

CHAPTER IV

PATANI AS A PROVINCE OF THAILAND

4.1 King, Nation, Religion

The transition from independent sultanate to Thai province was complete by 1909. Patani's relationship had evolved through varying degrees of autonomy and dependency over a 400 year time span, yet by the beginning of the twentieth century she was annexed as part of the Kingdom of Siam. All questions of administration, cultural and linguistic autonomy had become internal Siamese affairs. Traditional local leaders, those who had seen their autonomy and influence reduced at the expense of Thai speaking civil administrators, began to express opposition to the centralization, and to a greater extent, the acculturation. Religious leaders began to express their non-compliance around the defense of Islam.¹

Beginning in 1909, a series of uprisings began in Patani, with further ones occurring soon thereafter in Narathiwat and Yala as well. All of these initial low level rebellions were over taxation, and were seen to be justified by refusing to finance an administration whose policies were contrary to Islamic practices.² It was the nationalistic policies of King Rama VI (Vajiravudh) which would see spontaneous uprisings become general rebellion.

¹ Michael Gilquin, The Muslims of Thailand. (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005), p.70.

² Ibid.

4.2 Vajiravudh and Nationalism

Coming to power in 1910, Vajiravudh was the first to popularize the idea of the nation expressed as Nation-Religion-King. Allegiance to any one of the three meant loyalty to all three; disloyalty, disobedience or disrespect toward one meant disrespect toward all. He saw the nation as a “corporate body of people imbued with a common identity, striving for common purpose, placing the commonweal ahead of private interests.”³

In this environment, people were constantly reminded of a western threat, as the loss of territory to France and Britain occurred in the not so distant past. Vajiravudh continued to consolidate the reforms of his father, Rama V, with a nationalist, unitary agenda. In trying to define precisely what a Thai citizen should be, he issued a law requiring Thai family names for all his subjects.⁴ Soon thereafter in 1921, the Thai government promulgated the Compulsory Primary Education Act. This act closed the traditional pondoks schools and instead forced all Malay Muslim children to attend Thai primary schools.^{5 6} It was policies such as these which sparked the clashes between villagers and Thai authorities, such as Ban Namsai in 1922 and the subsequent Patani Revolt of 1923.⁷ Muslim religious authorities such as Haji Sulong who had studied Islam abroad, fueled resistance around the defense of Islam in the belief that “governments involvement in the religious affairs of the community...and political intrusion in the legal

³ David K. Wyatt, Thailand: A Short History. (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003), p.216.

⁴ Michael Gilquin, The Muslims of Thailand. (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005), p.70.

⁵ Syed Serajul Islam, The Politics of Islamic Identity in Southeast Asia. (Singapore: Thomson Learning, 2005), p. 83.

⁶ “Conflict in Southern Thailand: Islamism, Violence and the State in the Patani Insurgency”. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Policy Paper No. 20. September 2007: p.13.

⁷ Clive J. Christie, A Modern History of Southeast Asia: Decolonization, Nationalism and Separatism. (London: Taurus Academic Studies, 1996), p.176; Syed Serajul Islam, The Politics of Islamic Identity in Southeast Asia. (Singapore: Thomson Learning, 2005), p.83

and religious matters of Muslims since the reign of Rama V was corrupting the purity of Islam.”⁸

Inasmuch as the newly emerging leaders attempted to galvanize support around the defense of Islam and Malay culture, in many ways this early resistance was an answer to Siamese centralization. Centralization which was a characteristic of Siamese Kingdom cum state protecting itself from internal and external threat.

4.3 First Forms of Autonomy

Following the Patani Revolt of 1923, the Siamese government was concerned that the British may attempt to exploit the situation and perhaps revoke the original Anglo-Siamese Treaty in a move to detach Patani from Siam. In the interest of securing loyalty over uniformity, a form of cultural autonomy was agreed and formalized by special legislation for Muslims. Islamic schools were reopened, Buddhist shrines were not built in sensitive places, and any symbolism likely to affront the religious feelings of the locals was to be avoided.⁹ A period of general stability resulted, albeit one in which there was “little economic and cultural development, education was stunted, and there was a general lack of dynamism...two societies existed with virtually no connect between them.”¹⁰

Following the coup of 1932, which eliminated the absolute monarchy, Malay Muslims gained the right to sit on the national parliament.¹¹ Yet despite having this right

⁸ Thanet Aphornsuvan, “Rebellion in Southern Thailand: Contending Histories,” *Policy Studies* 35 (Southeast Asia) Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2007: p.48.

