice of following another version of their religion, different from their grandparents and what is taught inside, and outside, schools? A right to dissent from and exit a particular Buddhist or Muslim practice and truth which justifies violence, whether it be offensive or defensive? In the areas of conflict how do people identify themselves, aside from the identities pinned on them by the Thai state and Muslim insurgents? Are religious and ethnic differences and identities the most important for people, rather than gender, political, and local differences?

Let us orientate ourselves by briefly examining three key interpretations of the southern Thailand conflict and the role played by ethnic and religious differences in them.

Duncan McCargo understands the conflict’s cause not to lie in religion or ethnicity but rather a legitimation crisis (2009:180) of the Thai state and control by the Thai king’s sacred rule. McCargo sees separatist violence in the region as contained and prevented by the ‘virtuous rule and security’ of network-monarchy, with the Thai king as a major political actor, which unravelled when Thaksin changed local security and administrative agencies (McCargo, 2009:7-9). The Thai state lost its moral authority and legitimacy in the South. Hence the cause of conflict is political ‘a call for autonomy, representation and participation’ by Southern Muslims (McCargo, 2009:18). It is not an ethnic conflict in McCargo’s analysis. The Thai state enrolled and co-opted Muslim elites as its agents to govern but in the process Thai-ified them and thus local Southern leaders lost their moral and spiritual authority; this exacerbated violence and the separatist cause as local Malay Muslim populations were excluded from participating in governing, having neither been consulted nor given their active consent (McCargo, 2009:20,54,59). Conflict is part of a nationalist struggle between Patani and Bangkok rather than centered in Islam (McCargo, 2009:187,188). McCargo argues that whilst insurgents use Islamic language and customs, Southern violence is not a religious conflict about Islam but rather ‘historical-political grievances’ (McCargo, 2009:188).

Islam is not the cause of violence but an ‘ideological frame, a legitimating resource’ (McCargo, 2009:12,180) used by militants in the context of a lack of Malay Muslim political representation and participation in governance. Thus, Islam is an idiom and means to contest and combat the Thai state and Bangkok rule. But nevertheless, I would argue, that Islam is used by radicals as though they wish to ‘divide and rule’ Malay Muslims, to judge and impose identities as good or bad, loyal or traitors to Islam and to demonize Thai state officials, security forces, inciting animosity. So, whilst there is not a Southern Thailand ‘jihad’ (Askew, 2010:125) or any direct orders for ‘juwae’ fighters to kill, it is difficult to agree with McCargo (2009: 48,9) that religion—including Buddhism as we shall see shortly-only plays a minor role in inciting and supporting killing. In an arena of conflict religions are used to legitimate and justify killing humans as others: ‘unholy'
and impure enemies. For both Buddhists and Muslims it can be a sacred duty to use defensive violence and kill to preserve: their ‘territory’-drive out colonizing ‘invaders’ and ‘occupiers’- identity and religion.

McCargo’s (2009) analysis of the Southern conflict is problematic in several ways, namely, it tends to:

1) underestimate how religion and ethnicity are performed situationally and used to cause violence and enact oppositional identities.

2) ignore Thai racism and processes of racialization, especially religion as a marker of ethnicity and membership of an imagined race which results in the ethno-religious exclusion of Malays and Muslims from Thainess;

3) play down the ethno-religious aspect of the Southern conflict as resistance against the Thai state as a Buddhist racist state;

4) have a Thai state-centric point of view centred on a sovereign myth of legitimacy of the virtuous rule of the monarch. Alternately, adopting a Schmittian perspective, ‘sovereignty’ and rule can be understood as it actually operates in Thailand, especially in the restive south, through extra-legal military powers of suspending and annulling the constitution and rule of law to create states of exception and emergency (Schmitt, 1996; Agamben,1998; Rackett, 2014 a,b.) which does not turn on individuals as giving their active consent as ‘citizens’ and rational actors but rather as subjects.

5) focus on and privileges the role of Malay Muslim elites, individual personalities, taking for granted their interests and identities, to the exclusion of the diverse and multiple identities of ordinary Malay Muslims (cf. below; and Askew, 2010:147-8).

