“Fragmented Modernities: The Quest for a Social and Cultural History of Patani”

It is arguable that an on-going violence in the deep south of Thailand was partly an effect of Patani’s historical writings under the domination of a certain nationalist discourse. In this writing, Patani’s history was emplotted as a unitary political entity extinguished and colonized by a hostile Siam. A specter of this historical narrative has haunted the southern provinces for several decades and became a potent force in pushing patriotic men, young and old, to grasp weapons and walked their lives into the graveyard. By which, they became a legend.

Under avoidably, in the making process of a nation-state that the Patani nationalists have been fighting for, the national history became an indispensable project. Nonetheless, a common narrative project as such is a modern symptom, directly responding to the nature of the nation-state that was plural and fluid. Memory narration helped melting those elements and casting the nation. However, discourses on political and traumatic memories that helped casting the nation and calling for arm-uprising were in fact estranged and marginalized other social and cultural elements considered inessential or irrelevant for the fighting course.

In the opposite, I will argue that if the Patani nationalists would like to map out their world more clearly in creating a different society of their own, only a subject of political sovereignty is not enough in their historical emplotment. New subjects and
emplotments of Patani’s historical writings are necessary. A new nation could not be created out of a narrow, exclusive ethnic group whereas plural dimensions of the society and culture are silenced, or repressed. Our fragmented modernities project was crafted out from this perspective, i.e. intending to provide panoramic views of a plurality of social and cultural elements of the Patani society.

In short, I would like to explore a possibility to write and read a social and cultural history of Patani, without a political melodrama dominated by a nationalist discourse. Patani history, thereby, are exploded with flesh materials ranged from anthropological survey, routes and agencies of modernities, magazine, film theatre, local music, performing arts, families memoirs, etc. Things considered profane, such as local dangdut and film theatre, are thus put back into the national pantheon. It would be tough now to craft a Patani historical emplotment without calling in these social and cultural entities. I am quite certain that after the fragmented modernities project, the entire landscape of a historical narration of the Patani national history is changed immensely, for ever.

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“Muslims’ Contested Modernities in the Context of Violent Ethnic Conflicts”

On February 9, 2012 at 8.10 a.m., ten minutes after the sound of the daily national anthem, a homemade-bomb hidden in a car parked near the provincial hall of Pattani exploded. The 30 kg. car bomb killed one person and wounded 12 others and also damaged the public health office, education zone 1 head office as well as 12 parked vehicles.

This Pattani bomb attack marks a new departure in southern violence. It seems that the insurgents’ operations have increased lately and that more technically proficient bombs have been used. This is the first efficient, high order device in a deployed vehicle. To get such a destructive effect out of a 30-kg. explosive indicates a fact that the technical ability of the bomb maker is far superior to anything that occurred to date. And this is indeed a worrying sign if one looks at Northern Ireland as an example. When the IRA felt that its regional campaign began to lose media appeal, they moved
their area of operation to the UK mainland. An explosive ordnance disposal expert warned that Thailand’s tourism industry could be wiped out with similar devices delivered in Bangkok or other popular tourist locations if the insurgents choose this bloody campaign trail.

Put another way, the use of violence through powerful and technically advanced bombs categorically places the issue of modernity at the center of the ongoing ethno-religious deadly conflict in southern Thailand. What does it mean for (some) Malay Muslims to fight for their land and rights on the legitimization grounds of Islam and Patani history while using modern weapons as a means to achieve such goals?

This paper is an attempt to argue that while such modern weapons such as M16, AK47 or C-4 explosives are signs of a type of modernity, and that those who fight with modern violence could be seen as a kind of “modern” Muslims, the notion of modernity itself is contested. Through contested modernities, an alternative path to engage in deadly conflict based on an “authentic” Islam as modern platform could be attempted. I will begin with a brief description of the current state of ethno-religious conflict in southern Thailand. Then the idea of modernities, understood in the context of different histories – “western” and “Islamic” would be critically addressed. Finally, a way of fighting, a choice to engage modernity in the context of deadly conflict, based on “authentic” Islamic teaching will be suggested.