⁹ Michael Gilquin, *The Muslims of Thailand*. (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005), p.71; “Conflict in Southern Thailand: Islamism, Violence and the State in the Patani Insurgency”. *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, Policy Paper No. 20. September 2007: p.13.

¹⁰ Michael Gilquin, *The Muslims of Thailand*. (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005), p. 71.

¹¹ “Conflict in Southern Thailand: Islamism, Violence and the State in the Patani Insurgency”. *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, Policy Paper No. 20. September 2007: p.13.

protected by the new Constitution, in fact the first MPs in the Malay provinces except Satun were Thai Buddhists. Muslim representatives were not actually elected to parliament until 1937. Despite the slow change however, it seemed at first that the new political system would give them a voice, and a public place to speak their mind. The change was welcomed, and there was less forceful resistance from the Malay Muslims.¹² The stability would not last.

4.4 Creating the Myth-What it Means to be Thai

In the late 1930s, General Pibun's aggressive nationalist agenda would again bring Bangkok into conflict with its former vassal. Pibun tried to further centralize and strengthen the state, promoted Thai nationalism and the creation of a homogenous Thai national identity based on central Thai culture.¹³ The Pibun government enacted the National Culture Act, a harsh set of policies designed to force assimilation of minorities in Thailand. These policies included a ban on the use of minority languages in government offices, emphasis on Buddhism as the national religion, and the requirement that everyone take a Thai name.¹⁴ The most sensitive edicts, known as Rattaniyom, also went so far as banning the wearing of traditional clothing and rescinded statutes which had previously allowed local application of Sharia law.^{15 16} Malay Muslims were no longer permitted to observe Friday as a public or school holiday, and there were also attempts to convert Muslims to Buddhists.¹⁷

¹² Thanet Aphornsuvan, "Rebellion in Southern Thailand: Contending Histories," *Policy Studies 35* (Southeast Asia) Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2007: p.34-35.

¹³ Chandra-naj Mahakanjana, "Decentralization, Local Government, and Socio-political Conflict in Southern Thailand" *Working Papers No 5*. Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2006: p.8.

¹⁴ "Conflict in Southern Thailand: Islamism, Violence and the State in the Patani Insurgency". *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, Policy Paper No. 20. September 2007: p.13.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Chandra-naj Mahakanjana, "Decentralization, Local Government, and Socio-political Conflict in Southern Thailand" *Working Papers No 5*. Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2006: p.8.

¹⁷ Thanet Aphornsuvan, "Rebellion in Southern Thailand: Contending Histories," *Policy Studies 35* (Southeast Asia) Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2007: p.36.

These centrally imposed assimilationist policies led to the emergence of the modern militant, separatist movements. Dr. Gothom Arya, Director of the Mahidol University Research Center on Peace Building and a member of the National Reconciliation Commission argues that the “local patriotism” of the Malay Muslims became heightened due to the fact that they were forced to defend “patrimony such as language, customary way of life, natural resources, educating their children, etc.”¹⁸ Being Malay is identical to being Muslim, and Malay groups in the militancy do not hesitate to use religious sentiment to win over the local population to their cause. Islam would begin to be the “mobilizing resource” to resist the assimilation of the Thai state and reject its claims on Malay territory.¹⁹

During WWII, violence in Patani increased. Bangkok allied with the Japanese while the Malay Muslim leaders such as Haji Sulong supported the British, hoping the latter would give them independence from Thailand after the war.²⁰ In 1944, Haji Sulong established the Patani Malay Movement with the objective of promoting Islam and encouraging cooperation among Muslim leaders in order to fight against the government’s interfering with the Islamic way of life.²¹ Once again, over concerns of growing discontent and nationalistic sentiments, the Thai government in 1945 introduced a number of measures designed to appease and co-opt the Malay Muslims.

4.5 The Patronage of Islam Act

The Patronage of Islam Act created a state sanctioned and controlled Islamic Hierarchy. It revived the post of Chularajamontri, a crown appointed whose duty was to

¹⁸ Gotom Arya, personal interview, Bangkok, Thailand, 29 Jan 08.