Askew’s research and interviews with insurgents ‘emphasize religious motivation as a principal impulse and mechanism of commitment for many recruits. Insurgent leaflets have commonly demonized the Thai state and Buddhists as kafir (unbelievers), claiming that Muslims are under attack and that Thai troops have been sent south to kill Muslims’ (Askew, 2010:126). Askew argues for the importance of ethnicity and that the meaning and solutions to the southern unrest converge on the key question of Malay Muslims of the borderland: how do they view the current violence, and just how do they position themselves on a range of matters extending from ethno-religious identification, relations with and experiences of the Thai state, and attitudes towards separatist-inspired insurgency and their views on violence and ... identifications (Askew, 2010:143-4).

Jerryson’s bold hypothesis is that the primary cause of violent conflict in the south is racial inequality (Jerryson, 2011:144,166). Thai state led exclusionary policies together
with impoverished social conditions gives rise to separatist strife. Malay Muslims are ‘displaced from the normative identity twice-fold…neither ethnically Tai, nor religiously Buddhist’ (Jerryson, 2011:144). Any solution to the conflict, argues Jerryson, requires ‘reworking of Thailand's concept of racial formations’ which act to ‘displace minority identities by measuring their ethnic and religious identities against the norm of Thai Buddhism’ (Jerryson, 2011:183).

I think Jerryson’s interpretation is correct. Pace McCargo’s analyses conducted in terms of the legitimacy crisis of ‘network monarchy’ and the inviolability of the king’s sacred ‘body politic’, these are not the primary issue in the southern conflict. I would question if Thai Bangkok rule has ever been legitimate? And not just in the deep South. Historically there were rebellions and resistance against Bangkok ruled in the North and Northeast Thailand (Winichaikul,1994). I would argue governmental rule in Thailand is exercised through a normative Thai Buddhist identity and imaginary race (Rackett, 2014a). Thus a case could be made, pace McCargo, that the conflict, Malay Muslim insurgent separatists are not attacking the monarchy, its putative legitimacy but rather the racist and religious form of Bangkok ‘internal colonial' racist rule.

Arguably, all the diversity of ‘ethnic’ populations in Siam: Lanna, Mon, Chinese, Khmer, Lao, have been subjected to Bangkok ‘internal colonization’: ‘Thai-ified’ and ‘Buddhaized’ to varying degrees (Winichaikul, 1994; Streckfuss, 1993; Streckfuss, 2011). The deep south displays the effects of this process of colonization and has been restive to rule by and through Thainess. But given the regional Muslim majority and Buddhist minority mixed dynamic of the South either exclusive Buddhist or Muslim rule will alienate and marginalize individuals and communities in this hybrid zone.

Racism is ignored by McCargo’s analysis along with religion’s role in justifying and generating violence. Thainess as a dominant form of (Buddhist) rule through the imposition of a racialized identity fuelling racism against the: Malay in the South, Khmer and Lao in the Northeast, ‘Hill Tribe’ indigenous minorities in the North and refugees from Burma.

I think to understand the Southern conflict we need to not just to pose the question of regional autonomy, but to what extent will the Thai state, its form of rule, allow minority populations, not just the Malay Muslims, dissent and autonomy from an imposed exclusive formation of Thainess? People are gauged as civilized and judged worthy for inclusion within the boundaries of Thainess, historically, according to the degree which they embrace Buddhism, qua civility, and display signs and sentiments of unconditional love of nation and king (Streckfuss, 2011). Do Thai citizens exist or are there only Thai subjects? Are ‘ethnic’ Malay Muslims free to be Thai and Muslim, Thai Muslims? Malay Buddhists? Or just Thai?
I shall now have a dialogue with and examine Jerryson’s work ‘Buddhist Fury’ (Jerryson, 2011) to underscore the force of racial, ethnic and religious discourses which fix situational identities and differences. In other words, how ethnicity and religion are made to figure in fuelling antagonism and violence. The work of Juergenmeyer (2001), Zizek (2003) Juergenmeyer and Jerryson (2010), Faure (2010) Tambiah (1976, 1996), Victoria (1998), Jerryson (2011) (Streekfuss, 2011) and Rackett (2014,a,b) de-bunks the myth of Buddhism as a moderate moral spiritual force ‘above’ the political and outside the state. Whilst Buddhism is not violent in-and-of-itself, as a lived tradition it can lend itself to dark and deadly uses. Thus, there are Buddhist dimensions to the violent Thai state power struggle to control the South.

