

For We Are Also What We Have Lost

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ABSTRACT This essay describes and analyzes a historical situation of loss in Thailand's far south since the annexation of the Sultanate of Patani by Siam and its recurring conflict since the late 1940s. What was felt to be lost for my Malay Muslim interlocutors was a history of protracted struggles against a Thai Buddhist kingdom—the implications of which varied widely and were experienced unevenly. For some elites, the present violence reflected the loss of a past glorious kingdom. For ordinary civilians facing a reality of unending violence, what was lost was quotidian liveliness, embodiment, and emplacement. For others, the history of their struggles and its attendant losses had become constitutive of the present. Over the course of the essay, the relationship between loss and history (in its multiple temporalities) is ethnographically shown to be unstable, given the uneven effects on a population that was never homogenous in the first place.

KEYWORDS Sultanate of Patani, Haji Sulong, proximate displacement, recurring conflict, loss

The wounds from the annexation of the Sultanate of Patani by Siam and its consequent marginalization of my people have never formed scabs because they continue to bleed.
—attributed to a Malay senator

Under the 1909 *sia din daen* (ceding territory) Anglo-Siamese treaty, Siam's southernmost territories were ceded to Britain. In return, the British recognized Siamese authority over the Sultanate of Patani—what is now referred to as Thailand's far south, comprising the Malay Muslim-majority provinces of Pattani (with two *t's*), Yala, and Narathiwat. Decades after this annexation of the Sultanate of Patani, armed and unarmed groups calling for forms of autonomy have ebbed and flowed in Thailand's far south since the late 1940s, so much so that it has become not only the longest-running but also the least-known conflict in Southeast Asia.¹

Although the region was relatively *quiet* from the early 1980s to the late 1990s, more than seven thousand (and counting) lives have been lost since the

escalation of violence in January 2004. Images of the military siege at the historic Kru Se Mosque; footage on YouTube of the horrific Tak Bai incident; the abduction and disappearance of Malay suspects; and the insurgents' targeting of military personnel, soft targets—Buddhist monks, government school teachers, civil servants, Malay village chiefs and their deputies, and Malay civil defense volunteers—and ordinary civilians have become commonplace for those living in the region. Unlike in the past, when various separatist groups would acknowledge their actions, not a single group has taken credit since the escalation of conflict in 2004, which is why the current conflict is called the shadow insurgency.² In fact, “fighting with ghosts” is a common metaphor used by the Thai military in describing the perpetrators of violence.³

This essay explores the unevenly distributed referents of loss for a subset of Malay Muslims in Thailand's far south in this latest conflict. For some elites, the present violence reflects the loss of a past glorious kingdom. For ordinary civilians engaging with the difficulties and precarity of unending violence, what was lost was quotidian liveliness, embodiment, and emplacement. For yet other civilians who revered Haji Sulong and his modernist Islamic teachings, the history of violence and its attendant losses in the mid-twentieth century had become constitutive of the present. Over the course of the essay, the history of loss is ethnographically shown to be itself lost, as a common historical horizon dissolves for these subjects.

The Kru Se Massacre and the Dusun Nyior Awakening

From the almost weekly bombing and shooting in the latest conflict, the Kru Se Mosque massacre stands out as one of the major sources of contempt toward the government among the diverse Malay Muslim populations. On April 28, 2004, Malay Muslim men clashed with security forces at eleven sites in the region. One of them was Kru Se, a pilgrimage and political site for Malay Muslims.⁴ Despite the initial instruction from authorities to negotiate with the group of thirty-two men armed only with machetes and trapped inside the mosque, the commanding officer at the scene ordered his forces to attack, leaving all who were trapped dead. By the end of that day, 107 Malay Muslim men had been killed across the region.

As I was conducting fieldwork, the name of who might have given the order to the commanding officer at Kru Se to kill was whispered to me. However, the identity of this person was not actually a question; rather, it constituted a public secret that reflected a certain kind of *legality* in Thailand. Several interlocutors said they could not reveal what this *legality* is—but they “knew” I “knew.” They also said the authorities “knew” that they “knew.” What makes the massacre at Kru Se so difficult to narrate has to do with the lack of Thai historical discourse on the impunity of state killing its own people. This violence deviates sharply—as with the student massacres of 1973, 1976, and 1992—from the conventional view of Thailand as a

stable paradise for citizens and tourists alike.⁵ It is this absence of recognition that makes what happened at Kru Se, especially naming those who had given the order to kill, politically unspeakable. Those who were involved are unlikely to speak out, to be sure, and—even supposing that sufficient evidence was gathered—it would also bear poorly on the *amaat* (the top echelon of the military, the monarchy, and other officials who control power and command respect in Thailand). But it is clear that the historical meaning of that day has not been lost on the diverse Malay Muslims in Thailand's far south.

