

**'EDUCATION CREATES UNREST':  
STATE SCHOOLING AND MUSLIM SOCIETY IN THAILAND AND THE  
PHILIPPINES**

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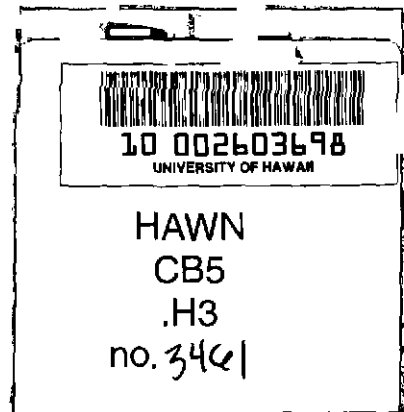
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## Abstract

In educational studies, the politics of state schooling, particularly in crafting national identities, cultures, and allegiances has been a common focus of scholarly interest. However, in Southeast Asian studies, less work has been committed to understanding the cultural politics of government-sponsored education in the context of colonialism, nation building, and/or modernity. Within this body of literature, few scholars have sought to examine the state school in cases where it has been challenged, questioned, or resisted. Additionally, there is a persisting tendency to observe the development of modern education from the perspective of the center, majority, and elite, consequently paying scant attention to the making of the margins and the historical experiences unique to their schooling environments. Therefore, based on archival research and preliminary fieldwork, this thesis aims to explore the cultural, political, and historical contexts of modern education through two case studies: the first in southern Thailand and the second in the southern Philippines. It concludes by connecting these educational pasts to the present challenges confronting state schooling in the Muslim minority regions of Greater Patani and Mindanao and Sulu, respectively.

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## Introduction

It will be the duty of the commission to promote and extend...the system of education already inaugurated by the military authorities. In doing this they should regard as of first importance the extension of a system of primary education...which shall tend to fit the people for the *duties of citizenship* and for the ordinary avocation of a civilized community.

President William McKinley, 1900<sup>1</sup>

All citizens need to be trained in knowledge to earn their living, to become good persons. At the moment, students study in schools with the objective of being a clerk and of becoming a high-ranking officer. They should realize that education in school is to cultivate in them the *qualities of effective citizenship* and abilities related to earning their living like people in other nations. It is therefore the responsibility of the Ministry of Education to inculcate this idea among all citizens to have them realize their duties as citizens and to be able to think wisely so that they will be useful to the country.

King Chulalongkorn, 1910<sup>2</sup>

In educational studies, the politics of state schooling, particularly in crafting national identities, cultures, and allegiances has been a common focus of scholarly interest.<sup>3</sup>

However, in Southeast Asian studies, less work has been committed to understanding the cultural politics of government-sponsored education in the context of colonialism, nation building, and/or modernity.<sup>4</sup> Within this body of literature, few scholars have sought to

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<sup>1</sup> *Reports of the Philippine Commission, the Civil Governor, and the Heads of the Executive Departments of the Civil Government of the Philippine Islands, 1900-1903* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Kuru Sapha, *Prawat Kru* [Biography of Thai teachers] (Bangkok: Kuru Sapha Press, 1958), pp. 33-39.

<sup>3</sup> See for example, *The State and the Politics of Knowledge*, ed. Michael Apple (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003); Susanne Wiborg, "Political and Cultural Nationalism in Education: The Ideas of Rousseau and Herder Concerning National Education," *Comparative Education*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (2000); Norrel A. London, "Curriculum Convergence: An Ethno-Historical Investigation into Schooling in Trinidad and Tobago," *Comparative Education*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (February 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Notable examples of educational work in Southeast Asia include: *Reshaping Local Worlds: Formal Education and Cultural Change in Rural Southeast Asia*, ed. Charles F. Keyes (New Haven: Monograph 36/Yale Southeast Asian Studies, Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1991); Jeffrey Ayala Milligan, *Islamic Identity, Postcoloniality, and Educational Policy: Schooling and Ethno-Religious Conflict in the Southern Philippines* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); David M. Ayres, *Anatomy of a Crisis: Education, Development, and the State in Cambodia, 1953-1998* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000); Nick Cheesman, "School, State and Sangha in



examine the state school in cases where it has been challenged, questioned, or resisted. Additionally, there is a persisting tendency to observe the development of modern education from the perspective of the center, majority, and elite, consequently paying scant attention to the making of the margins and the historical experiences unique to their schooling environments.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, based on archival research and preliminary fieldwork, my thesis aims to explore the cultural, political, and historical contexts of modern education through two case studies: the first in southern Thailand and the second in the southern Philippines.

I became interested in the role of the state school, particularly in Southeast Asia's Muslim minority areas, while I was working in the Philippines. I worked for a non-governmental organization that had a number of education reform projects in Mindanao and Sulu. These projects were in collaboration with Synergeia Foundation (the organization for which I worked), local government units, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). My development experience broadened my understanding of public education, bringing to light the importance of culture and history. In the end, I came to realize that many of the challenges confronting the contemporary

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Burma," *Comparative Education* Vol. 39, No. 1 (February 2003); and, J.S. Furnivall, "Southeast Asia—Instruction or Education," *Pacific Affairs* Vol. 15, No. 1 (March 1942).  
<sup>5</sup> See for example, Ayres, *Anatomy of a Crisis*, which neglects to consider the experience of the Muslim Cham minority; David K. Wyatt, "The Beginnings of Modern Education in Thailand, 1868-1910," (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1968), which fails to mention the experience of the Muslim Malays in the southernmost provinces of Thailand, particularly their notable resistance to modern education; Jo Anne Barker Maniago, "First Peace Corps: The Work of the American Teachers in the Philippines: 1900-1910," (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1971), which lacks any discussion regarding the experiences of American teachers working in the southern Philippines; and, Cheesman, "School, State and Sangha in Burma," which neglects to consider the Christian and Muslim minorities' school experience.

public school were anchored in the region's history with government-run education. Following my two years in the Philippines, I traveled to other parts of Southeast Asia, including southern Thailand. However, it was not until I entered graduate school that I began to explore the history of state schooling in Southeast Asia's Muslim minority communities. In doing so, I was struck by the shared historical experiences of southern Thailand and the southern Philippines. I was also interested in how different the public school had evolved since its establishment. The Thai state school in the deep south has been the target of cultural, political, and religious violence. Since 2004, more than 2,000 individuals have been killed, scores of schoolhouses burned down, and hundreds of teachers have fled the region. By contrast, the contemporary public school in Mindanao and Sulu has struggled with quality, but has remained a place of opportunity. Moreover, the Department of Education has implemented reforms that reflect genuine attempts at accommodating the cultural heritage of Islam. These reforms have included: the implementation of a Ramadan school calendar, an increase in the hiring of Muslim Filipino teachers, Arabic language courses, and Islamic studies curriculum.

### **Thailand and the Philippines as Exceptions?**

Charles F. Keyes notes in his study on the development of state schools in Southeast Asia that by the end of the nineteenth century, colonial governments, together with Siam, began to devise and implement policies whereby states themselves assumed responsibility for the promotion, direction, and control of education.<sup>6</sup> These policies,

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<sup>6</sup> Charles F. Keyes, "State Schools in Rural Communities: Reflections on Rural Education and Cultural Change in Southeast Asia," in *Reshaping Local Worlds: Formal*

writes Keyes, exacerbated growing divisions between classes and communities “in most Southeast Asian countries—Siam and the American-administered Philippines being exceptions.”<sup>7</sup> On one level, my study aims to explore Keyes’s historical construction that Thailand and the Philippines were exceptions to the violent challenges often characterizing the beginnings of the state school in Southeast Asia. Based on archival research and preliminary fieldwork in the Muslim regions of Thailand and the Philippines, my thesis argues that since its inception modern schooling has been an object of resistance in these two Muslim societies.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, a succession of educational policies introduced at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries inspired a great deal of division, resistance, and suspicion among Muslims in both regions. The nature of resistance, though, was often waged against the perceived cultural and religious violence purported by the government-run schools (e.g. cultural and religious conversion). These nationalizing, standardizing, and territorializing educational policies have continued well into the present, exhibiting minor change since their initial deployment. In other words, these school policies have shown little concern for the distinct cultural heritages and religious value systems that have historically constituted the socio-political landscapes of southern Thailand and the southern Philippines.

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*Education and Cultural Change in Rural Southeast Asia*, ed. Charles F. Keyes (New Haven: Monograph 36/Yale Southeast Asian Studies, Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1991), p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Keyes, “State Schools,” p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, Haji Gulamu Rasul was the son of Haji Butu from Sulu. He had been seen “as a model Muslim student and later went to the United States as a government scholarship student...During his two years in the United States, Haji Gulamu acquired an excellent command of English, a Bachelor of Laws degree, and an American wife. He returned with increased prestige...” For more on Haji Gulamu, see Ralph Benjamin Thomas, “Muslim but Filipino: The Integration of Philippine Muslims, 1917-1946,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1971), pp. 76-77.

## Literature Review

A survey of literature regarding the state school in Thailand and the Philippines reveals a wealth of vernacular and English material. However, most studies explore the development of government-sponsored education from the experience of the majority, center, and elite. Jeffrey Ayala Milligan, writing on the Philippines, has thus noted:

Educational historians in both the United States and Philippines have extensively documented American involvement in establishing, expanding, and shaping Philippine public education. Comparatively little has been written, however, on one highly distinctive element U.S. educational involvement in the Philippines: the American education of Muslim Filipinos on the southern islands of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago. Most references to this unique chapter of American education in the Philippines are contained in more general accounts of U.S. colonial policy toward the Moros.<sup>9</sup>

Within the available body of work in English, few examples engage the politics of schooling, particularly from an ethno-historical perspective.<sup>10</sup> In the case of Thailand, several works focus entirely on the educational policies and elite reactions of the Thai in Bangkok.

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<sup>9</sup> Milligan, *Islamic Identity*, pp.45-46.

<sup>10</sup> For examples that have taken an ethno-historical approach, see: *Education and the Colonial Experience*, ed. Philip G. Altbach and Gail P. Kelly (New York: Advent Books, 1991); Milligan, *Islamic Identity*; Kimberly A. Alidio, "Between Civilizing Mission and Ethnic Assimilation: Racial Discourse, U.S. Colonial Education and Filipino Ethnicity, 1901-1946," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2001); Uthai Dulyakasem, "Education and Ethnic Nationalism: The Case of the Muslim-Malays in Southern Siam," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1981); Charles F. Keyes, "The Proposed World of the State School: Thai Villagers' Entry into a Bureaucratic State System," in *Reshaping Local Worlds: Formal Education and Cultural Change in Rural Southeast Asia*, ed. Charles F. Keyes (New Haven: Monograph 36/Yale Southeast Asian Studies, Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1991); and, Terry Grandstaff, "Thai Governmental Policy Toward Primary Education, 1932-1938," in *Anuson Walter Vella*, ed. Ronald D. Renard (Honolulu: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Hawai'i, 1986).

David K. Wyatt's 1966 dissertation, *The Beginnings of Modern Education in Thailand, 1868-1910*, is a foundational study that charts the making of modern Thai society through the introduction of state education during the reign of Rama V. Wyatt. It draws on a range of primary (royal) sources (decrees, statements, letters, correspondence, and reports) that add historical importance to his work. Wyatt's scope, however, is limited to the beginnings of modern education in Bangkok and its immediate environs. Even when revised under the title *The Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn* (1969), Wyatt's study remains narrow in its understanding of what constitutes "Thailand." In neither case does Wyatt adequately address or even consider the cultural, administrative, linguistic, and/or political issues, which were coupled with the beginnings of modern education in southern Thailand (i.e. Greater Patani). The same comments apply to Wyatt's 1975 essay, "Education and the Modernization of Thai Society,"<sup>11</sup> which focuses on the Thai nobility and its gradual embrace of Rama V's reforms. He pays no attention to the resistances of the Malay-Muslims that emerged in response to the development of state education, the displacement of their *pondok* tradition, and the modernizing project itself.

Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead's *Rise and Decline of Thai Absolutism* studies the development of the Thai state during the reign of Rama V. In doing so, Mead constructs the early period of modern education as a time aimed at cultivating civil servants and

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<sup>11</sup> David K. Wyatt, "Education and the Modernization of Thai Society," in *Change and Persistence in Thai Society: Essays in Honor of Lauriston Sharp*, ed. G. William Skinner and A. Thomas Kirsch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975).

promoting nationalism. However, much like Wyatt, Mead limits her study to the educational experience of the elite class in Bangkok. Without openly setting their limits, or defining their scope, Wyatt and Mead represent *the* history of modern education and *its* role in turning Siam into Thailand as essentially an elite, Bangkok experience. The same pattern is followed by other scholars. Randal Shon Batchelor's 2005 dissertation cites Wyatt's *The Politics of Reform* extensively.<sup>12</sup> In doing so, Batchelor reproduces the notion that "educational change" was an exclusively elite, Bangkok experience. Although Keith Watson's 1982 study, *Education Development in Thailand*, is broader in its scope than Wyatt, Mead, or Batchelor and provides valuable detail and analysis, it fails to consider in a substantial way the unique educational experience of southern Thailand. Instead, Watson focuses on the development of Thai education in central Thailand, neglecting the emergence of modern education in the outer provinces and borderlands.

Turning to the reign of Rama VI (1910-1925), Walter Vella's *Chaiyo: King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism* pays considerable attention to education, suggesting that "[it] was the main concern of King Vajiravudh. For his strongest aim was to educate his nation to its nationhood."<sup>13</sup> Vella's focus on educational development as a "method of spreading the idea of nation to all the country's youth" was, however, discussed only in the context of the Thai-speaking public. He gives no indication that the Compulsory Primary Education Act of 1921 was, for example, implemented initially in

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<sup>12</sup> Randal Shon Batchelor, "Borrowing Modernity: A Comparison of Educational Change in Japan, China and Thailand from the Early Seventeenth to the Mid-Twentieth Century," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Montana State University, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Walter Vella, *Chaiyo: King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1978), p. 160.

five provinces, one of which was Pattani. Nor does he include any reference to the resistance that emerged as a result of the Act's implementation in the southern region. Contrary to Vella's suggestion that the Act was "initially limited to certain village groups (*tambon*) where reasonable adequate facilities existed,"<sup>14</sup> Kanniga Sachakul has noted, citing a 1921 Ministry of Education report, that "in the first year the law only applied to five provinces, including the Pattani province, and some sub-districts on a limited basis."<sup>15</sup> Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian's *Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957*, provides a fair reading of the Act's implementation in the Pattani region. Moreover, as a result of her earlier work, which demonstrates a profound sensitivity toward the history of Thai-Malay relations, Kobkua more than other Thai historians, is perceptive to the Act's impact in the south. She writes:

The attempts by the center to bring the regions or peripheral areas directly under the rule of Bangkok continued with the implementation of the compulsory education reform of King Wachirawut and the socio-cultural reform of the Phibun government. The education reform, on the whole, benefited the Northeast but provoked a serious challenge from the Thai Malays in the South.

In the case of the Philippines, few studies look beyond the history of the public school system in Manila. That is, most of the available literature in English chronicles the development of public education, but does so based on narratives, reports, and figures from the island of Luzon. A sizeable amount of material pertains to the life and times of

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<sup>14</sup> Vella, *Chaiyo*, p. 165.

<sup>15</sup> Kanniga Sachakul, "Education as a Means for National Integration: Historical and Comparative Study of Chinese and Muslim Assimilation in Thailand," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1984), p. 213; Report of the Ministry of Education, 1921: 3.

the Thomasites, or early American teachers.<sup>16</sup> While the Thomasites served as teachers and administrators throughout the islands, most of the literature relates to the challenges and changes encountered by them working in the Christian provinces. Aside from a few secondary sources that have looked at Mindanao and Sulu during the American colonial period, I have mostly utilized archival material collected during the time of my residence in Manila (2003-2005).<sup>17</sup>

Within the available secondary literature, only Jeffrey Ayala Milligan's *Islamic Identity, Postcoloniality, and Educational Policy: Schooling and Ethno-Religious Conflict in the Southern Philippines* focuses on the religious and historical conditions of schooling in the Muslim south (specifically pertaining to the Maranao). Milligan's work is by far the most important and relevant text on the study of educational and cultural change in the southern Philippines. Published in 2005, *Islamic Identity, Postcoloniality, and Educational Policy* is comprised of several articles written by Milligan since 2001. A former Peace Corps volunteer based in Marawi City, Milligan's work draws "a historical and contemporary sketch of the conflict between Muslims and Christians in the southern Philippines, a conflict variously known as the "Muslim Problem" or the Moro

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<sup>16</sup> See for example, Mary Bonzo Suzuki, "American Education in the Philippines, the Early Years: American Pioneer Teachers and the Filipino Response, 1900-1935," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California—Berkeley, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> Relevant works include: Milligan, *Islamic Identity*; Patricio N. Abinales, "State Authority and Local Power in the Southern Philippines, 1900-1972," (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1997); Peter G. Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland: The American Government of Muslim Filipinos, 1899-1920* (Quezon City: New Day, 1983); Thomas, "Muslim but Filipino," and, Samuel K. Tan, *Sulu under American Military Rule, 1899-1913* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1968).



Problem.”<sup>18</sup> While pioneering and thorough, Milligan nevertheless seems to over-emphasize the religious and political dimensions of Islam at the expense of its cultural aesthetics. Moreover, though Milligan’s focus is the “Muslim Problem,” his research is limited to the Maranao ethno-linguistic group located in the province of Lanao del Sur.

In addition to Milligan’s work, Samuel K. Tan’s *Sulu Under American Military Rule, 1899-1913* provides a strong foundation for understanding Muslim (Tausug) society during the American colonial period. The Tausug ethno-linguistic group is located in the Sulu archipelago, namely on the island of Sulu. Written as a Masters’ thesis at the University of the Philippines in 1966, Tan’s work draws on a wealth of primary sources—reports of the colonial government, foreign observers, army officers, and congressional records.<sup>19</sup> However, Tan raises concern regarding the “one-sidedness” of these materials. In particular, he notes the limited availability of Muslim sources. In my own research, I have encountered similar challenges. The only records maintained by the Muslims in Sulu were the *tarsilas*, or genealogies. While recognizing the importance of colonial sources, Tan also adds that they “are valuable only in so far as getting the American perspective of Moslem reaction is concerned and certainly not incontrovertible in presenting a just portrait of Moslem struggles in Sulu and the Moro Province.”<sup>20</sup>

Among the different chapters in Tan’s work, the most relevant to my study was entitled *Political and Educational Reforms and Development*. In his review of the developments

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<sup>18</sup> Milligan, *Islamic Identity*, p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Tan, *Sulu under American Military Rule*, p. v.

<sup>20</sup> Tan, *Sulu under American Military Rule*, p. v.

and educational reforms set in motion during the American colonial period, Tan incorporates a number of statistics and accounts that shed an important light on the politics of American-sponsored schooling in Sulu. For instance, Tan cites a private letter sent in 1910 by Resident Commissioners Manuel Quezon and Benito Legarda to President William H. Taft, which brings to light the discriminatory practices of the Civil Service. The issue raised by Quezon and Legarda was the discrepancy in teacher pay. The Resident Commissioners wrote, "the last report of Civil Service shows, on the Government rolls, 2,659 Americans, receiving \$6,297,975.00 and 4,397 Filipinos costing but 4,288,481.00, the average salary paid Americans being \$1,612.81 yearly, while that paid Filipinos is but \$468.01."<sup>21</sup> From these statistics and others, Tan concludes that there was an "apparent lack of sincerity in the American effort to educate the native populace."<sup>22</sup>

While Milligan's focus has been on the Maranao of Lanao del Sur and Tan's on the Tausug of Sulu, Thomas M. McKenna's research has been for the most part confined to the Maguindanao of the Cotabato river basin on the southwestern portion of the island of Mindanao.<sup>23</sup> McKenna's work is deeply insightful for it too draws on the limited historical and contemporary sources relating to Islam and society in the southern Philippines. McKenna's approach is most appealing and therefore rewarding because it

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<sup>21</sup> Tan, *Sulu under American Military Rule*, p. 105.

<sup>22</sup> Tan, *Sulu under American Military Rule*, p. 107.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas M. McKenna, "Appreciating Islam in the Muslim Philippines: Authority, Experience, and Identity in Cotabato," in *Islam in an Era of Nation-States: Politics and Religious Renewal in Muslim Southeast Asia*, ed. Robert H. Hefner and Patricia Horvath (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), p. 66.

recognizes the “reality” of localization, hybridization, and accommodation in Muslim everyday life. For example, McKenna writes:

The standard account of the postcolonial history of Islamic identity in the Philippines states in simplified form that, beginning circa 1950, an Islamic resurgence began to manifest itself throughout the Muslim areas of the Philippines and that this Islamic consciousness intensified and eventually culminated in an Islamic insurgency against the Philippine state. A critical review of the available evidence suggests that, rather than witnessing the widespread development of a heightened Islamic consciousness, the early postcolonial period saw an intensification of *ethno*-religious identity on the part of prominent Muslims (emphasis added).

Similarly, writing against the popular/essentialist construction that the “Moros” were a unified force prior to American colonialism, indeed that the “Moro Wars” during the Spanish period created a pan-Islamic identity, McKenna instead suggests that it was American colonial rule during the early twentieth century that facilitated the formulation of a transcendent *ethno*-religious identity.<sup>24</sup>

Within the broader histories of public education, Mary Racelis and Judy Celine Ick have edited *Bearers of Benevolence: The Thomasites and Public Education in the Philippines*. This book, originally published in 1956, is an important “anthology of recollections, eyewitness accounts, and official documents” from ordinary historical figures such as teachers, bureaucrats, and students. While the voices of such everyday characters are often left unheard in historical narratives (not to mention national narratives), the strength of *Bearers of Benevolence* is that they are indeed brought into focus. However, the state image and national memory that is constructed through Racelis and Ick’s edited work

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<sup>24</sup> McKenna, “Appreciating Islam,” p. 47.

excludes in large part the experience of public education in Mindanao and Sulu. With the exception of Frank C. Laubach's 1932 essay entitled "the Lanao System of Teaching Illiterates," no other entry was drawn from the southern islands. The benefit of Laubach's essay is that it informs us of a completely different educational context, one that has been marginalized from state educational histories. Laubach notes, for example, "For years they looked with suspicion on the public schools. They knew only the Arabic letters, which they considered sacred. The public schools taught a new alphabet, a new language, and new ideas. The teachers were Christians. Some fifty government school buildings were burned down by them."<sup>25</sup> The schooling experience articulated by Laubach disrupts in many ways the "naturalized" impression/memory that the introduction of public education was a warmly received if not totally embraced endeavor.

Building on Ick and Racelis, Dalmacio Martin edited a book entitled *A Century of Education in the Philippines 1861-1961*.<sup>26</sup> Published by the Philippine Historical Association in 1980, *A Century of Education* covers the development of schooling from the Spanish period to the Republic period. It is divided into two parts. The first section deals with education prior to 1945. The second part addresses issues post-1945. Main chapters include work on education since the Spanish decree of 1863; education during the Philippine revolution (1896-99); schooling during the "American-Philippine Educational Partnership, 1898-1935"; and, education during the Japanese period (1941-

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<sup>25</sup> Frank C. Laubach, "The Lanao System of Teaching Illiterates," in *Bearers of Benevolence: The Thomasites and Public Education in the Philippines*, ed. Mary Racelis and Judy C. Ick (Pasig City: Anvil Publishing, 2001), p. 173.

<sup>26</sup> *A Century of Education in the Philippines, 1861-1961*, ed. Dalmacio Martin (Manila: Philippine Historical Association, 1980).

1945). However, while *Education in the Philippines* does in fact contain a detailed history of the development of state school policy, it fails to consider or recognize the diverse experiences of public education outside of the Christian provinces. It fails to consider the history of education in Mindanao and Sulu. It pays no attention to the resistance that emerged in the southern Philippines, nor does it acknowledge the existence of Islamic education in the Muslim region. In effect, a familiar development occurs as a result of these important oversights. What unfolds is a history of education in the Philippines based exclusively on the diverse moments and experiences of schooling in the central and northern regions.