In Thailand to be Thai is to be Buddhist. But, equally in the South, and Malaysia, to be Malay is to be Muslim. Ethnicity and religious affiliation are welded together in an imagined community of faith and destiny. For Jerryson, the political stake in the South of Thailand is Malay Muslims desire ‘for autonomy based on ethno-religious identification’ (Jerryson, 2011:8). Jerryson’s comparative and historical narrative helps render the religious violence in southern Thailand intelligible as a norm and not an enigmatic exception. Buddhism, in the thrall of Thai state nationalism, functions as a fundamental marker of ethnicity and imagined ‘race’. Jerryson shows how being Thai and Thainess are state produced racialized identities, which have their source in Siam’s response to Western colonization and Buddhist and Hindu religious traditions. Thai identity politics doubly excludes Malay Muslims from Thainess: by their other religion and racialization as ‘khaek’ dark strangers.

Buddhism has never existed outside the State (Jerryson, 2011:58,9; Tambiah, 1976). Buddhism historically has served forms of governance as a source, and means, of legitimating sovereignty, providing spiritual and moral guidelines for kings’ righteous pure rule, which do not exclude violence and war. Monks as spiritual exemplars are attributed with the power to purify and order hearts and minds and social relations (Gray, 1986). This sacred role is not discrete from politics and power. Under Thai State nationalist purview, Thai monks have had a political role as emissaries: agents for building new national identity and unity. Monks enrolled in governmental programmes embodied the law and authority of the state not just the dhamma(Jerryson, 2011,61-8,106-7). As state agents they promoted socio-political objectives to re-integrate ethnic populations and create moral communities of national belonging identity and solidarity. Thus their political duty politicized their representations(Jerryson, 2011:85). The advent of ‘the political monk’, was set out first by the work of Tambiah (1976) and Somboon (1993): ‘pra thammathut’ missionary role for monks in rural North and Northeast to unify and detach restive locals from regional affiliations and identifications, radical politics, to re-attach them to nation, king and religion; ‘pra thammarak’ monks ‘civilizing mission’ focused on ‘hill tribes’ Karen, Hmong, Shan, to convert them to Buddhism, reduce drug trafficking, as loyal subjects (Jerryson, 2011:165; Tambiah, 1976; Somboon, 1993). Buddhism was used as an anti-communist ideology from the 1950’s to late 1970’s to neutralize rebels in the South.
and Northeast. The Thai state is sacralized as an imaginary repository of pure dhamma practice, which monks politically defend in the frontline. Anyone who wishes to change the socio-political order, create division and disharmony becomes an enemy of the state demanding political action. As Jerryson underscores political monks are a phenomenon of violent times.

The present southern conflict marks the re-emergence of a nationalist and political use of monks, supported by Queen Sirikit, to uphold the faith: ‘pra asamak’ role is to support the laity, increase the number of southern monks and protect the integrity of Buddhism in Yala, Pattani and Naratiwat ‘danger’ zones (Jerryson, 2011:66).

Enrolling monks in governmental programmes transforms them into symbols of Thai nationalism and Thai Buddhism. Monks have become military targets in conflict, provoking violent reactions and increasing religious tensions, through the particular way they perform Buddhism in the South by asserting their political role and call for a strong form of Buddhist nationalism. Some southern monks address the ‘Malay Muslim problem’ in a way reminiscent of monk Kittivuddho’s (1976) right wing Buddhist nationalist 1970's call to defend the faith against communism and to justify killing impure enemy others in a time of emergency. Buddhist religion is used by/ serves the state, and non-state actors both to justify and legitimate violence. Security forces, police, soldiers, militia, villagers are guided by Buddhist principles. However, their role in the violence is played down by the Thai public image of Buddhism as non-violent and the troubles in the South as an Islamic conflict caused by Malay Muslims.

Jerryson explores the question of how Buddhist monks become to be ‘walking embodiments of Thai nationalism’? (Jerryson, 2011:50). Thai monks roles mean that they are double agents of the State and Sangha, representing the sacred and the profane, as living symbols of the Dhamma and representatives of Thainess, the Thai polity. It is monks' political agency that explains their targeting by insurgents. As representatives of the Thai State, monks, unintentionally, are a catalyst escalating religious violence and identity politics. Jerryson argues the conditions for evoking Buddhist violence are: a space of conflict; politicized Buddhist images, roles and representations and any defacing assault upon their sacred status and incarnation (Jerryson, 2011:50).