It was against such invisible inscriptions along history's silent edge, a phrase taken from Margaret Steedly,⁶ that Chaiwat Satha-Anand and Thanet Aphornsuvan⁷ immediately noted the significance of the date of the clashes (April 28, 2004) and its relevance to Haji Sulong and his modernist Islamic teachings; it had been exactly fifty-six years from the incidents at Dusun Nyior village on April 28, 1948. Often referred to within the Malay Muslim communities as *Kebangkitan Dusun Nyior* (Dusun Nyior Awakening), this event could be considered the ur-history for the recurring conflict in Thailand's far south when the Malay Muslims were charged with separatism (*baeng yaek dindaen*, separating the land), the most heinous political offense against the centralized and allegedly unitary Thai state.⁸ The state prefers to call it *kabot dusong yo* (Dusong Yo Disturbance) in a convoluted move to obscure the aspirations of minority culture and identity. Following Benjamin's critiques of the conflation of history as progress,⁹ in remembering Haji Sulong and the Dusun Nyior, we find ourselves confronted by an archive of violence in such a way that we might be able to perceive the layers upon layers of violent historical debris that have propelled us into the present.

The Kru Se Mosque, which is located in the subdistrict Tanyong Lulo of Pattani's Muang district, is also the hometown of Daub ibn Abd Allah, one of the region's most well-known Muslim scholars.¹⁰ It was in this subdistrict that young Sulong attended an Islamic boarding school before his father sent him to Mecca. While in Mecca, Sulong became greatly influenced by the modernist teachings of Muhammad Abduh.¹¹ Upon arriving back in Thailand's far south in the late 1930s, he was watched and his remarks reported. In addition to being considered a threat to the state, Haji Sulong's modernist teachings of Islam were anathema to the conservative *ulamas* and *uztazs* (religious authorities) and the Malay Muslim elites. In short, he was as admired by many ordinary Malay Muslims as he was vilified by the established authorities. He threatened the traditional order; he was a dangerous deviation from the epistemic topography of the Malay world; he was, in his refusal to conform to any of the above, destabilizing the status quo.

When news broke that a commission from Bangkok was heading to Pattani, Haji Sulong and his associates produced seven demands concerning the political rights and religious affairs of Malay Muslims. At the same time, by his invitation, a

Straits Times British correspondent visited Pattani, infuriating Bangkok by reporting on government corruption, blackmail, and the persecution of Malay Muslims. On January 16, 1948, Haji Sulong and his associates were charged with treason and arrested. Their arrests sparked clashes across the far south, with the largest one at the village of Dusun Nyior, where more than four hundred Malay Muslims and thirty policemen were killed.¹²

Following the state suppression of this unrest, an estimated 250,000 Muslims signed a petition requesting that the United Nations preside over the secession of the far south from Thailand and its joining with Malaya. Calls for support were also made to the Arab League, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Malaya. Prime Minister Phibun released Haji Sulong and his associates on bail in 1952, but on August 13, 1954, Haji Sulong, his eldest son, and a few companions were summoned to the police station in Songkhla, the only non-Malay Muslim-majority province in the far south. They were then escorted to a mosque for the noon prayer. That was the last time they were seen. The police claimed that they mysteriously disappeared on their way home. The most widely believed story is that they were tortured, forced to consume pork and alcohol, and killed, and their bodies stuffed into barrels and dumped into the sea.¹³