As this literature review has tried to demonstrate, studies on government-run education in Southeast Asia have been about the “national” experience of state schooling. From David K. Wyatt’s classic study on the politics of educational policy during King Chulalongkorn’s period to Dalmacio Martin’s history of education in the Philippines, the themes have thus remained particularly consistent. That is, most works available in English have focused on *how* state education has worked to create unities, coherencies, and singularities in dominant cultural societies. While these aspects of state educational history are insightful to understanding the “origins” and “technologies” of nationhood and the “making” of national communities, they, nevertheless, leave outside a wide range of stories and experiences. I now turn to two case studies, which excavate these exclusions and narrate histories of resistance against the government school system.

### Case Study One:

#### Resistance to Education in Southern Thailand

"There's a conflict in my mind. I'm a teacher and I'm carrying a gun? It saddens me just to think about it."<sup>27</sup>

Tanakorn Saengtarung

School principal at Baen Jut Deang, Thailand

In this case study, I focus on the politics of cultural and educational change in southern Thai society. Since the late nineteenth century, there has been a state school presence in the Malay-speaking provinces of southern Thailand. The state school in Thai society has been employed, more so than any other government apparatus, to construct, legitimize, and historicize the coherency of the cultural state in Thailand. That is, it has been used to define the boundaries and contours of the Thai nation.<sup>28</sup> Through schooling, individuals have come to learn, understand, and accept notions of "Thai-ness". "For most of the twentieth century," writes Michael Kelly Connors, "Thai-ness was a rather ham-fisted ideological tool that monarchs and dictators used to bludgeon recalcitrant subjects into public support for the national ideology of nation, monarchy, and religion."<sup>29</sup> Specifically, the state school sought to "educate" the Malay public in southern Thai society in the Thai language and script, the geographical map of the Thai nation, the cultural ways and manners of the Thai "people", and the structures of Thai time. The constant reification of these national aesthetics constitutes the perceived homogeneity and

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<sup>27</sup> "Learning to live with Thai violence", BBC News, 12 July 2005  
[<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4675415.stm>] (15 February 2006)

<sup>28</sup> For the construction of the We-Self, see Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Kelly Connors, "Ministering Culture: Hegemony and the Politics of Culture and Identity in Thailand," *Critical Asian Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2005), p. 525.



harmony of the Thai nation. In this regard, the state school has been instrumental in fashioning and refashioning a national identity and culture in the public mind. However, the historical and contemporary case of the Malay Muslims in southern Thai society, namely those constituting the provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, Yala, and Songkhla, disrupt the education-based ideological project of “Thai-ness”.

The narratives of “Thai-ness” are drawn from three state-inscribed pillars: nation (*chat*), Buddhist religion (*satsana*), and monarchy (*phramaha kasat*). According to Stephanie Teachout, “this tripartite identity is symbolically represented in the nation’s flag as Thai children are taught in school: the red section represents the nation; the white stands for Buddhism; and the blue signifies the King. These three pillars construct a unified national identity in Thailand.”<sup>30</sup>



Three pillars of Thai identity as observed inside a classroom: Nation, Sangha, and Monarchy.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Stephanie J. Teachout, “Thai Language Maintenance in New York City: Wat Thai and the Preservation of Thai Identity,” *Languages, Communities, and Education* (New York: Society for International Education, Spring 2005), p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> Photograph taken by author in southern Thailand at a public school in 2006.



However, in contrast to the educational and historical narratives of “Thai-ness”, there has been a subaltern experience that has rejected and resisted the Thai state school system. Therefore, while the state school in Thai society has been an instrumental force in purporting and reinforcing the aesthetics of “Thai-ness” and what it means to be a Thai, it has also been the historical and contemporary object of anti-state violence, namely from those that have contested the strict cultural contours and representational forms of violence.<sup>32</sup> In southern Thai society, Malay-speaking communities have resisted the assimilative-integrative (Thaicizing) practices of the central government in Bangkok.

In light of this subaltern discourse, I strive to make sense of the role of the state school in southern Thai society. In doing so, I explore the politics of public education from a cultural-historical perspective. First, I chart the history of administrative change in the south as a way of surveying early government efforts aimed at re-orienting communities away from the Malay world and toward the emerging Thai world. Second, building on this historical context, I attempt to explain how the state school has tried to impart “the qualities of effective citizenship” as the essential attributes of “Thainess” and the Thai world. Third, I situate the origins of the state school’s Thaicizing project in the context of a modern history of education in southern Thai society. In doing so, I draw on Thai royal sources from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to highlight the politics of cultural state formation, as well as the social importance of the localized Pondok

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<sup>32</sup> For more on representational violence or the violence of representation, see Michael J. Shapiro, “National Times and *Methods* Other Times: Re-Thinking Citizenship,” *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2000), p. 89; *Methods and Nations: Cultural Governance and the Indigenous Subject* (New York: Routledge, 2004); and “Samuel Huntington’s Moral Geography,” *Theory & Event* Vol. 2, No. 4 (1999), p. 5.



tradition, which was during this period critical to maintaining cultural ties to the Malay world.<sup>33</sup> Within the third part of this section, I argue that the historical and contemporary resistance to the state school system is in large part linked to the educational and cultural changes affecting the Pondok tradition—for the Pondok has been historically responsible for maintaining the religious, cultural, and political boundaries of Malay Muslim identity in southern Thailand.

Therefore, my aim in this section is to exemplify how the state's persisting interest in reconfiguring the social and cultural conditions of education in the border region can in some way shed light on the violence that characterizes the modern south. More precisely, through a historical and contemporary case of state education in southern Thai society, I demonstrate that in addition to religion, the nationalizing aesthetics of "Thai-ness" as disseminated through the Thai state school system also need to also be considered in understanding, more broadly, the politics of state schooling in the Malay-speaking provinces. In doing so, I draw on several interviews, primary and secondary sources, and visual media.

### **Administrative Change in the South: From Tributary States to the Area of the Seven Provinces**

Administrative change has played an important role in the expansion of modern education in Thailand. Therefore, to better understand the development of state schools in

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<sup>33</sup> For more information on cultural state formation in Southeast Asia, see Leonard Y. Andaya, "Cultural State Formation in Eastern Indonesia," in *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era: Trade, Power, and Belief*, ed. Anthony Reid (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 40.

southern Thailand, it is imperative to set the historical context for government-sponsored education. I intend to do so by tracing the emergence of the southern region as an integral part of the Thai state. In other words, I want to begin by asking: how did the south become part of the modern political landscape of Thailand? From such a history, it appears that the gradual formation of borders in the south in fact improved Bangkok's ability to centralize its administration and nationalize its citizenry. Likewise, such boundaries (and boundary-making agreements) seemed to have compromised the south's ability to determine its own political loyalties. The example of the Raja of Patani at the end of the nineteenth century exemplifies this point clearly. Moreover, as the making of the south indicates, administrative change was not always the result of colonial pressure and influence. Nor was such change exclusively the product of Rama V's reign. In fact, the conditions that gave rise to Rama V's far-reaching reforms, which in short sought to "naturalize" the south's relationship to the Thai state, solidify its presence as a distinct region of the nation, and thus prepare the ground for modern education, have links to the fall of Ayutthaya and the rise of Bangkok.

### **The Fall of Ayutthaya and the Rise of Bangkok**

In 1767, Ayutthaya, the capital of Siam, fell to the Burmese. This defeat changed the political relationship between the capital and its tributaries. It provided an opportunity for the Malay states to pronounce their independence and thus the end of their vassal status under Siam.<sup>34</sup> This turn in capital-tributary relations, however, was brief. After a successful coup to remove Taksin from power, Rama I (Thongduang) was appointed to

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<sup>34</sup> Astri Suhrke, "The Thai Muslims: Some Aspects of Minority Integration," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Winter, 1970-1971), p. 533.

the throne. Rama I established the Chakri dynasty and moved the Thai capital from Thonburi to across the river at Bangkok.

In the aftermath of Ayutthaya, Taksin and Rama I sought to extend Siam's influence southward, covering vassal states that had once denounced their loyalties to Bangkok. During this time, Baker and Pasuk have noted, "The remilitarization of society, initially for defense, resulted in an expansion of the Siamese capital's territorial influence far beyond an earlier scope."<sup>35</sup> This tumultuous period has been captured in the writings of Sir John Bowring. In 1857, Bowring wrote:

In the fourth year of his reign, or the year 1772, the King [Taksin] made an expedition into the Malay peninsula, with the design of taking possession of Lagor [Nakhon Si Thammarat]. In this province, the governor appointed by the King of Ayuthia, when the Burmans were victorious, assumed the supremacy, made his royal proclamation, and filled every office, following his own will...The governor took the title of King of Lagor, and his family that of prince and princess. When Phya Tak arrived with his navy of brave marines, and his armed forces by land, the King of Lagor prepared for defence...The King of Lagor becoming aware of the fact, lost his confidence in his power to oppose the invading army. He decided to leave his country and all his adherents, and save his life alone. He therefore left the city privately at night, and fled in haste to Patani, a town in the Malay peninsula, on the western coast of the Gulf of Siam...and placed himself under the protection of his former friend, the Raja of Patani. When the King of Siam had learned that the King of Lagor had placed himself under the Raja of Patani, he wrote the Raja that if he did not give him up, he would come with an armed force and lay waste the country. On receiving this communication, the Raja of Patani, through fear of the threatened consequences, immediately gave up the King of Lagor to the Siamese messengers, who took him prisoner to the King of Siam.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 28.

<sup>36</sup> Sir John Bowring, *The Kingdom and People of Siam; with a Narrative of the Mission to the Country in 1855* (London: John W. Parker and Son, West Strand, 1857), pp.360-361.

These expansionary efforts created for Bangkok a new spatial identity, with tributary states in all directions of the capital.<sup>37</sup> Baker and Pasuk have cited the chronicler of Rama I, who commented: "His kingdom was far more extensive than that of the former Kings of Ayutthaya."<sup>38</sup> These administrative changes coupled with the creation of the court position *Kalahom*, or the minister in charge of political and economic affairs in the south, reflected a new approach to governing the nation, as well as maintaining authority over territory. A new political discourse had emerged, though still in its infancy. This new outlook sought to learn from the fall of Ayutthaya and thus extract more and expect more from its tributary states. In the age of Ayutthaya, the vassal-capital relations were often loose, with much political focus given to the *bunga mas*, or golden flower. The sending of the *bunga mas* was a sign of subject-hood. Captain Peter James Begbie, writing in 1834, has described the political symbolism of the *bunga mas* when he quotes the Sultan of Thamat in 1792. In a letter to the Honorable A. Couperus, Governor of Malacca, Sultan Thamat of Trengganu explained:

I have received intelligence from Siam that that nation mediates an invasion of my country, and the repetition of these rumours each succeeding year adds to my uneasiness. I have omitted no method of conciliating the Siamese, and sent a Bunga Mas, or Golden Flower, with other presents, as a token that I am their subject, but my submission produces no kindness on their part. I therefore inform my friend that my conduct towards the Siamese has ever been inoffensive, as I am apprehensive that, if I receive no support from the Company, I shall never enjoy

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<sup>37</sup> On the notion of spatial identity, see, for example Thongchai Winichakul's *Siam Mapped*.

<sup>38</sup> *The Dynastic Chronicle Bangkok Era: The First Reign*, Chaophraya Thiphakorawong edition, tr. and ed. Thadeus and Chadin Flood, vol. I (Tokyo: Center for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1978), p. 281.

the blessings of peace in my country. The Siamese attacked the Patani District in the month Dulkaida.<sup>39</sup>

During the reign of Rama I, Bangkok continued to receive and expect the *bunga mas* from its Malay vassal states. Though, in addition to this symbolic tribute, Siam also began to play a more direct role in the maintenance of its political relations. As a result of the *Kalahom*, a Thai commissioner was appointed by the king and based at Nakhon Si Thammarat to essentially be Bangkok's "eyes and ears." In 1791, the governing authority was split between a Thai commissioner based at Nakhon Si Thammarat and a Chinese commissioner at Songkhla. Both commissioners were assigned at the service of the king in Bangkok. Consequently, this reorganization effort precipitated an uprising in Patani, which lasted from 1789-1791.<sup>40</sup> The raja of Patani was deposed from his rule and replaced by a Malay ruler.<sup>41</sup> In 1808, however, Patani rebelled again.<sup>42</sup>

Following Patani's rebellion in 1808, Rama II (1809-1824) introduced what scholars have called a policy of "divide and rule."<sup>43</sup> Initially aimed at reducing the power and status of Patani, this reform also extended Bangkok's authority over the southern region.