How to be a Thai Buddhist is learnt and performed in a specific way in the southern Thai conflict zone. The role of being a Buddhist monk has been politicized as a response to violence and, furthermore, incites religious Thai nationalism. Monks incarnate and signify the legitimacy of the Thai state in a ‘convergence of Thai sacrality and governance' (Jerryson, 2011:81). The consequences of Buddhist soldiers and police defending monks and local communities against insurgent Muslim attacks, is the militarization of Buddhist identities and spaces: temples become fortresses and military camps and have led to the advent of a seemingly enigmatic figure the military monk ‘tahan pra' (Jerryson, 2011:114-142).
A rise in insurgency since 2004, the year of the Tak Bai and Kru Ze massacres of Malay Muslims in the south by Thai security forces (McCargo, 2009:28-49), makes religious practice a national security problem of identification of who and what you are, either: friendly and safe, on our ‘side’, or a dangerous threat, on the other ‘side’. This political drama is staged by nationalist ideology as an anti-Thai clash threatening to destroy Thai Civilization and unleash anarchy. Buddhism is used to manage the ‘state of emergency’ in the South. But according to Jerryson, Buddhists are attacked, not primarily as Buddhists, but rather, as symbols and representatives of the Thai State and Bangkok rule; this helps explain why Buddhist monks are targeted by insurgents and the theatrical performance of extreme violence against them: beheadings, high rates of injury and death.

Monks signify the sacred and profane: political and religious power together with purity as ‘walking embodiments of Thai nationalism’. When monks are attacked by militants, with their heavy load of ‘symbolic capital’ this is experienced as an attack on the ‘body-politic’ as well as the Buddhist Sangha; the result being local and national fury (Jerryson, 2011:50). Monks are drawn into violence and politics through their ‘religio-political identities’. The closer they are to conflict the more religion becomes relevant to the violence. It is not their intention to be catalysts for Buddhist violence, but despite their equanimity, their actions and meanings exceed religious authority, representing the sacred nation, national religion. The body of a monk is a sacred vessel of the dhamma, sacrosanct, making murder a defilement inciting moral outrage. As ethical ‘body-examples’ of spiritual purity, wisdom, the charismatic embodiment of dhammic truth, when they are attacked this is experienced as an attack on a sacred incarnation and pathway to enlightenment—much as defiling the Koran or the Prophet (Jerryson, 2011: 59).

The Thai State is normatively Buddhist and political monks amplify this leading to embattled nature of Buddhist spaces and ways of life in the South. Monks are seen as the enemy even though they have no enmity towards Muslims. Ironically, monks cannot detach their political identity, role and ethno-nationalist significations. They are perceived as agents of the state. The problem is they are not seen as an individual Buddhist monk, having a local identity, but as just another representative of a Buddhist Thai State. Monks are identified as a religious and national symbol not humans. When monks, temples and statues are attacked this simultaneously defaces a sacred political and religious symbol (Jerryson, 2011: 70).

A byproduct of religious violence is a dualistic mentality, eliminating complexity and ambiguity, robbing people of plural identities, ethnicities, either one of ‘us’ Thai Buddhist friend or, one of ‘them’ Malay Muslim enemy. In this absolutist morality people and events are either good or evil. Conflict thus loses any local meanings and motives and is read, for instance, as Malay Muslim separatist irrational violence (Jerryson, 2011:73).

Attacking a national symbol discloses, unleashes and reinforces its full power and status propelling a conflict onto a cosmic stage (Jerryson, 2011:74) Juergensmeyer). Violence
transforms a temple into a national cause resulting in the militarization of temples and Buddhist actors became political entities and targets. A supernatural cosmic drama of trans-individual actors and supra-human forces performing Buddhism at risk and in moral peril, not a mundane story of power politics, separatist forces against the nation-state. Defacing temples and monks was seized upon as a cause to promote a militant Buddhist nationalism. The image of beheaded monks is used to incite hatred, to justify and drive a fantasy fear of insurgents performing a Muslim ‘ethnic cleansing’ of Buddhists. Muslims are demonized into evil others inflaming aggression into an orgy of destructive violence. Mobilizing religion transforms security forces into ‘moral guardians, sacred avengers of the nation, not mere State servants, whose sacred duty is to uphold and protect the integrity of Thai Buddhism’ (Jerryson, 2011:75,76).

National rage and Buddhist fury are products of monks' political role in a conflict zone unleashing the latent power of their sacred representations: a ‘religionization of politics' is manifest in the management of conflict southern Thailand by politicizing Buddhism. Monks enact being a dhammic vessel, blessing people and amulets, purifying, offering merit making on alms rounds, performing ceremonies and rituals, living an ascetic lifestyle. But all these roles and forms of agency are interrupted and changed by violence. Performing Buddhism, being a Buddhist, has become militarized: police and military make merit by giving monks saffron bullet-proof vests! Monks see having guns as a minor misdemeanor, necessary to fulfilling their duty in violent circumstances (Jerryson, 2011:84,85,114-142).