Glorious Patani

I visited Kru Se Mosque with a university student, Hassan, in 2005.¹⁴ An elderly man asked if we knew why there were so many bullet holes in the walls. Aware that I was not going to offer any response, he spoke again, “The government needs to explain why the *pembunuhan* (massacre) happened.” He pointed toward a tea stall across the street, and as we sat down, he told me he was a teacher at a religious boarding school and that he was connected to the Kelantan palace (which is connected to the former Sultanate of Patani). He turned and stared at the mosque, as if he were looking at an object in which the traumatic emotion of a recent tragedy were hidden. He then turned toward Hassan and exhorted him and his generation to take pride in the history of the Sultanate of Patani, a maritime kingdom that was once a site of the *maso loning* (renaissance) of the Muslim world. He complained that the community at Kru Se felt powerless, as if the present had utterly spoiled the memory of a historical glorious past. When I asked about the recent clashes with Haji Sulong and Dusun Nyior, instead of continuing his reverie about the Sultanate of Patani, he looked at me and Hassan. And just as he had had words, he now had silence. He shrugged his shoulders, got up, and left.

I was perplexed that the history of glorious Patani continued to preoccupy his historical consciousness at the expense of negating the meaning of more significant events that I felt had more significance to the Kru Se massacre. Is what is often called memory not about remembering at all but replaying a story locked

in our minds? Or, as the region remains a backwater in Thailand's socioeconomic and political landscape, was an alleged historical glorious Patani past more narratable than the 1940s Islamic Awakening and the subsequent series of unsuccessful struggles—which from the outset not only had produced no future but indeed had become a discredited past?¹⁵

I encountered another glorified description of Patani that summer. Sitting in the company of men and university students at a tea shop, a local politician, Faosee, reminded his audience that the latest conflict had roots in the traumatic *sebahgiyae hok* (annexation) of Patani by Siam. He repeated like a mantra the story of the kingdom's golden age (*zaman emas*): that Patani was once a thriving maritime kingdom and had at times even defeated Siamese armies. Over tea he took pleasure in regaling us with stories of his frequent visits to the Kelantan palace and would repeat that his ancestry was from the Sultanates of Patani and Kelantan. When I pressed him on his lineage, he prevaricated and could not reveal the names from that genealogy. As David Lowenthal cynically remarks, “‘The charm of the past is that it is the past,’ says Wilde’s Henry Wotton, as if to preclude further explanation.”¹⁶ When I asked Faosee if the current insurgency could be interpreted as a reawakening of Dusun Nyior, he dismissed my interpretation by saying that Haji Sulong and his movement were simply advancing Wahhabism.¹⁷

At his law office, Farok, who also laid claim to the Patani aristocracy, straightaway got into the golden age narrative as well: “Patani was a maritime kingdom and its sultanate was one of the richest in the Malay Archipelago.” He also said Patani could never return because Wahhabism had replaced that era of Islam. The vital point in his meta story, like those of Faosee and the elderly teacher, is that Patani's glorified past can never return. In other words, the Malay Muslims in Thailand's far south are a people defined by their collective loss of a glorious sultanate, of a loss of a certain Islamic religiosity allegedly replaced by Wahhabism, and a loss of territorial sovereignty. In their retelling of this meta story, there is a certain stability—a story that has been told and retold, in which a glorified past can be expressed and heard, a story that lacks the gaps and silences that usually accompany those of life stories and personal narratives. Notably, the appearance of Haji Sulong marked a departure from the traditional struggles against Thai subjugation under the auspices of the rajas of the former Sultanate of Patani. Their aristocratic backgrounds may explain why these elites were uneasy with Haji Sulong's modernist Islamic revival. And, like these elites, many conservative ulamas and *ustazs* have also repeatedly levied accusations of Wahhabism at historical actors and contemporary activists. Anxious about their established positions, modern Islamic teachings presented a threat to their historical hegemony and authority.

The term Wahhabism has been polemically (mis)appropriated in Southeast Asia toward marginalized groups since the beginning of the twentieth century by tradi-

tional religious teachers, local elites, and government agents. As Farish Noor points out, a group of *Kaum Muda* (youth movement) progressive ulamas gathered in the straits settlements of Malaya to set up their modern madrasas (religious boarding schools) at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁸ They were deeply influenced by Egyptian reformists Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, who argued that Islam is a religion of the intellect and reason to free themselves both from superstitions that were neither Islamic nor rational and from the shackles of colonialism. For all that, they were condemned as Wahhabis by the British authorities. In Thailand's far south Haji Sulong and his associates also saw the need to advance Muhammad Abduh's reformist Islamic teachings. But their progressive teachings upset the conservative ulamaa, who requested that a government investigation be conducted to determine whether Haji Sulong was fomenting rebellion, something the government was all-too-willing to oblige.¹⁹ Such accusations of Wahhabism continue to this day at Thailand's far south because the ground has been well prepared. The profuse mythology (or I should say the poverty) of this Wahhabi story dates to long before the latest insurgency and fell on ears finely tuned by the style and imagination with which the elites had long depicted the far south. In that patronizing and frozen mythology, the glorious past can never return because simple or brute Wahhabism has replaced that era of Islam.