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<sup>39</sup> P.J. Begbie, *The Malayan Peninsula, Embracing the History, Manners and Customs of the Inhabitants, Politics, Natural History etc. from its Earliest Records* (Madras: Vepery Mission Press, 1834), pp. 89-90.

<sup>40</sup> Uthai, "Education and Ethnic Nationalism," p. 60.

<sup>41</sup> Panomporn Anurugsa, "Political Integration Policy in Thailand: The Case of the Malay Muslim Minority," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1984), p. 67.

<sup>42</sup> Nantawan Haemindra, "The Problem of the Thai-Muslims in the Four Southern Provinces of Thailand," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, (1976), p. 200.

<sup>43</sup> See for example, Uthai, "Education and Ethnic Nationalism," p. 60; Anurugsa, "Political Integration Policy," p. 67; and, David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 141.

Patani was consequently split into seven small *muangs* or provinces: *Pattani*<sup>44</sup>, Saiburi (Teluban), Nongchick, Yaring (Yamu), Yala, Rahman, and Ra-ngae. These seven *muangs* were under the commissioner at Songkhla.<sup>45</sup> In order to prevent unrest and gradually integrate the provinces into the Thai state, Bangkok initiated the political responsibility of appointing a raja to each province. Six provinces were placed under Malay rule. Yaring had a Thai ruler.<sup>46</sup> Bangkok sought to make Patani an example. Its conversion into seven smaller provinces was directed toward deterring the other Malay states from engaging in rebellion.

However, Bangkok's "divide and rule" policy failed to set such an example and prevent the Malay states from resisting Thai rule. In 1832, following the success of Kedah's rebellion against Siam, the seven provinces, excluding Yaring (Yaring had a Thai ruler), participated in a rebellion. The rebellion, however, was defeated and the rajas of Pattani and Yala retreated to Kelantan.<sup>47</sup> In 1838, there was another rebellion in the region. This time only the Malay rulers in four of the seven provinces cooperated with Malays from Kedah. The newly appointed rulers of Pattani, Yaring, and Saiburi remained loyal to Bangkok.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The spelling difference reflects the different spatial and political conditions. Patani is the kingdom, while Pattani is the state or province, which came into existence during the reign of Rama II.

<sup>45</sup> Uthai, "Education and Ethnic Nationalism," p. 60.

<sup>46</sup> See for example, Haemindra, "The Problem of the Thai-Muslims," p. 200 and Anurugsa, "Political Integration Policy," p. 68.

<sup>47</sup> Uthai, "Education and Ethnic Nationalism," p. 60.

<sup>48</sup> Haemindra, "The Problem of the Thai-Muslims," p. 200; Anurugsa, "Political Integration Policy," p. 69.

In much the same way it had handled Patani's rebellion in 1808, Bangkok responded to Kedah's rebellion by introducing a new administrative policy. In 1839, Rama III (1824-1851) divided Kedah into four principalities: Kedah (part of which is presently the province of Pattani), Kebangpasu, Perlis, and Satul (presently the province of Satun). These principalities were under the commissioner at Nakhon Si Thammarat.<sup>49</sup> During this same time, in 1826, Bangkok signed a treaty with the British, demarcating the border between Siam and British Malaya. The border would further be solidified in 1902 and 1909, respectively.

During the reign of Rama V (1868-1910), the spatial identity and organizational structure of Siam began to be formalized through intense change. Under Rama V, governance became truly centralized. Therefore through administrative reform, Bangkok began to introduce a Thai world to the "port cities down the peninsula, which simultaneously looked southwards to the Malay world."<sup>50</sup> To facilitate this re-orientation, Prince Damrong, the Minister of the Interior and later the Minister of Education, developed a system of provincial administration called *thesaphiban*, or control over territory. This system was extended to the Malay provinces in 1892 and 1899.

Consequently, in 1897, Kedah, Perlis, and Satul were formed into *monthon* Traiburi, or circle of Traiburi. The other Malay provinces including Pattani were rearranged into one administrative unit called *boriwen chet huamuang*, or area of the seven provinces, which

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<sup>49</sup> Uthai, "Education and Ethnic Nationalism," 61.

<sup>50</sup> Baker and Pasuk, *A History of Thailand*, p. 13.

was under a Thai commissioner at Pattani.<sup>51</sup> Through these administrative changes and reforms, Bangkok increased its centralized control over the south, facilitating its territorial integration into the Thai landscape. To better guide the commissioners on the ground, Bangkok released the "Regulations Concerning the Administration of the Area of the Seven Provinces," which, among other things, informed these resident Thai officials to instruct the local Malay rulers that their sending of *bunga mas*, or tribute, was no longer required. And, furthermore, the Regulations indicated that the Malay rulers' provincial treasuries would be handled the same way as the rest of the Kingdom: by the revenue department.<sup>52</sup> In addition, as Astri Suhrke has noted:

The provincial governor's independent status and attendant privileges were sharply curtailed by the national administrative reorganization at the end of the nineteenth century. The governor was increasingly appointed from the national civil service, received a regular salary according to a uniform national scale, and his office was restructured along the lines of a centralized, modern bureaucracy. His power of taxation and appointment was controlled by the central government...The local elite in the Malay provinces did not survive the administrative reorganization with ease. Initially, the existing Muslim governors were retained by King Chulalongkorn, but they were gradually replaced by Thai-Buddhists. Almost all positions in provincial administration which were filled through national civil service appointments came to be staffed with Thai-Buddhists. This was a matter of general rules governing the national civil service, and the practical difficulties for a Thai-Islam to enter the bureaucracy. The Muslim who spoke little or no Thai, had a different religion and different customs, few connections among leading Thai families and lacked formal education according to the Thai curriculum was in a poor starting position indeed.<sup>53</sup>

These changes precipitated tensions between the local Malay rulers and the resident Thai commissioners. For the *rajas*, *bunga mas* embodied the totality of their political

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<sup>51</sup> Uthai, "Education and Ethnic Nationalism," p. 63.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>53</sup> Suhrke, "The Thai Muslims," p. 536.



relationship with Siam. It reflected the "traditional" order of things. The resident Thai commissioners, however, represented the new order. In the new context, symbolic tribute had no use in the management of political relations. Instead, the Thai state sought to extract revenue from the Malay states. That is, a constant flow of revenue, not the occasional *bunga mas*, defined the relationship between the south and Bangkok. Coupled with the end of the *bunga mas* was Bangkok's role in appointing governors to each province as well as developing public institutions such as government schools, the first of which began in 1898. Reflecting on this change toward the Thai world at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, Suhrke has explained:

Instead of the traditional ties with Kelantan, Pattani was firmly pulled into the Thai-Buddhist sphere by being included in the *monthon* of Nakhon Sri Thammarat. The governor of Pattani, Abdulkader, responded by advocating secession from Thailand. He was sentenced to 10 years in jail in 1902, but was pardoned after having served 2 years and 9 months and returned to Pattani where he continued to work for secession. Shortly afterwards he found it prudent to flee to Kelantan.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Suhrke, "The Thai Muslims," p. 537.

## **The Pondok Tradition in Greater Patani**

In southern Thai society, there exists a religious and cultural institution known as a pondok. For many Malays in Thailand, the pondok is the traditional place for Islamic and cultural learning. However, since the late nineteenth century, the Thai state has sought to Thaicize the pondok by forcing it to teach a curriculum designed by officials in Bangkok, conduct its lessons in Thai, use Thai script, and impart the “qualities of effective citizenship”. This process of Thaicization has been, at times, subtle and indirect. For example, in 1913, the Thai Ministry of Public Instruction noted in its report:

We shall regard the mosques as learning places in the same way that we regard the monasteries, for the mosques have many students who study about religion...The principle will be to let the mosque leaders, exempted by the government from military conscription and without salary, to teach the Malay language. Then the education officers will ask that three hours be devoted to the study of Thai each day. The mosques will have support for this just as the monasteries do, that is, there will be soliciting for contributions from the people to be used in building better facilities...However, to act according to this play is admittedly difficult (Ministry of Public Instruction, 1919: 142).<sup>55</sup>

In order to contextualize the government’s historical and contemporary efforts at Thaicizing the pondok, it is important to understand the multiple roles of the pondok in southern Thai society. While their minority status situates them within the margins of the dominant culture of the Thai nation, the Malays in the southern provinces of Songkhla, Satun, Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat share historical, cultural, and linguistic characteristics with other “centers” of the Malay world. In saying that, it is important to point out that Satun (Satul) is a Muslim province, formerly part of the Malay state Kedah. Satun is predominantly Thai in terms of ethnicity and language, and as such its loyalties,

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<sup>55</sup> Sachakul, “Education as a Means,” p. 212.

historically, have been with the Thai state. Patani, the former Malay kingdom that once encompassed the modern areas of Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani, on the other hand, has been documented as a rich location for Islamic traditions and Malay culture. As Andries Teeuw and David K. Wyatt noted in their introduction to the *Hikayat Patani*, "Patani traditionally has been held to be one of the cradles of Islam in Southeast Asia...d'Eredia, writing in 1613, stated that Islam was adopted in Patani and Pahang before being introduced in Malacca."<sup>56</sup> Similarly, it has been noted that Patani was indeed a regional center for Islamic learning and scholarship during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. On this point, Virginia Matheson and M.B. Hooker have contended:

In the modern world of Islamic writing, Patani is often held up as a centre of "pure" Islamic teaching and scholarship. The reference is to the famous Patani pondok in which...knowledge [was] conveyed in absolute and uncontaminated terms, in short a basic but classic education, from which students (murid-murid) may then graduate to the Middle East centers (Cairo, Mecca etc.).<sup>57</sup>

During the nineteenth century, suggests Joseph Chinyong Liow, Patani Malays maintained strong ties to the Arab-Muslim world. They were prominent educators in major Islamic institutions, most notably the Grand Mosque in Mecca. In such capacities, Patani scholars and tok guru played crucial roles in translating religious commentaries and sermons from Arabic to Malay.<sup>58</sup> In relation to the translation and transmission of Islamic knowledge, Matheson and Hooker have suggested that it is quite possible for

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<sup>56</sup> Andries Teeuw and David K. Wyatt, *Hikayat Patani* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> Virginia Matheson and M.B. Hooker, "Jawi Literature in Patani: The Maintenance of an Islamic Tradition," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 61, Part 1, No. 254 (June 1988), p. 4.

<sup>58</sup> Joseph Liow, "The Truth about Pondok Schools in Thailand", *Asia Times*, 3 September 2004 [[http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/FI03Ae04.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/FI03Ae04.html)] (18 March 2006)

Patani to have done in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries what Aceh did in the seventeenth: namely, possess direct links with Mecca and, as a result, diffuse Arabic-Islamic scholarship into Peninsular Malaya and beyond.<sup>59</sup> As a result, the extensive heritage of Greater Patani (i.e. the outlines of the former Malay kingdom) has been quite instrumental in shaping Malay subjectivities. However, since Patani's break-up into seven muangs or provinces following a failed rebellion against the Thai state in 1817, and its subsequent integration into the Thai nation at the end of the nineteenth century, this distinct and resilient heritage has been in tension with Thai cultural state formation. In the context of Greater Patani, Surin Pitsuwan has argued, "The process of "national integration" is synonymous with "cultural disintegration" from the perspective of many Malay-Muslims."<sup>60</sup> In spite of the state-induced change and subsequent processes of Thaification, the pondok has historically remained defiant and responsible for defining and defending the cultural, religious, social, and political contours of "Malayness".

### **What is a Pondok?**

Pondok (ponoh) is a Malay word that means "hut" or "house". It is derived from the Arabic word Fondok, which means "motel, hotel, or lodging."<sup>61</sup> There are at least two approaches to understanding the origins of the pondok tradition in Malay society. One claims that the origins of the pondok pesantren or "Muslim boarding school" in

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<sup>59</sup> Matheson and Hooker, "Jawi Literature in Patani," p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> Surin Pitsuwan, "Islam and Malay Nationalism: A Case Study of the Malay-Muslims of Southern Thailand," (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1982), p. 177.

<sup>61</sup> Pitsuwan, "Islam and Malay Nationalism," p. 8.