How to be a monk is prescribed by socio-political parameters and fantasy. Religion is de facto normatively Buddhist in Thai society. The Thai King is an upholder and righteous protector of all faiths but must be Buddhist to have pure ‘blood' and ‘barami' to perform this sacred duty (Tambiah, 1976; Gray, 1986). Buddhist monks have demonstrated to assert that Buddhism is the national religion of Thailand. Rama VI argued that Buddhist war is justifiable if defensive and killing is done for a higher cause from good intentions not hatred and intolerance. The spectre of Kittivuddho haunts the South urging that it is only a minor sin to kill non-human enemies of religion, nation and monarchy as a revered sacred duty (Kittivuddho, 1976). Buddhist nationalism displaces other social and moral problems so that southern Malay Muslims, like communists in the 1970s, become public enemy of Thainess ‘No 1’ for Buddhist laity and monks who have to defend and preserve Buddhism by any means necessary. In southern Thailand violence is exacerbated by monks performances leading to militarization making them Other and their otherness a cause of violence. This is exemplified by the question of whether a person can be a monk and a soldier: the advent of the ‘military monk' soldiers ordaining to fulfill their sacred duty Jerryson, 2011: 122)

The ‘tahan pra' ‘soldier monk' exists in the South, despite official denials ‘monks cannot fight and have weapons' (Jerryson, 2011:114-21) and Western fantasies ignorant of the Asian tradition of Buddhist warrior monks (Jerryson and Juergensmeyer, 2010; Victoria,
1998). They signify the collapse between the sacred and profane authorities of Thai Buddhism-Church and the State. Soldiers can become monks, but not vice versa. Military monks transgress a sacred image of peaceful non-violent meditating monks, their secret existence exposes the foundational myth that Buddhism and violence are mutually exclusive. Monks carry weapons in their shoulder bags for protection, but the issue, argues Jerryson, goes deeper showing the presence of military monks and the State at the heart of southern temples (Jerryson, 2011:120). A soldier monk who shoots to kill, to defend other monks and the dhamma, can justify this as a minor sin, lesser evil, to protect Thai Buddhists against ‘Mara’: Malay Muslims constructed as enemy-others incarnating a negative, violent, ‘evil’ opposite of ‘Thai goodness’ (Jerryson, 2011:120; Keyes, 2010).

Thai racialized identity

Thai racism identifies Malay Muslims as ‘khaek’ not by using a Western biological notion of race, but rather one based on skin colour, a sign of spiritual purity and means of identification for inclusion or exclusion within the fold of Thainess. Khaek as a category subsumes multiple ethnicities, South Asians, Malays, Arabs, aggregated together by the shared attribute of having a dark skin, which is can be read by Buddhists as a sign of impurity and inner badness (Jerryson, 2011:151,2; Keyes, 2010). It is not ethnicity that causes racism, exclusion and inequality in Thai society but, rather, how race and religion are combined in identity formation.

Religion, argues Jerryson, (2011) is most important for Malay Muslim identity but it excludes them from Thainess. Malay ethnic identity has become fused with Islam. But it has not always been so. Historically, in the 17 Century until 1900 there were Malay Buddhists and the state of Patani was considered by Malays as neither Buddhist, nor, Muslim; this shows that although Malay is an indeterminate and ambiguous identity, identification as Malay Muslim fixes as set apart from dominant Thai society (Jerryson, 2011:152). Was this a product of Siamese colonization? Jerryson sees it as associated with Malay Muslims racial categorization making them ethnically and religiously Other.

Chinese are included in Thainess on the grounds of being Buddhists, their shared customs and beliefs, socio-economic role and status (Jerryson, 2011:145). Thai Buddhism is the normative measure of identity and civility, which others lack, and becomes a racial identity. Khaek is a racialized identity including a religious marker, a negative classifier ‘people of another religion’ (Jerryson, 2011:152-3). Keyes (2010) argues that ‘khaek' is associated with the ‘Buddhist evil’ figure of Mara, demons and their human followers, imagined as dark bearded figures-(unintentionally) representing historical Malays and South Asians. Thus, I argue that Thai social order embodies racialized distinctions and statuses and to this degree it has traces of the Hindu caste system re-worked by Thai Buddhism and politics.
Having a dark or light skin is not just a sign of a poor socio-economic occupation, or aesthetic issue of beauty, but is an indigenous Buddhist classifier of moral and spiritual purity—as shown by Christine Gray (1986). Buddhism is not an exception to religious traditions assigning people to superior and inferior racial groups. Indeed, the formation of Thai national identity, as a response to European colonization, excluded Malay Muslims resulting in today’s southern conflict. Racial forms of otherness and colonial difference were borrowed and deployed by Siam.