These elites were no longer interested in talking about a glorious Patani when I met them in 2009 and during subsequent summers. Perhaps the action of that sinister and eminently sardonic force, time, had prompted a reconsideration of their stipulation of a glorious past. It was as if, with time, they had fallen victim to self-adoration. With the conflict dragging on, had the weight of the glorious past become a burden to their arrested present? The region remained submerged in growing unemployment, alcoholism, drug abuse, economic contraction, violent crimes, persistent corruption, and wrongheaded security policies—so much so that rehearsing a glorious past was now put under the sign of a tension that was no longer creative between history and memory. Perhaps their reluctance in talking about such a past in 2009 and subsequent years was their attempt to save themselves from further moral embarrassment, a past that could never be recovered. Humility can be gratifying.

Recurring Conflict

For those who rehearsed the history of the glorious Patani kingdom in the historical present, there were many others who professed no interest in that past or held that any instrumental use of that past would ultimately trivialize it. Instead, what mattered more to them was the stalled, arrested present. On a van to Muang (capital district of) Pattani in 2009, Hanisah offered a somewhat fatalist description of their history and sense of reality: “For those of us who grew up here, who live here, who are stuck here, we see them (acts of violence) as well, but they have become *biasa* [normal] for us. This is not the first time. . . . We grew up *menunggu*

[waiting] for it to happen again, *menunggu* for violence to erupt once again. . . . This is a recurring conflict. The question is, where do you go when you have nowhere to go, no way out?" She forced a smile.

With reference to the *longue durée*, "waiting" might also describe the Malay Muslims' disposition and psychology in Thailand's far south. Since the days of Haji Sulong, can the subsequent waves of struggles be seen as progress? To follow this line of analysis, we might see the suppression of such expressions of autonomy as leading to a sense of both agency and agony from the region's protracted struggles for autonomy and its accompanying violence since the late 1940s. History was understood as a nightmare from which they could not wake up. All that Hanisah and those of her generation who were born after the Haji Sulong era have heard of are the repeated struggles and their failures. And they sensed that it was only a matter of time before their desire for a better future (their struggles for respect, their expressions of autonomy) would resurface—and with it, the possibility of violence.

I now wonder what it means to describe this disposition as "waiting," as in other situations of "forever" conflict. Will there ever be a resolution for Thailand's far south? As many have remarked, the history of the Malay Muslims in Thailand's far south is indissociable from the history of struggles against the modern Thai Buddhist kingdom.²⁰ And as long as the conflict is contained within the far south, Bangkok is never concerned with how long the conflict will last or how it recurs.²¹ To be clear, within this history of conflict, periods of upheaval were not the same in their ideologies, practices, and religiosity. Each was led by different groups of actors. The collective history of the Haji Sulong movement was that of a reformist Islam. By contrast, the class-oriented struggles from the 1960s to the early 1980s were led by educated elites and aristocrats under threat of losing more land. As many of these elites have since fled overseas, their movements have lost their force. And with the current shadow insurgency, one cannot be sure who the leaders of this nameless violence are. With no end in sight, desires for expressions of autonomy might now mark, to invoke Koselleck again, "futures past."

Hanisah continued, "As locals, we are tired of [the conflict], tired of thinking or talking about it. You might even say we are used to [it]." Soon, she and I fell asleep (as the warm air blowing from the air conditioners above our heads made us sleepy), only to wake up when I sensed the van was slowing down. The rest of the passengers woke up as well. Two soldiers clad with semiautomatics slid the van door to the side and their gaze swept across us before they slid the door back. As our van journeyed on, I counted a total of eight more checkpoints before we arrived in Muang Pattani.