Indonesia, and Southeast Asia more generally, could be traced to the mid-nineteenth century. On the founding of the Muslim boarding school, Clifford Geertz has explained:

The pilgrimage [*hajj*], on which some two thousand Indonesians were departing by 1860, ten thousand by 1880, and fifty thousand by 1926, created a new class of spiritual adepts: men who had been to the Holy Land and had (so they thought) seen Islam through an undarkened glass. Upon their return the more earnest of them founded religious boarding schools, many of them quite large, to instruct young men in what they took to be the true and neglected teaching of the Prophet. Called either *ulama*, from the Arabic term for religious scholars, or *kiyayi*, from the Javanese for sage, these men became the leaders of the santri community, a community which soon expanded to include anyone who had been in a religious school at any time in his life or who even sympathized with the sentiments fostered by such schools whether he had in fact been in one or not.<sup>62</sup>

A second possible approach to understanding the origins of the pondok tradition in Malay society is more in line with O.W. Wolter's concept of localization. Surin Pitsuwan has argued that throughout the Arab world, Islamic schools were often established in urban centers and called madrasa (madaris, plural form in the Philippines; madrasah, singular form in the Philippines). "In rural Southeast Asia," writes Pitsuwan, "the ashram [students' huts or spiritual lodging in Hindu-Buddhist culture] was the only institution that could approximate the madrasa."<sup>63</sup> As a sign of its localization, the ashram was given an Arabic title: the fondok. Over time, it became pronounced as pondok. The huts located in the photograph below, which are just behind the mosque, constitute the pondok school. Often these schools are established by *tok gurus* and supported by the local community through donations.

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<sup>62</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 67.

<sup>63</sup> Pitsuwan, "Islam and Malay Nationalism," p. 176.

A traditional pondok in southern Thailand.<sup>64</sup>

It has been reported by the Thai government that the oldest existing pondok in the southern region was founded in 1809.<sup>65</sup> However, the pondok is believed to have a much longer history. In 1624, a pondok and its tok guru were noted to have served the needs of students in the village of Talomanok, Narathiwat province.<sup>66</sup>

### **Tok Gurus as Cultural Workers**

Each pondok has a tok guru, or religious teacher. The tok guru is generally an individual who has made the pilgrimage (haj) to Mecca, thus attaining the honorific title haji. Not all hajis, though, have their own pondok. Having made the haj, it is argued, provides the tok guru greater moral and cultural authority in his immediate community. "For the religious knowledge they [tok gurus] possess is considered to be direct from the source and, therefore, purer and closer to the teachings and traditional practices of the Prophet."<sup>67</sup> In the nineteenth century, tok gurus and other Islamic scholars were in large part responsible for translating Arabic-Islamic texts in Malay. Well-known tok gurus would attract

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<sup>64</sup> Photograph taken by author in 2006.

<sup>65</sup> Prakrit Prachonpachanok, "The Improvement and Encouragement of Pondok to be the Private School," (unpublished, M.A. thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1978), p. 61. Cited from Ibrahim Narongraksakhet, "Pondoks and their Roles in Preserving Muslim Identity in Southern Border Provinces of Thailand," in *Knowledge and Conflict Resolution: The Crisis of the Border Region of Southern Thailand*, ed. Uthai Dulyakasem and Lertchai Sirichai (Nakhon Si Thammarat: Walailak University, 2005), pp. 79-80.

<sup>66</sup> Abdul Haleem Bashah, *Raja dan Dinasti Jembal dalam Patani Besar* [King and Jembal Dynasty in Great Patani] (Kelantan: Pustaka Reka, 1994), p. 67.

<sup>67</sup> Pitsuwan, "Islam and Malay Nationalism," p. 184.

students from around Southeast Asia to study at their pondoks. Some pondoks, such as the Islam Foundation of Somburanasasna Dala near Pattani, writes Ryan Anson:

Have existed for more than 100 years and attract religious scholars from all over Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Cambodia. Students commit up to 10 years to living in austere thatched huts while learning about the Prophet Muhammad's message, studying Arabic and interpreting Islamic jurisprudence. Given that the schools reinforce both an Islamic and ethnic Malay identity, it is no surprise that up to 75 percent of Muslim youth spend part of their lives in at least one of the country's 400 *pondoks*...In March 2005, a small military unit showed up at the Islam Foundation of Somburanasasna Dala to question a few teachers. A Malaysian student named Nik Ismail Haji Sulong said that a group of Indonesian and Cambodian scholars abruptly left this well-known school after the conflict reignited in 2004. One young Singaporean later disappeared after making a trip to the country's porous border with Malaysia.<sup>68</sup>



Tok gurus at an Islamic school in Nakhon Si Thammarat.<sup>69</sup>

Aside from their more religious role, tok gurus are Malay cultural workers. In this traditional and modern capacity, the tok guru cultivates a sense of “Malayness” among the students in Greater Patani. Because, in historical terms, masuk Melayu (to become

<sup>68</sup> Ryan Anson, “Thailand's Underground War,” *SAIS Review*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Summer-Fall, 2005), p. 143.

<sup>69</sup> Photo taken by author in 2006.

Malay) meant to become Muslim, the tok guru's role has always been to support Malay identity formation. In Nakhon Si Thammarat, for example, tok gurus recounted in Malay the intellectual genealogies of various pondoks. In doing so, they shared aspects of Malay history, culture, and identity. This cultural knowledge provides the tok gurus with a degree of status in society. Many of the tok gurus I spoke to made regular trips to Rantau Panjang, Kelantan and Alor Setar, Kedah for resources and supplies.

The tok guru teaches students Malay manners, customs, history, and time. In the pondok tradition, the tok guru conducts his class in Malay and Arabic. With reference to Malay structures of time, knowledge, and power, pondok lessons have, since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, "revolved around prayer and memorizing the scripture (Koran), commentaries and exegesis provided by [the] tok guru."<sup>70</sup> To illustrate the point about Malay time, Ibrahim Narongraksakhet has noted:

[The] learning schedule in a pondok [is] divided into three main periods. They [are] (1) Around 5:30 a.m. after Fajar prayer. This period would take about two hours. (2) Around 1:00 p.m. after Zuhri prayer. This period would take 2-3 hours. (3) Around 7:00 p.m. This period would take 2-3 hours.<sup>71</sup>

In my own research, I have found that the structure of time is an important dimension of Malay identity. Pondoks, under the guidance and leadership of tok gurus, reinforce the Malay structure of time. Among differences between the pondok and the state school in southern Thai society, time is important because it supports the development of "Malayness" and challenges the temporality of "Thainess". Moreover, and in relation to

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<sup>70</sup> Liow, "The Pondok Schools," p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> Narongraksakhet, "Pondoks and Their Roles in Preserving Muslim Identity," p. 84.



Malay time at the pondok, the tok guru has historically transmitted the holidays and practices connected to the Islamic calendar. These celebrations include Ramadan, Hari Raya Haji/Korban (First day celebration after the end of Haj), Hari Raya Aidilfitri (First day celebration after the end of Ramadan), Awal Muharram (Muslim new year), and Friday prayers.



Boys at Mahad Islammiah wearing sarongs in Nakhon Si Thammarat.<sup>72</sup>

Therefore, the role of tok guru is much more than a religious teacher just as the pondok is more than a traditional Islamic school. The tok guru is a cultural worker in the Malay community. As a cultural worker, the tok guru imparts the values and traditions reflective of the Malay world. These Malay ways include the proper wearing of the sarong, how to garden, and how to heal and use herbal remedies. Much like the pandita or tuan guro in early Tausug society, the tok guru trains his students for life; he provides them life skills.

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<sup>72</sup> Photographs taken by author in 2006.

While at Mahad Islammiah, the head tok guru, Mr. Sari Binlatae, expressed to me how he prepares his students for the world. At Mahad Islammiah, the students are taught Malay, Arabic, and English. He added that four years ago they began teaching Thai too. Tok guros such as Mr. Sari Binlatae are important figures in southern Thai society. Of the languages taught, Malay (Kelantanese) is the one spoken in the community, at the market, and in the home. It is the language of identity in the Malay region of southern Thailand, and the pondok has played an instrumental role in maintaining its survival.

### **Maintaining Bahasa Melayu: The Linguistic Role of the Pondok in Greater Patani**

Ibrahem Narongraksakhet has contended that the Malay language in southern Thai society is more than a language; "it implies that the one who speaks Malay is a Muslim who is regarded as the one who is able to preserve his identity as a real Muslim."<sup>73</sup> In this sense, the pondok has two important roles in relation to the student in southern border region: to develop the student's linguistic self as a Malay speaker, as well as his/her religious self as a Muslim. While this may seem obvious to those that approach and understand religion as a cultural system, it is not however common sense to the general Thai population.<sup>74</sup> In 2006, Anand Panyarachun, chairman of the National Reconciliation Committee said:

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<sup>73</sup> Narongraksakhet, "Pondoks and Their Roles in Preserving Muslim Identity," pp. 69-70.

<sup>74</sup> On cultural approaches to the study of religion, see Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). On the limited knowledge of the general Thai public regarding Islam and identity in the south, see "Thais Ill-informed about the South", Thai Day, 23 February 2006 [<http://www.manager.co.th/IHT/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=9490000024869>] (21 February 2007)

The majority of Thais are still ignorant about the causes of the violence in the southern border provinces...The history, way of life and identity of the people in the three southernmost provinces has never really been accepted by the wider Thai society.<sup>75</sup>

Transforming the “Malay” into a “Thai”, save for his/her religion, has been the goal of the Thai state in Greater Patani. Foremost, has been the government’s historical effort aimed at replacing Malay with the national language. Thai government officials thought that this has been a reasonable accommodation. In fact, in 1987, the Thai Prime Minister urged “Thai-Muslim parents to allow their children to learn the Thai language.” The Prime Minister, Mr. Prem Tinsulanonda, went on to say:

No one can claim that Thai Muslims want to separate themselves from the kingdom of Thailand. When the idea of separatism has been discarded, what we must do is to make them feel that they are Thais in every way except religion.<sup>76</sup>

However, Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda failed to understand that religion, culture, history, and identity are inseparable in Greater Patani—just as they are in other parts of kingdom. Matheson and Hooker have clarified this point by explaining, “Islam is a whole identity which is both temporal and spiritual.”<sup>77</sup> Part of this “whole identity” is the everyday use of Malay. The pondok has maintained the use of Malay in the region since at least the early days of the Malay Kingdom of Patani. This maintenance of Malay has reified, moreover, the place of Greater Patani in the broader Malay world (alam Melayu). The linguistic role of the pondok in southern Thai society has thus been important in shaping both historical and modern Malay subjectivities.

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<sup>75</sup> “Thais Ill-informed about the South”.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Matheson and Hooker, “Jawi Literature in Patani,” p. 4.

<sup>77</sup> Matheson and Hooker, “Jawi Literature in Patani,” p. 4.

According to Narongraksakhet, Muslim parents preferred sending their children to the pondok where they learned Malay and Arabic rather than the public school where they were taught in Thai. "Students who were studying in public schools," writes Narongraksakhet, "were suspected that they might be influenced by Buddhism which might shake their faith because before the year of 1932 education offered in government schools was in temple area."<sup>78</sup> The Muslim parents' decision to send their children to pondoks further challenged the government's explicit and at times violent policy toward national integration. Essentially, this practice worked to undermine the Thai state's Thaicizing project in the south.

This is not a new development. Since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Bangkok has tried to eliminate the linguistic role of the pondok by pressuring it to use Thai. To which, Uthai Dulyakasen adds insight from his research in Teluban. Uthai has sketched Bangkok's view of the pondok as an institution that develops and reinforces the student's linguistic self as a Malay speaker. He noted that while the majority of the Malays, particularly the tok gurus, preferred the pondok tradition to secular education, "the Siamese authorities viewed the pondok as one of the serious barriers for national educational and political development. Some Siamese authorities even went so far as accusing the pondok of being politically oriented institutions, which reinforced ethnic loyalties."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Narongraksakhet, "Pondoks and Their Roles in Preserving Muslim Identity," p. 85.

<sup>79</sup> Uthai, "Education and Ethnic Nationalism," p. 84.