The Siamese forged a notion combining nation+race+citizenship: ‘chaat’ as a new form of national identity (Streckfuss, 1993) and racialized religious identification. The Brahmin and Buddhist origins of ‘chaat’ in Sanskrit ‘jati’, signify birth, rank, caste, family, race and lineage; membership of a ‘divine race’ to become, or to be born Buddhist (Jerryson, 2011:157,158). Caste, purity and pollution, the sacred and mundane are all entailed in ‘jati’s meanings of spiritual and socio-economic status, racial formation of superior pure and impure inferior castes: one sign of membership being possession of a light skin colour. Jati was taken up by 19th Century nationalist ideology by Rama VI making Buddhism into a signifier of being civilized, a superior race, not savage jungle others within Siam, on the international imperial stage (Jerryson, 2011:158). As Scott puts it: ‘barbarians are a state effect, only existing from the point of view of the state’ (Scott, 2009:123). Siam needed savages and inferior beings for its appearance of being civilized: ethnic and religious minorities took on this role. Buddhism was crafted and re-presented as rational, philosophical and logical not based on blind faith. Siamese Buddhism became part and parcel of Siamese racial identity by excluding Malay Muslims as ‘foreign and semi-barbarians’ as Chao Phraya Yomarat expressed it (Jerryson, 2011:161), but including ethnic Lao, Khmer, Vietnamese and Chinese as they were closer, as Buddhists, to the Siamese race. Malays could not change their religion and become Thai. Ethnic Vietnamese, Khmer and Lao could be included in Thai nationality ‘as if of the same blood’ but not Malays as Muslim khaek (Jerryson, 2011:164).

Violence stems from racial inequalities decided upon religious and ethnic identifications. Skin colour, not speaking Thai and being Buddhist become pathologized as if one can read off religious identity from a persons appearance: to see one is to know one, a dark skinned potential terrorist. In a zone of conflict identities become racialized into incarnations of goodness and badness as effects of the trauma of violence (Jerryson, 2011:79,169). Faith becomes fate when identification is fixed to an essential culture, selfhood and primordial religiosity. Buddhism is used to construct otherness of those who question and oppose Thainess. Religious and racial truth regimes identify who and what people are: pure or unclean, inferior, or superior, worthy of living or dying.

Same or Other? Who do the ethnic Malay Muslims think they are?

Let us examine a pathbreaking analysis of southern ‘turbulence’ by Askew (2010). He unreifies the Malay in Malay Muslim by challenging much received wisdom about conflict
on the grounds that it takes for granted as pregiven the unity, identity, politics and interests of Malay Muslims. Many claim to speak for represent the “Malay Muslim” but in a reductionist manner which refies them in fixed a primordialist “culture and way of life” (Askew, 2010:144). Drawing upon ethnographic research, Askew argues that actually there are many ways of being an ordinary non-elite Malay Muslim (Askew, 2010:146). Whilst some Malay Muslims may express resentment of the Thai state and the past conquering of the Patani sultanate by Siam (Askew, 2010:144), others resent insurgent groups and identify with Thailand, have no interest in the past, seeing themselves as being Thai and at the same time using local Malay language.

Askew argues that an elite vs peasant, authentic vs collaborator, traitor interpretative polarity ignores how rural Malay attitudes fit neither separatist nor loyalist models. The trouble with elite views, whatever they may claim, is that they are not representative the majority (Askew, 2010: 147). There exists an over politicised view of what Malay views and identifications ought to be. For instance, dividing the population into minority Buddhist and Muslim majority communities which obfuscates existing neighbor relations and perceptions of ‘a more collective locality-based identity that transcends singular ethnic identification’ (Askew,2010:146). As I showed, following Jerryson, polarisation is a an effect not a cause of conflict: a product of religious and ethnic nationalism which creates dualism of absolute differences. Askew is correct to state that ‘exclusive “Malay” identification is situational and relational’ (2010:146). What exists in reality are multiple and hybrid identifications which confound normative ideological and political presuppositions. For example, ‘An inclusive locality-orientated form of identification crossing ethno-religious boundaries can be seen operating in some mixed neighborhoods’ (Askew, 2010:146-7). Malay Muslim loyalty, as determined by neighborhood in some Muslim areas, expresses strong opposition to insurgents, as voiced by villagers, village heads and sub-district chiefs, and also has led to the formation of anti–insurgent hit squads.