Proximate Displacement

As I alluded to earlier, for ordinary civilians what matters (given the difficulties of reality in the latest conflict) is not the loss of a given historical past but the loss

of present liveliness, embodiment, and emplacement—a condition exacerbated by precarity. This was the sense expressed by the *mak pasar* (women vendors) at three open-air markets in Muang Pattani. One of these vendors, Zainab, was living with her husband and his first wife and their children on the outskirts of Muang Pattani when I met her in 2009. When I went back the following year, Zainab and two other *mak pasar* were sharing a room close to their market. For safety reasons, many other *mak pasar* had also decided to share rented rooms in Muang Pattani. Aishah, another *mak pasar*, explained, “The roads on the outskirts are not safe anymore in the dawn and evening hours. . . . These are the *waktu geriya* (hours of the guerrillas).” Another *mak pasar*, Pla complained to me that there had been innumerable roadside explosions, especially during the *waktu geriya*. She emphasized, “Day and night are a different world around here. One is *waktu tahann* (hours of the army), the other is *waktu geriya*.”

The decision to share rooms in the city can be interpreted as one way of engaging with the tactics of precarity. As Anna Tsing reminds us, “One way of keeping precarity in mind is that it makes us remember that changing with circumstances is the stuff of survival.”²² However, writing in the context of the Sri Lankan civil war, Sharika Thiranagama reminds us that such proximate displacements are critical measurements of belonging and indices of loss, an existential and material dilemma for those experiencing them. As Thiranagama puts it, “Proximate displacement . . . creates very different ways of inhabiting loss from that of external displacement.” For the externally displaced, “‘home’ can remain in a static time left at the point of departure,” while proximate displacement means “that their past landscape has not disappeared from sensory experience.”²³ Some *mak pasar* would emphasize, in an emotionally charged manner, “We are mothers, the ones providing the *sayang* (loving) to our children, and now should we expect our husbands to be both fathers and mothers in the families?” Even though the open-air markets were always lively, they lamented that the markets lacked the liveliness of their families and the bucolic settings of their villages. Zainab reminisced about how her days started—cooking breakfast, getting her children ready for school, and making sure her husband and in-laws had their first cup of sweet coffee to start their days.

Aishah added what was lost with an intensity about being territorially anchored in her home and village:

Our home in the village is not only a physical but also an intimate existence. We took in everything inside and outside our home—rain on our roofs, mice on the ceiling, the smell of shrimp paste, the smell of mango permeating the entire house, and what about our cats . . . and the adult conversation. . . . Our home is more or less emotionally proofed against what is happening outside. . . . Together, as adults, we were there to insulate our young ones from the violence.

Worrying about the safety of their children, some *mak pasar* decided to take the risk of moving back. But that did not last. Clichés like “You just can’t go back to living in the villages” do not convey the mix of distress that overtook them when their decisions to return felt like a brief layover. Severed from the social, psychological, and psychical relationships with their homes and villages, they often complained of being “out of place” with their current living arrangements, arrangements lacking in their familiar landscape and soundscape, which led to a loss of emplacement and the fusion of which were fundamental to their embodiment of self in space and time. They were mothers who made life safe for their children and grandchildren, counseling them of the dangers of informants, whether these be state agents or insurgents (the latter being read as anyone visibly marked as Muslim).

These *mak pasar* would sigh and complain to me and to each other each summer I visited them. “Here we are at the year 2014 [2015, . . .], entering the ninth [tenth, . . .] year of the current violence. Do you see any end in sight?” Their questions were rhetorical, indicating the collective political fatigue (if not political impotence) and resigned acceptance that there was nothing to be done but to endure and engage with the difficulties of reality. They were stuck in a prolonged (if not permanent) liminality; it was the indefinite nature of these separations that presented the most anguish in their lives, in which celebrations, rituals, and the rhythm of village life were interrupted. As ironic as it might seem, living in indefinite proximate displacement has a strong metaphysical dimension: one learns to see multiple forms of loss in even the smallest sensation. As many of them worked seven days a week, it was common to hear them lamenting how they missed—in both temporal and affective senses—their villages, their homes, and their families. A private moment of remembering a favorite site at one’s home or village, for example, can resonate in political, historical, and psychological chambers. Last but not least, to perceive proximate displacement is also to acknowledge the resources these *mak pasar* drew upon—both physical and psychological.