As early as 1902, Prince Damrong, the Minister of Education, conveyed similar concerns to Rama V. In a letter to King Chulalongkorn, Prince Damrong explained that some provincial towns in the kingdom had dialects and a local alphabet that differed from standard ones being used in the capital and other urban cities. "The provincial towns must think of a way to teach the Thai language and alphabet."<sup>80</sup> In 1910, a Thai commissioner in Pattani reported to the Department of Public Instruction:

Pattani region basically has a Malay population, with some Thai and Chinese who study in monasteries. The Malay population study in homes or at mosques and learn only the Islamic scripture. In the beginning there is some teaching of the Malay language under inspection and supervision of the province education officer aided by an *Imam* [Islamic authority]. The objective is to have the learning process underway before learning the Thai alphabet is added. The suitability of reducing learning in mosques and homes, and of combining efforts into a new school for a given sub-district or district depends on appropriate topographical considerations.<sup>81</sup>

Prince Damrong replied to the report by the Thai commissioner in Pattani by emphasizing and reminding the commissioner of the government's role in Thaicizing the Malays through language. It was paramount for the state through its cadre of teachers to displace the use of Malay, and in its place, plant Thai. Prince Damrong responded to the commissioner by adding:

To reduce the number of schools is unsuitable since the more widespread the teaching is the better. If these schools teach Thai, the government will give them support; if they don't have teachers, the government will set up a central school to train teachers before sending them out to teach in different places. These teachers will be given a salary for working for the government. Their duty should be to teach Thai only, so that every student will be able to speak Thai. This will be the first step; the second step, to be able to read and write in Thai, can come later.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Sachakul, "Education as a Means," p. 209.

<sup>81</sup> Quoted in Sachakul, "Education as a Means," pp. 209-210.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Sachakul, "Education as a Means," p. 210.

While reflecting on the government's efforts to enforce the use of Thai and minimize the practice of Malay, at least among the youth, it is important to note that the pondok's linguistic role remains equally relevant in today's southern Thai society. For example, Sachakul has reported from her fieldwork in the 1980s that:

Many Malay children could read Thai printing fluently but without any understanding of the text. In actual practice they learned little and retained less. In part, this slight knowledge of the Thai language reflects the opposition among the Islamic people to learning what they consider to be the language of Buddhism.<sup>83</sup>

Similarly, I found in my own research that Malay is still widely spoken. Pondoks from Nakhon Si Thammarat, for example, offered Malay, in addition to Arabic, English and Thai, to their students. At Mahad Islamiah, a pondok in Nakhon Si Thammarat, I was able to converse, though poorly, with Mr. Sari Binlatae, the head tok guru who happened to be from Pattani province. In our conversation, Mr. Sari Binlatae stressed the importance of Jawi as well as Malay in constructing the identity of his students. Therefore, coupled with the pondok's linguistic role, is its scriptural role. Chaiwat Satha-Anand has recently clarified the identity of Jawi in *The Life of This World: Negotiated Muslim Lives in Thai Society*. He has written:

It has also been invariably claimed that the Muslims in the south speak "Yawi", a dialect of Malay, in apparent ignorance of the fact that Yawi, which is the Thai rendering of the Malay term "Jawi", is essentially a script and not a language or even a dialect.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Sachakul, "Education as a Means," p. 251.

<sup>84</sup> Chaiwat Satha-Anand, *The Life of This World: Negotiated Muslim Lives in Thai Society* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005), p. xi.



A student at an Islamic school in Nakhon Si Thammarat practicing her Malay/Jawi.<sup>85</sup>

In Greater Patani, Matheson and Hooker have expanded on Jawi's influence in Malay identity formation. They have noted that, "the Jawi-Islamic complex of literature is taken as defining Malay cultural identity. Although the Malays are the majority in the four southern provinces, they are a small minority in Thailand. Their own view of their ethnic, cultural and religious identity is, therefore, fundamental. The Jawi-Islamic complex is crucial in this respect..."<sup>86</sup>

Firmly summarizing as well as reinforcing the multiple roles and values of the pondok tradition in southern Thai society was a leaflet distributed by a separatist group in Yala in 1977. The leaflet contextualizes the pondok tradition in a cultural landscape that has been subject to the processes of Thaification since the nineteenth century. Moreover, the leaflet makes the case, as I have also tried to do that the pondok is more than a place for Islamic learning; it is a rich cultural institution that cultivates and imparts the qualities of

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<sup>85</sup> Photograph taken by author in 2006.

<sup>86</sup> Matheson and Hooker, "Jawi Literature in Patani," p. 4.

“Malayness”. These qualities connect the Malay communities in southern Thai society to the broader Malay world. They, moreover, distinguish the Muslims in the south from Muslims in other parts of the kingdom. In particular, Omar Farouk Bajunid has contended that while Thai has gained momentum as the principal language of Islamic communication, Malay is still the definitive Islamic medium and the undisputed marker of Islamic identity among Muslims who live as real minorities in the Malay cultural heartland in Thailand and in the provinces of Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat.<sup>87</sup> He attributes the prevalence of Malay, among other things, to the high number of religious schools (*pondoks*) that continue to use it as the medium of instruction. Within this context, the separatist leaflet from Yala states:

*Pondok* schools are the only institutions of the Malay people, which teach Malay language to serve the community needs. *Pondok* schools are not a disguised organization for political purposes. Nor are they educationally and economically wasteful. The conversion of the *Pondok* schools to private schools is to introduce an undesirable culture to the people—the use of Siamese language as the medium of instruction, the teaching of Siamese history, the teaching of Buddhist principles in the school mean the obstruction of learning Islam and Malay language. These subjects are not only irrelevant to our needs but they will also destroy the intent and aim of the *Pondok* schools—and hence Islam will disappear from Siam.<sup>88</sup>

By understanding the *pondok* as an institution that imparts the aesthetics of “Malayness” and maintains ties to the broader Malay world, we can begin to appreciate the “whole identity” of the Malays in southern Thai society. That is, we can start to see how the *pondok* directly challenges the cultural state formation process in Thailand. Therefore, at

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<sup>87</sup> Omar Farouk Bajunid, “Islam, Nationalism, and the Thai State,” in *Dynamic Diversity in Southern Thailand*, ed. Wattana Sugunnasil (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005), p. 9.

<sup>88</sup> From a leaflet distributed by a separatist group in Yala on September 19, 1977. Cited from Uthai Dulyakasem, “Education and Ethnic Nationalism,” p. 85.



this point, it is important to discuss the development of state schools in southern Thai society to better understand this challenge. Finally, just as the *pondok* cultivates a sense “Malayness”, the state school has, historically, tried to impart the qualities of “Thainess”.

### **Beginnings of Modern Education in Southern Thai Society**

During the reign of Rama V (1868-1910), the spatial identity and administrative structure of Siam began to change in profound ways. This period has been succinctly captured in the writings of Margaret Koch. She has noted that during the nineteenth century:

Southeast Asia witnessed the incorporation of kingdoms and sultanates into new states in which sovereignty lost its sacral content and became a matter of bureaucratic administration over a clearly defined territory. For a majority of the states this process was a direct effect of European colonial rule. However, even in Thailand, which avoided direct colonial rule, strong pressures from Britain [and France] forced a restructuring of the kingdom designed to replace a loose unity around the sacral person of the king with effective administrative control.

The case of modern education contextualizes the politics of change more so than any other reform pursued during the reign of Rama V. This is particularly so if one looks at the development of state schools in the Malay region. As I mentioned earlier, the south had its own system of education. This system was based around the *pondok*, which as a cultural institution imparted the values and characteristics of “Malayness”. These aspects of identity were most notably observed in their use of Malay and Jawi, as well as their belief in Islam.

Therefore, after administratively integrating the Malay tributaries into the Thai state, Bangkok sought to facilitate the cultural integration of the Malays into Thai society. Rama V, in particular, looked to his half-brother Prince Damrong for assistance. Strategically, he appointed the prince to be not only the Minister of the Interior, in charge of developing a system of provincial administration called *thesaphiban*, or control over territory, but also the founding Minister of Public Instruction. W.A. Graham, writing in 1924, has explained how the Ministry of Public Instruction came to be.

“In the year 1891, H.R.H. Prince Damrong...was sent on a mission to Europe to study the question of education, and, on his return, a Government Department of Education was inaugurated which a little later became the Ministry of Public Instruction. The late Sir Robert Morant, then acting as tutor to the Crown Prince, was associated with Prince Damrong in this important work, and to their joint labors is to be attributed the scheme of national instruction which the Ministry of Public Instruction has ever since been trying to carry out and develop.”<sup>89</sup>

Moreover, it was in the spirit of a Bangkok-inspired nationalism and in response to external forces such as the surrounding colonial powers that Siam sought to reinvent itself as a unitary state complete with a coherent culture and definitive borders. The purposes of the government school were in effect to reinforce these two modern inventions: the territorial state and the cultural nation. However, expanding modern education into the Malay provinces of the southern region proved to be more difficult than Bangkok had expected.

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<sup>89</sup> W.A. Graham, *Siam: With one hundred and fifty-three illustrations and a map, in two volumes—volume I* (London: Alexander Moring Limited, 1924), p. 251.

In 1910, Rama V articulated his vision regarding the important roles of the state school in a modernizing Thai society. He said:

All citizens need to be trained in knowledge to earn their living, to become good persons. At the moment, students study in schools with the objective of being a clerk and of becoming a high-ranking officer. They should realize that education in school is to cultivate in them the *qualities of effective citizenship* and abilities related to earning their living like people in other nations. It is therefore the responsibility of the Ministry of Education to inculcate this idea among all citizens to have them realize their duties as citizens and to be able to think wisely so that they will be useful to the country. (emphasis added)<sup>90</sup>

However, Rama V's vision speaks, almost exclusively, to the utilitarian nature of modern education. In doing so, he applies high value to civic or state knowledge and vocational skills that might prove "useful to the country." In subtle ways, these expectations cultivate a collective consciousness that embraces, as fact or truth, the borders of the state and culture of the nation. It is important to clearly outline the cultural and political purposes of the modern school in Thai society, and particularly in the southern region. By exposing these directed aims of the government school, one can begin to see how Malay efforts to resist its establishment might arise. It is against this background that one might also begin to see the contemporary violence toward the state (school) as a form of cultural resistance.

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<sup>90</sup> Kuru Sapha, *Prawat Kru* [Biography of Thai teachers] (Bangkok: Kuru Sapha Press, 1958), pp. 33-39.

## Thai Language as Nation Builder

One of the stated cultural purposes of the government's provision of education to Greater Patani was "to teach the young Malays to speak Siamese like that of the Mons in Pak Kret or Pak Lad, Bangkok."<sup>91</sup> As we have seen the pondok schools were initially seen as sites for this introduction. During the nineteenth century and borrowing from British symbols of nationhood, Siam realized that standardizing language use in the kingdom was an effective way to build a strong nation and control its outer provinces. In an Andersonian sense, then, Thai, as the national language of instruction, became a territorializing as well as a modernizing tool of the state.<sup>92</sup> And so, within newly formalized and integrated areas such as Greater Patani, which was predominantly Malay, the government sought to quickly institutionalize the use of Thai and the Thai script through the creation of government schools. To this effect, one finds at the beginning of Rama VI's reign (1910-1925), an elaborated policy concerning the organization of government education for Malays, with particular reference to the Thai language. The educational policy appeared in a report of the governors' meeting on December 5, 1910. In the report, it was advised:

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<sup>91</sup> Rojanaudomsart Nopadol, "Problems of Education in Monthon Pattani, 1902-1931," (Bangkok: Srinakarinwrote, 1980), p. 42. Cited from Uthai, "Education and Ethnic Nationalism," pp. 152-153.

<sup>92</sup> See for example, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (Pasig City, Philippines: Anvil Publishing, 2003). Anderson speaks to the importance of print capitalism in facilitating the collective imagining of the nation. However, in order to imagine a broader community, one beyond the village for example, there must be a demand for print. Therefore, in creating this demand for print there must be populations that are literate in a particular language. Schools were essential in demarcating the territorial and cultural limits of this collective imagining.