The point is that any unified category of “Patani Malay identity” is seriously brought into question, along with essentialist notions of “Malayness” and any ‘irreducible and primordial ethnic consciousness as a basis of common interest and grievance’ (Askew, 2010:147). The latter are constructs of analysts and their moral and political romantic presuppositions. Ordinary Muslims, unlike Muslim elites and academics, may vary well be quite indifferent to, the politics of, Malay Muslim identity (Askew, 2010: 148). In the light of the diversity of experiences of being Malay, views and identifications, the question which needs to be asked of both elites and separatists is who do they speak for? Thus, local elites compete with one another using questions of religion and identity as ‘a ground for political capital’ (Askew, 2010:148). Developing Askew’s logic, the question can be raised of the insurgents: who do they think they are? A vanguard? In other words, an elite, imposing on others a view of themselves as incarnating the truth of historical oppression and who represent the majority of the Malay Muslim people, their real and/or best interests? But, as Askew, astutely asks: ‘just what does this mean for ordinary Muslims still remains obscure and under-examined’ (2010:148).
Neither Buddhist nor Muslim Patani? Figures of Hybridity

The possibility of cultural and religious hybridity (McCargo, 2009:25; Jerryson, 2011:47; as conceptualized by Jan Nederveen Pieterse) undermines reification of the Muslim in ‘southern Malay Muslims’ and raises the question of how far have communities been united and unified by a shared single Muslim tradition and customs? ‘Patani’ as a region is marked by complex patterns of hybrid beliefs and practices: Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic local spirits and magic, spells and offerings.

In the Thai nationalist ‘master narrative’ the deep south represents the loss of territory by the Siamese state and the a sacred site and source for Buddhism the kingdom of Langkasuka (Jerryson, 2011:35,6; Jory, 2013: xx1v). Whilst, Muslim militants draw upon a counter-master narrative of the past in which the Patani sultanate was an Islamic state. However, as McCargo points out, Patani was ruled by a Queen for a while and there is ‘no evidence it was ever governed by a council of ulama or that the Koran was used as the basic law’ (McCargo, 2009:178). Indeed, Anthony Reid demonstrates that pre-Islamic Patani from the 15th to 17th Centuries was a paradigm of pluralism. A cosmopolis of hybrid features seen in its traders and inhabitants: Chinese, Portuguese, Javanese, Sumatran, Malay, Cham and Japanese (Reid in Jory, 2013:3-21). Elements of this ‘neither Buddhist nor Muslim but melange of bits and pieces of both’ hybridity live on today to problematicize ethnic and religious binaries.

Den Tohmeena, the son of the famous Islamic teacher and martyr Haji Sulong-‘disappeared’ by the Thai state August 13 1954- could be seen as an incarnation of hybridity. He had a secular education, spoke perfect Thai, wore Western dress and was married to a Buddhist, and, at the same time, was a powerful Malay Muslim advocate against Thai state violence and played a role as mediator for ordinary people (McCargo, 2009:63).

At Wat Srisudachan Pattani, medications, blessings, powerful amulets, and removal of curses are performed for Muslims using Buddhist spells to remove Muslim hexes. Chickens are offered to graves by Muslims and Saiburi fishermen pray to the sea goddess (McCargo, 2009: 20,1). One tradition associated with the south is a Malay form of Islam ‘overlaid with magical and syncretic practices’ (McCargo, 2009: 180). For example, insurgents make oaths on the Koran, eat paper with Arabic vows washed down with holy water and are blessed by a village immam (McCargo 2009: 151).

Muslim militants may use Malay magic and protective spells (McCargo 2009: 138-90) and join in with Buddhist rituals and practice magic, in spite of any influence of Arabic fundamentalist Islam which does not accept this.
Malay Buddhists?