What we see among these *mak pasar* and others are forms of movement and dwelling that came about from a certain shared and uneven history, and their reactions to their ongoing predicaments and precarity. In essence, these actions allow them to live in an awful world. But we cannot reify and valorize this agency; to do so while the recurring conflict reaches a stalemate in a perpetual state of uncertainty would be at best naive and idealistic. Tobias Kelly asserts that one of the crucial tasks of anthropology is to elucidate the limits of endurance—its elasticity as well as its limits; and that what makes violence so violent is the exhaustion of enduring and engaging with the difficulties of reality without end.²⁴ Violence in Thailand’s far south is similarly a recurring episode, hardening ordinary Malay Muslims’ sense of reality and producing a profound skepticism of any future. To say that they are *biasa* (used to) or *bosan* (bored) with the recurring conflict was an

expression of their time and of a sense of the history and expected future that made violence unsurprising. They continue to be engulfed by a “tiresome, weighty now,” Adam Reed’s phrase for the temporality of prison inmates in Papua New Guinea.²⁵

Thinking about violence that is not only recurring but also without end in sight—a temporality that is not linear but cyclical—poses a conceptual challenge to an anthropology that seeks agency and futurity. The difficulties of reality in Thailand’s far south since the days of Haji Sulong are symptomatic not of change (since change has yet to arrive) but of repetition. The diverse Malay Muslim communities are waiting not only for change to arrive but also for violence to erupt once again.

Freedom, Freedom, Freedom

Working with my Malay Muslim interlocutors over the years, I have been struck by how little space for freedom their accounts offered; I have been struck by not only their helplessness but also their insistent realism that would not allow them to entertain for a moment the utopianism necessary to save their world. Amina was one exception. She has a bachelor’s degree from Chulalongkorn University, one of the top universities in Thailand, but was unable to secure a teaching position, leaving her to give private English lessons at her parents’ house. Amina intended to open her own school but doubted the idea would be accepted by the conservative religious boarding schools around her village. “What infuriates me is our *tradisi* [tradition] . . . so much restriction, suspicion,” she said. Her refrain, first articulated sharply and then muttered throughout our exchange, was “freedom, freedom, freedom.” She felt outraged by the ways things were so restrictive and conveyed that frustration with a raised voice: “I feel like an exile in my own backyard. . . . Our *tradisi* is holding me back, holding us back.”

Amina once asked me, “Has anyone ever told you about what happened to Haji Sulong?” She shuddered, as if her spiritual resonance were not at ease with what she had just asked. Amina closed her eyes as she mustered the strength to continue. I quote her at length:

Sometimes when I think about their tragic deaths, it makes me afraid to endure any more. But we must, I must. When you told me certain elites here in Pattani said to you Haji Sulong was a Wahhabi, you have no idea how much that infuriated me. . . . Haji Sulong was sacrificed. . . . These elites have no values. They are the ones who remind me I must endure. It’s as if Haji Sulong and their *disappearance* never happened, as if his only value was to teach these elites how to forget. . . . Not for us. Haji Sulong and those that died tragically that day have not been forgotten. Their deaths, their absences filled my life, our lives. . . . The way they were killed or disappeared is to me the deepest possible form of exile, the deepest possible exile of their souls. We won’t accept that version of their deaths. Or at least I won’t. For me, we are also what we have lost. . . .

What is lost to me has become part of what I am. Even though they are no longer with us, their absences are ghostly present to us all, to us . . . who have been denied our rights for so long. . . . May Allah be with them! May the soul of Haji Sulong and those with him that day be blessed!

Amina once told me, “My father said I am safe so long as my aspirations are in the realm of dreams, but when I must bring them back to the world, I am in danger. His advice reminds me of Haji Sulong.” The legacy of Haji Sulong and his reformist call for a modernist Islam had achieved little to emancipate Malay Muslims or to reform superstitions, bigotry, jealousies, and betrayals, especially from those with political and religious power. Despite this failure, its effects present a political challenge—and not only to the immediate targets of her complaint. As an anamnesis that calls the marking of the official limit placed upon the past by the present into question, the deaths of Haji Sulong and his associates are consciously present for Amina and others that remember the conditions that *disappeared them* in the name of religion, race, ideologies, and so on. In fact, one can even say they speak on *their* behalf since those that were *disappeared* cannot speak for themselves. Amina’s anguish is a challenge to any naive and simplistic rendition of a collective “we” among the Malay Muslim population in Thailand’s far south—whether one manufactured by the state, the Malay Muslim leaders, or conservative *ulamas* and *ustazs*. It also underscores a constitutive register of loss, however unevenly distributed it is.