In setting up primary education, attention must be given to using the same Thai alphabet as are standard everywhere; this is one important point. As for the Pattani region, support must be given to the study of Thai by Thai-speaking Malay children there. This is the primary stage. To have Thai widely used throughout the province is the overall aim and is the basic objective of the curriculum for primary education.<sup>93</sup>

Several attempts were made to impose the use of Thai in the Malay region. As I have mentioned earlier, the government looked to “Thaicizing” the pondok tradition by pressuring it to offer Thai. The Malays often resisted, rallying around their Malay language and Jawi script, which constituted their cultural and religious identities. In spite of the Malays’ resistance to the Thai language, the education office in Pattani nevertheless sought to offer Thai language lessons inside local mosques. The government hired several Thai teachers to provide language instruction. From 1910 to 1912 there were only three mosques where Thai was taught.<sup>94</sup>

Uthai has noted that an effort was made again in 1916 to have Thai taught at local Islamic schools. However, it failed because cooperation with tok gurus was not obtained. Moreover, one could speculate and suggest that “Thaicizing” the pondok tradition (and Malay society for that matter) through policies that supported Thai language use were unsuccessful for several other reasons. These reasons were articulated in a report of an inspector of government schools who was sent on behalf of Bangkok to assess the situation of education in Greater Patani. His report noted:

1. Malay adults object to purely Siamese education for their children because Siamese is not their language.

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<sup>93</sup> Sachakul, “Education as a Means,” pp. 210-211.

<sup>94</sup> Uthai, “Education and Ethnic Nationalism,” in *Reshaping Local Worlds*, p. 141.

2. They object because their children have no opportunity to study Mohammedanism if Siamese is their language. They fear their children will be won over to Buddhism.
3. They object to having their children study for three years and still not know either Siamese or Malay well.<sup>95</sup>

As a result of his findings and Malays' views toward the Thai language, the inspector suggested:

4. If the government intends to enforce the educational laws, those laws should be strictly enforced in order to guarantee the Malay people a basic Siamese education. Malay education should be allowed after the pupils have a Siamese foundation.
5. If an attitude of tolerance is to be shown, then it would be better to encourage a Malay education, using Siamese script, the Malays could easily learn Siamese.<sup>96</sup>

Paying little attention to the inspector's report, Bangkok maintained an inflexible Thai language policy in the Malay region. By the time Kenneth Perry Landon made his report in 1939, scant progress, from the government's perspective, had been achieved in "Thaicizing" the south, particularly in expanding the use of Thai among the Malays.

Landon reported:

In the thirteen years of compulsory education in the Pattani area but slight progress has been made. The children who went to school came out with a parrot-like knowledge of Siamese. Scarcely two percent of the pupils used what they had learned. The average school on an average day could muster not more than forty percent of the children enrolled...Malays involved in legal cases usually have to use fingerprints instead of signatures on documents.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Khun Canya Withan, "Kham Prarop Nai Ru'ang Kan Su'ksa Khong Chon Thai Islam," *Pattanisan*, 1937, pp. 74-79. Cited from Kenneth Perry Landon, *Siam in Transition: A Brief Survey of Cultural Trends in the Five Years since the Revolution of 1932* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 85.

<sup>96</sup> Khun Canya Withan, "Kham Prarop Nai Ru'ang Kan Su'ksa Khong Chon Thai Islam," *Pattanisan*, 1937, pp. 74-79. Cited from Landon, *Siam in Transition*, p. 85.

<sup>97</sup> Landon, *Siam in Transition*, p. 85.

By no means was Landon sympathetic to the Malays. Though he captures their perception and concern regarding government education, he nevertheless places the "failure" on the Malays for not seeing "the value of a Siamese education." He noted:

Siamese Buddhist monks, as early as the opening of the twentieth century, attempted to provide primary educational facilities in the Patani area. At that time the Malay people objected to Siamese education because they felt it was the prelude to a plot to get their children into the Siamese army. The language of commerce and of religion, in that area, was Malay. The Malays failed to see the value of a Siamese education.<sup>98</sup>

Pitsuwan has thus appropriately noted that to take part in the educational system offered by the government would mean to cast off an important feature of their Malay-Muslim ethnic and religious identity.<sup>99</sup> The failure, on the part of the government, to understand the Malays has extended to the state's early use of wats or Buddhist temples in extending modern education to the masses.

### **The Use of Wats as Government Schoolhouses**

The use of wats, or Buddhist temples, as government schoolhouses contributed to widespread Malay resistance. W.A. Graham noted in 1924 that while many lower primary schools were opened, "the majority...by a *wise arrangement*, were founded upon the old temple schools of the Buddhist system with the monks as teachers (emphasis added)."<sup>100</sup> The government and the elites in charge of modern education saw nothing

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<sup>98</sup> Landon, *Siam in Transition*, p. 84.

<sup>99</sup> Pitsuwan, "Islam and Ethnic Nationalism," p. 78.

<sup>100</sup> Graham, *Siam*, p. 252.

wrong with this practical move, given the limited number of teachers and buildings in Siam at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. However, in 1902, for instance, the raja of Legeh, a Malay province, conveyed his feelings to Sir Frank Swettenham in Singapore regarding Bangkok's religious and cultural insensitivity toward the Malays, in spite of royal rhetoric relating to religious tolerance. The raja appealed:

The men, inhabiting in Legeh, are mostly Mohammadans and when the Siamese festival takes place, all the Chiefs are forcibly invited by the said Kalwong [Thai Commissioner] to kneel down and bow to the portrait of His Majesty the King of Siam and the idols [of Lord Buddha] opposite to it. To worship idols is, it is known abroad, strictly prohibited in Mohammadan Religion. This causes a feeling of disgust and discontent among the whole inhabitants in Legeh.<sup>101</sup>

The first two schools in Pattani that opened in 1898 were both in wats; one was in Nongchick, the other at Wat Sakkhi in the town of Pattani. In total, fifty-five students were registered, although, only eight attended government lessons at Wat Sakkhi.<sup>102</sup> The government school at Wat Sakkhi closed the following year due to lack of interest and the fact that the "majority of the people [were] Malays."<sup>103</sup> The Buddhist abbot's report to the Ministry of Education noted: "The provision of secular education is possible only to distribute the school text-books to the temples in the district."<sup>104</sup> These temple schools, which received government textbooks, according to Keith Watson, were classified as

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<sup>101</sup> Tengu Ngah Shamsooden, Rajah of Legeh to Sir Frank Swettenham, January 18, 1902. Cited from Pitsuwan, "Islam and Malay Nationalism," p. 54.

<sup>102</sup> Uthai, "Education and Ethnic Nationalism," p. 152.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p. 152.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p. 152.



local schools.<sup>105</sup> Landon's observations in 1939 confirm the central place of the wat in the government school system, as well as the overall importance of the local school.

Table 1: School Enrolment in 1939

Government Schools	Private Schools	Local Schools
53,474	62,513	988,208

Given the high enrolment at local schools, Landon further contextualizes, though not intentionally, the cultural and religious insensitivities of the Thai state in promoting government education. Specifically, Landon has noted:

A "local" school is created by a village or a commune under the inspection of the government. The District Officer may set up such a school if he feels it is needed. Most of these schools are located in *temple grounds*...It may thus be seen that local schools are the medium or educating the masses of the people.<sup>106</sup>

Moreover, it is clear from Table 3 that in expanding modern education to all villages in the kingdom, the government heavily relied on wats as government schoolhouses.

Table 3: Government Schools and Wats (1922-1932)<sup>107</sup>

Year	Total No. of Government Schools	Schools using Wats	%
1922	4488	3613	80.5
1926	5903	4507	76.18
1930	6642	4813	72.15
1932	7638	5433	71.13

While in theory the government sought to "educate" the Malays without violating or changing their religion, in practice it was a different story. From trying to "Thaicize" the

<sup>105</sup> Keith Watson, *Educational Development in Thailand* (Singapore: Heinemann Asia, 1980), p. 100.

<sup>106</sup> Ministry of Education, 1934-1935. Cited from Landon, *Siam in Transition*, pp. 97-100.

<sup>107</sup> Jumsai M.L. Manich, *Compulsory Education in Thailand* (Paris: UNESCO, 1951), p. 45.

pondok tradition through language and curriculum to using local wats as government schoolhouses, it is clear that the government was either unaware or did not care about the cultural implications and perceptions of its sponsored school system. From the perspective of the Malays, the government's cultural and religious insensitivities are particularly evident in the observations of Landon who commented:

Education in Siam has always been linked with the religion of the people. In 1934-35, there were 6,519 schools out of a total of 9,001 that were located in temple grounds. Over 76% of all education is under the influence of the Buddhist faith...Most of the schools that meet in temple grounds have been established by regular educational agencies...All of the schools have regular periods for religious instruction and character training. Over 89% of local schools, 42.3% of the government schools, and 7.3% of the private schools are located in temple grounds. Most of the children in Siam are being educated in close physical contact with the historical and accepted religion of the nation.<sup>108</sup>

Table 4: Enrolment at Government Schools (1886-1921)<sup>109</sup>

Year	No. of Schools	No. of Teachers	Students	Female
1886	35	81	1994	X
1900	55	X	4956	X
1902	79	X	7560	X
1909	131	712	14174	977
1915	3164	4466	133445	5396
1918	3340	5275	178052	11084
1921	4026	6903	241508	16819

In spite of the impressive growth in national enrolment statistics (see Table 4) and widespread popularity of "local schools" (89% of which were wats in 1934-1935), the government's efforts to "educate" the Malays and impart the "qualities of effective citizenship" as Rama V had once envisioned were violently and passively resisted. These Thaicizing practices were challenged in several ways. For example, Surin Pitsuwan has

<sup>108</sup> Landon, *Siam in Transition*, p. 106.

<sup>109</sup> Manich, *Compulsory Education*, p. 29.

argued that following the annexation of Pattani in 1902, governmental schools were targeted and burned down because they symbolized the Thai cultural state. Similarly, Saroja Dorairajoo has explained how the enactment of the Compulsory Primary Education Law of 1921, which required all school-aged Malays to attend government institutions instead of the pondok, led to two uprisings in 1922 and 1923.<sup>110</sup> In addition, Thanet Aphornsuvan has added:

The so-called rebellions originated from the Muslim villagers of Ban Namsai, in Mayo District, Pattani Province, who refused to pay taxes and rent on land to the Thai government. The cause of this resistance stem from the implementation of the Compulsory Primary Education Act in 1921, from which all Malay Muslim children were required to attend Thai primary schools.<sup>111</sup>

While violent responses to Bangkok's Thaicizing policies have been recalled and remembered in recent time, a more subtle form of resistance that has characterized the life of public education in Greater Patani since its inception has been the conscious decision by Malay parents' to boycott the government school system in favor of the pondok tradition.

### **Low Attendance as a Form of Cultural Resistance**

While some scholars have attributed the low enrolment among Malays to their inability to see the "value of Siamese education," I think more appropriately low attendance might be explained in the fact that government education was perceived, and rightfully so, as a

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<sup>110</sup> Saroja D. Dorairajoo, "Violence in the South of Thailand," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (2004), p. 466.

<sup>111</sup> Thanet Aphornsuvan, "Origins of Malay Muslim 'Separatism' in Southern Thailand," *Working Paper Series*, No. 32 (Singapore: Asia Research Institute, 2004), p. 18.

state (official) attempt at ridding the Malays of their cultural and religious ways. To understand the Malay perception and subsequent response to government schooling, one needs only to turn to the Pattani Province enrolment figures. By doing so, one might begin to appreciate the most symbolic form of resistance to modern education, as framed and delivered by the state, which was the non-participation of Malays in the public school system. Table 5 highlights the extent of their non-participation.

Table 5: Enrolment at the Three Government Schools in Pattani Province (1909)<sup>112</sup>

Location	Male Students	Teachers
Pattani (town)	156	2
Nong-chick	85	3
Yaring	78	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>6</b>

By 1912 the number of government schools in Greater Patani had increased to twenty and enrolment reached 1,528. Unfortunately, a breakdown of this statistic into Malays and Thais is not available. One could speculate and suggest that a great majority of the students were Thai. This is assumed based on the growing number of Thai teachers and other government workers in the area.<sup>113</sup> Additionally, one could base this assumption on the socio-cultural pressures among the Malays to boycott the government school system. The 1912 enrolment figure (1,528 pupils or 2%) represents a very small percentage of the total school-aged population in Greater Patani. Uthai has noted, based on his research in Teluban, that “there were a few Malays, particularly those who worked with the

<sup>112</sup> *Ministry of Education, Second Report of 1909*. Cited from Uthai, “Education and Ethnic Nationalism,” in *Reshaping Local Worlds*, p. 140.