Muslims used to come to cultural festivities in Buddhist temples, Thai New Year, the kings birthday. Buddhist temples were communal resources centres for Buddhists and Malay Muslims to work and socialise (Jerryson 2011:129). The reporter Muhamad Ayub Pathan has described cross-cultural hybrid practices in the south such as ‘Thai Buddhists teaching in Isamic boarding schools, mali flowers grown by Muslims for the Thai market, and local Chinese traders who speak fluent Malay’ (McCargo, 2012:103). Inter-faith marriages do occur, including, less frequently, conversion from Islam to Buddhism (Jerryson, 2011:162,163). Malays used to convert to Buddhism (Jerryson 2011:44) and ordain as monks historically in Narathiwat and were venerated for their spiritual achievements (Irving Johnson cited in Jerryson, 2011:219). In Satun there is evidence of family ties to Buddhism. Malay Muslims ordained to make merit when their children fell ill and recovered. Muslim parents prayed to Buddhist ancestors to cure their child and promised that their child would become a nun or monk (Nishii, 1999;2015). These instances show the mixing of Thai Buddhism and Malayness and how they could be unified (Jerryson, 2011:129).

Putting Out the Fire?

In this final section of this paper I want to make some suggestions about conflict resolution by a strategy of toleration and detaching from forms of attachment to identity and truth-telling that impede truce-making and peacemaking.

There is a need to abandon absolute notions of who is good and evil, right and wrong, as fixating on past injustices assigns blame and resentment and will not promote a truce and peacemaking. Thai State racist forms of rule and Muslim rebellion remain within a problematic of alternate conflicting authorities of truth and sovereignty.

The challenge of coexistence is how well can people tolerate others differences in ways of life and belief/non-belief other than their own? Can they live with others’ otherness without trying to convert or integrate them into their sameness? In situations of fighting oppression there exists a tendency to say ‘we will emancipate you if only you follow us’ and become the Same as us (Thompson, 2005: 88). Following Thompson’s arguments religious fundamentalism, Buddhist and Muslim nationalisms, involve arrangements of sameness rather than otherness (Thompson, 2006). A quest for identity. Fundamentalism entails the fantasy that certitude is possible about the world in which some believers possess the truth and who narcissistically elevate minor differences into absolute ones. This is done in such a way as if identity can exist without difference. In other words, a desire to make everyone identical. In the Southern conflict people and communities become marked by otherness and positioned as evil enemy-others from within moral, religious and ethnic formations of sameness: ‘We-Thai Buddhists /We-Malay Muslims are ‘good’ because the other is ‘bad’, the cause of ‘evil’, disorder and violence’. Is there
another way of thinking outside negative, absolute notions of sameness and otherness, identity and difference? People become locked in Manichean dualities of fixed absolute differences when their spiritual practices and beliefs are performed as forms of religious nationalism imposed by others: ‘You can only be a Buddhist or Muslim in this way, the true authentic way’. Can anything be learnt from the West and its traditions about coping with diversity and difference to bring about a durable peace?

As Thompson argues (2005) in the Western tradition after the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) secured peace from war, religion became a matter of private conscience not a state concern; this led to tolerance of different faiths, histories, cultures and identities. Tolerance is defined by Henry Kamen (1967) as the ‘concession of liberty to those who dissent in religion’. Toleration is both a mode of regulation and way of life.

How then to get combatants to tolerate one another? Thompson audaciously suggests that truce seeking is more important than truth seeking in the pursuit of peace (Thompson, 2005:101). Fixation on justice will lead to an attitude of ‘I am right and you are wrong’ and attributing blame. Whereas, a truce situation moderates two parties where there is no winner or loser (Thompson, 2005:102). Thus, political conflict and antagonisms can be moderated by cultivating a style of conduct ‘that embodies a studied indifference towards difference’ (Thompson, 2005:102). Such a practice of toleration makes what others have elevated into absolute and cosmic differences insignificant; this has the effect of deescalating violent conflict and depolarizing ethno-religious identities amongst social combatants to try and secure social peace (Thompson, 2005:84,85).

The important conclusions for peace making are that constructed religious and ethnic differences do not have to trump other differences, and, furthermore, they are not necessarily the most important aspect of being human and living together. People are more the same than other. Religions are implicated in driving racism. In the 'Deep South' of Thailand how much of an in-between Thai and Malay and neither nor Muslim and Buddhism culture exists? It is nationalist attachment to politicized religious and ethnic identities that fuels violence and excludes the possibility of multiple hybrid identities: diverse ways of being Thai and Malay in a local web of embedded populist identifications, in village neighborhoods or regional zones.

**Note**

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