By Way of Concluding

As this essay tries to show, the relationship between loss and history (in its multiple temporalities of past, present, and future) is never stable, given the uneven effects on a population that is never homogenous in the first place. In the context of the latest conflict in Thailand’s far south, certain elites had initially identified a historical rupture stemming from the destruction of a glorious kingdom of the past. But such invocations quickly subsided as they realized the conflict had reached a pervasive and consuming stalemate. Unlike for these elites, history for the ordinary civilians I worked with “lies in the adaptation of materials to time, to the exigencies of life, much as a door handle loses its shine or the keys on a keyboard lose their lettering.”²⁶ They did not have the luxury to talk about a certain historical glorious past and its loss. Instead, what mattered most were the loss of liveliness, of embodiment, and of emplacement. It is as if time no longer “flows,” and that the future—if there had been any future at all—is frozen. To put it slightly differently, “Time, in short, has become less yielding. . . . The present seems stricken with immobility,”²⁷ bracketed from any sense of effective past and future.

To return to the heterology of community, belief in a common vantage point—the collective “we”—is lost with this strong sense of betrayal by the

political and religious leaders of Malay Muslims in Thailand's far south. This might explain why the latest call of the shadow insurgents to express autonomy, echoing similar gestures since the 1960s, is at best ambiguously felt among my interlocutors, especially in recognizing that the very brutality by which the insurgents were pursuing change have the effect of weakening the autonomous aspirations among the heterogeneous Malay Muslims and the political avenues open to them. Thus, this uneasiness of hope has proved it impossible, to me, to consolidate a sense of realism into what we call change. It is with this impossible situation in mind that we should think about the temporality of violence and our subjects' endurance as repetitious, as habitual. Captives of the present, they have been enduring and engaging with the difficulties of a reality wherein time does not seem to pass, wherein they remain as subjects ensnared in a permanent temporality of what Deleuze calls "the paradox of contemporaneity."²⁸ As such, even those who did evoke such a collective hope or occasionally invoked Patani's glorious past did so in murmurs, with a half-smile, narrated as if emptied of life and saturated with doubt.

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Notes

1. McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*.
2. Helbardt, *Deciphering Southern Thailand's Violence*.
3. Askew, "Fighting with Ghosts."
4. Ockey, "Individual Imaginings."
5. Winichakul, "Remembering/Silencing the Traumatic Past."
6. Steedly, *Hanging without a Rope*, 199.
7. Satha-Anand, *Khwam ngiap*; Aphornsuvan, *Origins of Malay Muslim "Separatism."*
8. Satha-Anand, *Life of This World*.
9. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy." In his critiques of the conflation of history with progress, Benjamin presents the allegory about the "angel of history" as a critique of the linear conception of progress (257). He argues that the concept of humanity's historical progress "cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through *homogenous, empty time*" and that this concept of progression must be the starting point for critiques of the concept of progress itself (261). By contrast, for Benjamin the structure of history is

“time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]” (261), the eternal now as standing still in the present.

10. Matheson and Hooker, “Jawi Literature.”
11. Ockey, “Individual Imaginings.”
12. Che Man, *Muslim Separatism*.
13. Chaloeckiat, *Kontotan naiyobai*.
14. Except for public figures, I have substituted pseudonyms for all my interlocutors.
15. Koselleck, *Futures Past*.
16. Lowenthal, *Past Is a Foreign Country*, 36.
17. Wahhabism is an austere form of Islam that insists on the literal interpretation of the Koran and insists that those who are not Wahhabis are heathens and enemies.
18. Noor, “Pathans to the East!”
19. Mahmud and Anuar, *Sejarah Perjuangan Melayu Patani*.
20. Che Man, *Muslim Separatism*; Askew, “Spectre of the South.”
21. Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*.
22. Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World*, 27.
23. Thiranagama, *In My Mother’s House*.
24. Kelly, “Life Less Miserable?”
25. Reed, *Papua New Guinea’s “Last Place.”*
26. Taussig, *Law in a Lawless Land*, 135.
27. Scott, *Omens of Adversity*, 6.
28. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 81.

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