¹⁹ Duncan Mc Cargo, What’s Really Happening in Southern Thailand. Occasional Paper. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Regional Forum. Singapore, 2008: p.11.

²⁰ Chandra-naj Mahakanjana, “Decentralization, Local Government, and Socio-political Conflict in Southern Thailand” Working Papers No 5. Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2006: p.8.

²¹ Thanet Aphornsuvan, “Rebellion in Southern Thailand: Contending Histories,” Policy Studies 35 (Southeast Asia) Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2007: p.37.

advise the King on Islamic affairs, and placed it under the Ministry of the Interior. A National Council for Islamic Affairs was established as were Provincial Councils in every province where there were a substantial number of Thai Muslims.²² In addition, the rights to observe Friday as a religious holiday and the restoration of Islamic family and inheritance laws were returned to the Muslim community.²³ Despite these attempts at patronage and reform, however, the centrally imposed Islamic programs were unpopular. The new institutions to include the Chularajamontri were seen as agents of the central government and as further attempts to control the Muslim way of life. Coupled with this were increasing complaints about Thai security forces in the region as well, specifically the police.²⁴

4.6 Patani People's Movement and 7 Point Demands

Against this backdrop, in 1947 Haji Sulong formed the Patani Peoples Movement which had as its goals, self rule, implementation of Islamic Law and cultural rights.²⁵ That same year, responding to the increasing complaints of injustice by the police, Sulong and the Provincial Islamic Council of Patani drafted a proposal concerning political rule and the rights and religious affairs of Muslims.²⁶ The draft is known as the 7 Point Demands, and was actually the first demand by local citizens for self government or decentralization of the Bangkok administration and rule.²⁷

²² Clive J. Christie, *A Modern History of Southeast Asia: Decolonization, Nationalism and Separatism*. (London: Taurus Academic Studies, 1996), p.182.

²³ Thanet Aphornsuvan, "Rebellion in Southern Thailand: Contending Histories," *Policy Studies 35* (Southeast Asia) Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2007: p.38.

²⁴ Thanet Aphornsuvan, "Rebellion in Southern Thailand: Contending Histories," *Policy Studies 35* (Southeast Asia) Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2007: p.40;

"Conflict in Southern Thailand: Islamism, Violence and the State in the Patani Insurgency". *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, Policy Paper No. 20. September 2007: p.14.

²⁵ Chandra-naj Mahakanjana, "Decentralization, Local Government, and Socio-political Conflict in Southern Thailand" *Working Papers No 5*. Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2006: p.8.

²⁶ Thanet Aphornsuvan, "Rebellion in Southern Thailand: Contending Histories," *Policy Studies 35* (Southeast Asia) Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2007: p.40.

²⁷ Ibid.

These demands were as follows

1. The Thai government should give full authority to one person to administer the four provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat, Yala, and Satun. He or she should be elected by and from the people in the four provinces
2. Tax and income from the four provinces should be spent in the four provinces only.
3. The government should provide the teaching of the Melayu language in primary school up to grade four.
4. 80% of the government officials in the four provinces should be Muslims.
5. The government should use the Melayu language in government offices in the four provinces along with the Thai language.
6. Government should allow the Office of the Provincial Islamic Committee to issue regulation on Islam and Islamic tradition with the consent of the person mentioned in the first point above.
7. The government should separate the religious court from the provincial court and give the religious court the full jurisdiction

The demands did not call for a separate state, but instead for local autonomy within the unitary state.²⁸ Yet in the eyes of the central government, Malay Muslims self government was a step away from full secession. The government could not accept this level of decentralization based upon demand of a particular ethnic group. Acceptance would mean undermining the core belief in the indivisibility of the Thai nation based upon nation, religion, and king.²⁹ Regardless of how it came to be so, Patani was a part of Thailand indivisible. Hundreds of years of centralization and consolidation to strengthen in the face of external and internal threats made the concept of autonomy

²⁸ Gothom Arya, Local Patriotism and the Need for Sound Language Education Policies in the Southern Border Provinces. Occasional Paper. Mahidol University Research Center on Peace Building. Bangkok, 2008: p.9.

²⁹ Thanet Aphornsuvan, "Rebellion in Southern Thailand: Contending Histories," Policy Studies 35 (Southeast Asia) Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2007: p.15-16.

untenable. It would mean a threat to the security and unity of the Thai nation. The ensuing separatist struggle would be about “political legitimacy” with varying degrees of Islamism as a motivating factor.³⁰

4.8 Growing Popular Resistance

The formation of Haji Sulong’s Patani People’s Movement is indicative of the resistance changing its center of gravity. For the most part earlier resistance had been concentrated among the disenfranchised elites; traditional and religious leaders who had seen their power and influence whittled away since the time of Rama V. The post WWII period however would see the resistance begin to take on a “broader more popular quality.”³¹

In addition to the PPM, another popular group, GAMPAR, was emerging as the chief organization to campaign for the unity of Malays in southern Thailand. Its aims were to unite all south Thailand Malays and their descendants who were now in Malaya and to improve education and revive Malay culture in southern Thailand.³² And while Sulong’s PPM drew upon Islam as a source of legitimacy, for GAMPAR Islam was not high on the agenda as was Malay nationalism. Regardless the platform however, the increased mobilization and awareness among increasing numbers of Malay Muslims presented Bangkok with yet another internal security challenge. The Thai authorities’ method of response would further escalate the conflict, and would set the tone for increasing militancy based upon a sense of injustice and political illegitimacy. The Dusun Nyor incident is an example of this.

³⁰ Duncan Mc Cargo, What’s Really Happening in Southern Thailand. Occasional Paper. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Regional Forum. Singapore, 2008: p.3.

³¹ Chandra-naj Mahakanjana, “Decentralization, Local Government, and Socio-political Conflict in Southern Thailand” Working Papers No 5. Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2006: p.8.

³² S.P. Harish, “Ethnic or Religious Cleavage? Investigating the Nature of the Conflict in Southern Thailand” Contemporary Southeast Asia. 1 Apr 2006: p.3.

4.9 Dusun Nyor

Aphornsuvan writes, “from all accounts it is likely that the Dusun Nyor revolt was a culmination of many simmering conflicts and problems between Malay Muslims and government officials at that time. Thai officials and the government exhibited deep prejudice and fear over the real motives of the Malay Muslim people”.³³ Haji Sulong had been arrested in January 1948 and charged with treason, and the Pattani Islamic Council was dissolved.³⁴ Soon thereafter, Bangkok sent a special police force to be stationed in the southern border area to prevent further troubles.³⁵

That February, popular uprisings broke out in several districts throughout the south. Violent clashes erupted between Thai authorities and locals, resulting in hundreds of deaths and thousands fleeing into Malaya.³⁶ Then between April 26 and 28, the “fiercest fight between government forces and the Malay Muslim villagers in the first half of the century” in Dusun Nyor. As many as 400 villagers and 30 police officers were killed in an incident in which the “historical data is inconsistent.”³⁷ The government version reads that the crowd first attacked the police station and threatened to take over a village, while the Muslim version was that police started shooting at the villagers who were preparing to defend themselves against Chinese communist raids from Malaya.³⁸ After the incident thousands more villagers migrating to Malaysia, and 250,000 Malay Muslims petitioned the UN to oversee the acquisition of Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala to

³³ Thanet Aphornsuvan, “Rebellion in Southern Thailand: Contending Histories,” *Policy Studies 35 (Southeast Asia)* Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2007: p.53.

³⁴ S.P. Harish, “Ethnic or Religious Cleavage? Investigating the Nature of the Conflict in Southern Thailand” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 1 Apr 2006: p.3.

³⁵ Duncan Mc Cargo, *Rethinking Thailand’s Southern Violence*. (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2007), p.17.

³⁶ Thanet Aphornsuvan, “Rebellion in Southern Thailand: Contending Histories,” *Policy Studies 35 (Southeast Asia)* Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2007: p.52.

³⁷ Duncan Mc Cargo, *Rethinking Thailand’s Southern Violence*. (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2007), p.18.

³⁸ Thanet Aphornsuvan, “Rebellion in Southern Thailand: Contending Histories,” *Policy Studies 35 (Southeast Asia)* Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2007: p.53.

the new Federation of Malaya.³⁹ The events at Dusun Nyor have since become a symbol of Malay-Muslim uprising against the state, and are widely regarded as the beginning of the modern violent struggle in the south.

³⁹ "Conflict in Southern Thailand: Islamism, Violence and the State in the Patani Insurgency". Stockholm International Peace Research Institute , Policy Paper No. 20. September 2007: p.13.