<sup>113</sup> Moshe Yegar, *Between Integration and Secession: The Muslim Communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Western Burma/Myanmar* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2002), p. 176.

government, who sent their children to a secular school."<sup>114</sup> As one of Uthai's informants, a retired Muslim teacher, put it:

When we, the Muslim kids, walked to school, our neighbors looked at us with suspicion. Some of them even ridiculed us. We were almost isolated from our Malay peers.<sup>115</sup>

Watson has explained that though in 1915, 203 out of 227 village groups had their own local school boards committed to raising funds to support government education, school attendance in Malay provinces remained low because parental opposition was still strong.<sup>116</sup> Watson, interestingly, contributes the low enrolment of Malays to high parental illiteracy, in essence, disregarding the possibility that both—low enrolment and high parental opposition—were related forms of cultural resistance.<sup>117</sup> In 1915, approximately 2,636 students were enrolled in government schools in Greater Patani out of a total school-aged population of 87,034.<sup>118</sup> According to Uthai, the number of children in the district between the ages of eight and seventeen years was reported to be 59,034.<sup>119</sup>

Consistent with the government's insensitive approach to education in the Malay provinces, and reflective of its disregard for Malay cultural and religious values as expressed through language, script, and the pondok tradition, Bangkok concluded, based on reasons and opinions provided by "local authorities...that if education was to be

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<sup>114</sup> Uthai, "Education and Ethnic Nationalism," in *Reshaping Local Worlds*, p. 153.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, p. 153.

<sup>116</sup> Watson, *Educational Development*, p. 101.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, p. 101.

<sup>118</sup> Manich, *Compulsory Education*, p. 35.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, p. 141.

extended in the south it could only be as a result of governmental legislation rendering it compulsory."<sup>120</sup>

Consequently, on September 21, 1919, Phraya Dhechanuchit, the governor of Pattani province, submitted a report to Chao Phraya Thammasakmontri, Minister of Public Instruction. Inspired by the fact that Malay parents' generally refused to send their children to government schools to learn Thai, among other aspects of "Thainess", the report stated, in the interest of boosting Malay enrolment in the state school system, that:

For the convenience of the province, the government must enact a law requiring everybody of school age to attend a school in order that education will become widespread and that the governor and other officials concerned will have full authority to set up educational programs.<sup>121</sup>

### **The Compulsory Primary Education Act (1921): Its Impact on Malay Society in Greater Patani**

Ironically, Watson has argued that demands for compulsory education came "not from Buddhist Thais but from the Muslims in the south."<sup>122</sup> This is a peculiar proposition, considering the fact that no more than 3% of the total school-aged population in Greater Patani attended government classes. Moreover, as I have suggested earlier, this low enrolment reflects Malay parents' cultural resistance, not indifference, to Thai education. While it may be true that "local authorities" in the Malay provinces advocated the

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<sup>120</sup> Watson, *Educational Development*, p. 101.

<sup>121</sup> Sachakul, "Education as a Means," p. 212.

<sup>122</sup> Watson, *Educational Development*, p. 101.

enactment of a compulsory primary education law, this surely does not mean that Malay parents collectively voiced their demands for it. Moreover, these “local authorities” including the governor of Pattani, were in all likelihood Bangkok-appointed Thais or Malays who ostensibly shared in the government’s vision that Thaicizing the south through education was in the interest of the nation.

As early as 1917, it was government officials from Pattani province, not “the Muslims in the south”, who proposed a law requiring Malay children to attend government schools. The proposal indicated that it hoped to have the law take effect first in Pattani province as a special case; it also suggested a way to raise contributions to support education by collecting one baht from each able body person annually. Regarding financial support of government education, the proposal noted:

An annual education contribution should be approved as a special case. Make an announcement to the public that they should give annual contributions for education; that is, collect money from able-bodied men, one baht each year (Ministry of Education, 1917, p. 183).<sup>123</sup>

So then, in 1921, Bangkok enacted its first Compulsory Primary Education Act, which became effective on October 1, 1921; but in the first year the law only applied to five provinces, including Pattani, and some sub-districts on a limited basis.<sup>124</sup> Despite the new law, the number of students enrolled in primary education in Pattani gradually decreased

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<sup>123</sup> Sachakul, “Education as a Means,” p. 216.

<sup>124</sup> Sachakul, “Education as a Means,” p. 213.

over the next few years.<sup>125</sup> Table 6 clearly highlights this decline for the years 1924 and 1925.

Table 6: Number of School-Aged Children  
In and Out of School in Monthon Pattani, 1924-1925<sup>126</sup>

1924				1925		
Age	Number	Enrolled	Not Enrolled	Number	Enrolled	Not Enrolled
7-8	5,691	138	5,553	5,961	159	5,802
8-9	4,848	295	4,553	5,451	271	5,180
9-10	4,389	522	3,867	5,167	367	4,800
10-11	5,621	1,470	4,151	5,475	1,221	4,254
11-12	5,888	1,894	3,994	5,609	1,501	4,108
12-13	6,083	1,991	4,047	5,665	1,779	3,886
13-14	5,735	2,030	3,705	6,522	2,150	4,372
Total	38,210	8,340	29,870	39,850	7,448	32,402

In addition to a direct drop in school enrolment, Malay parents also negotiated their children's attendance to avoid harsh government fines. According to a retired educational officer in the region during early part of the twentieth century, the Malays were "even willing to pay fines just for not having to send their children to school. Some Malays reportedly tried to avoid paying fines by sending their children to school for one day in a month."<sup>127</sup> However, other reactions to the Compulsory Primary Education Act of 1921 included violence and an organized exodus of Malays to Kelantan and Penang (northern British Malaya). Sachakul has provided an excerpt from an account of the "exodus". The excerpt read:

Phraya Wichaiphubal, the thread of the local Police Department of Nakhnon Si Thammarat province, who went on an official visit to Malaysia, met some

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, p. 213.

<sup>126</sup> National Archives, December 1924; National Archives, December 1926.

<sup>127</sup> Nopadol, "Problems of Education in Monthon Pattani," p. 114 (in Thai). Cited from Uthai, "Education and Ethnic Nationalism," in *Reshaping Local Worlds*, p. 153.



inhabitants of Penang, conversed with them about news reported in the newspapers, and obtained some information:

There were many families of the Malay Siamese residing in Palis and Saiburi who made their living chastising Siam, namely:

- a) Trivial and severe taxation
- b) Severe educational management that compelled Malay children to attend Thai schools and collected an annual education contribution
- c) Compulsory Primary School Act intended to change the Malay custom and religious doctrine into those practiced and respected by Thais.<sup>128</sup>

While it is important that Sachakul included the excerpt for it sheds light on the impact and perception of the compulsory education law from the perspective of the Malays, she, however, clearly does not understand the deeper implications of learning Thai in Greater Patani. Moreover, Sachakul completely disregards the heritage of Malay (language) and Jawi (script) and their historical relationship to "Muslim Malay identity". Therefore, she has contended in response to the exodus:

This account signifies that the Muslim evacuation then took place as a result of the official requirement that children attend schools, which caused misunderstanding in the belief that this effort was intended to make Muslim children abandon their religious faith and accept Buddhism. The fact, however, is that such an intention had never been the government's policy. The government simply wanted the Malay-speaking natives to be able to speak Thai...<sup>129</sup>

In general, then, one could confidently state that Malay parents perceived the new law to be another coercive attempt by Bangkok aimed at closing their pondoks, weakening their traditional structures of society, and undermining the cultural and moral authority of their tok gurus. Furthermore, it was feared that religious education would become irrelevant as

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<sup>128</sup> Sachakul, "Education as a Means," p. 218.

<sup>129</sup> Sachakul, "Education as a Means," pp. 218-219.

far as modern occupations were concerned.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, one scholar has accurately noted how the symbols of nationhood so characteristic of Rama VI's reign (1910-1925) were reproduced through the government school system. "Unwilling to resist," writes Surin Pitsuwan, "the Malay-Muslims assumed a greater role in countering these symbols...Compulsory education was having its impact on Muslim society, mosques were encouraged to change their curriculum so as to accommodate Thai lessons and civic indoctrination designed by Bangkok."<sup>131</sup> Therefore, regardless of location, all government schools were subject to the new law and thus had to "follow the Ministry's rules and regulations concerning syllabi, programs, periods of work, textbooks, and other educational materials, hygienic conditions, methods of instruction, discipline, administration, and any other appropriate measures."<sup>132</sup>

## Conclusion

The Compulsory Primary Education Act of 1921 inspired intense cultural and educational change in Greater Patani, which had the effect of dramatically reconfiguring the conditions of everyday life. Bangkok increased its cultural presence and political control over the area by seeing a growth in government schoolhouses, teachers, and "Thai-Muslims".

Government education has played an instrumental yet contested role in the making of the modern Thai nation-state. Through the Thai schoolhouse Bangkok has violently sought to

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<sup>130</sup> Uthai, "Education and Ethnic Nationalism," in *Reshaping Local Worlds*, p. 154.

<sup>131</sup> Pitsuwan, *Islam and Malay Nationalism*, p. 63. See also Wyatt, *The Politics of Reform*, p. 333.

<sup>132</sup> Sachakul, "Education as a Means," p. 213.

change the Malay minority's language, script, religion, cultural ways, and sense of time so that they would reflect the aesthetics of "Thainess". "Thainess" was imagined by Bangkok to include the Thai language, Thai script, Thai dress, Thai cultural values such as merit, Thai time structured around Buddhist and royal holidays, and, in the broadest sense, the proper ways of being a modern Thai. However, already present in the south was a deep-rooted heritage of "Malayness". As I have noted, the complex qualities of "Malayness", which essentially constituted "Malay Muslim identity", were reproduced through *pondoks*, *tok gurus*, and the use of the Malay language, Jawi script, and Malay time structured around the Muslim holidays and the Islamic calendar. Therefore, in a direct response to Charles F. Keyes' assertion that Thailand was uniquely saved from the cultural and political disturbances that typically characterized the beginnings of modern education in other Southeast Asian societies, I have suggested through comparative example and historical analysis otherwise. Since its inception, the government school has been resisted from the Malays in the south. This resistance, at times, has been violent, sustained, and well coordinated. A history of Malay resistance to government schooling, particularly from the founding of the first school in Pattani up to the implementation of the Compulsory Primary Education Act of 1921 and shortly thereafter, can provide us a new perspective for observing and understanding the contemporary violence against the state school system in southern Thailand.

## **Case Study Two:**

### **Resistance to Education in the Southern Philippines, 1899-1919**

The goal of this case study is to shift the focus away from the life and times of the public school in Manila, and instead locate it within the cultural-historical context of Mindanao and Sulu. In doing so, I intend to provide a different school history, one that dramatically disrupts Charles F. Keyes' historical construction that the early educational policies exacerbated growing divisions between classes and communities "in most Southeast Asian countries—Siam and the American-administered Philippines being exceptions."<sup>133</sup> I argue that since its very inception the government school system in Mindanao and Sulu has been resisted. This response has, for the most part, been ignored by educational and Philippine historians alike. Based on archival research and preliminary fieldwork in the south, I demonstrate that resistance to the government school system resembled tactics employed by the Malays in Greater Patani.

To better understand the politics of colonial schooling in the Muslim south, it is imperative to shed light on the pandita tradition in Mindanao-Sulu society. The pandita, very much like the tok guru in Malay society, was locally revered as an intellectual, cultural, and religious authority. And similar to the pondok in Greater Patani, the traditional Islamic school in Mindanao-Sulu society was, in the Spanish-American colonial lexicon, called a pandita school. After establishing the cultural and historical importance of the pandita tradition, I then turn to the beginnings of American colonial

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<sup>133</sup> Keyes, "State Schools," p. 5.

rule. Specifically, I focus on the development of public instruction as a contested cultural institution in Mindanao-Sulu society.

### **The “Other” Malay World: Islamic Culture in the Eastern Archipelago**

“Joloano panditas are those who...keep up the relations of the Magindanaos with the foreign centers of the Islamic world.”

Ferdinand Blumentritt<sup>134</sup>

Anthony Reid has described how the heritage of Melaka went in two different directions after the city fell to the Portuguese in 1511. He has noted:

A number of lines of kingship sought to continue the royal lineage and court style of Melaka, of which the most successful for two centuries was the Riau-Johor line centered in the region of modern Singapore. On the other hand, the merchants who had given Melaka its life spread almost throughout Southeast Asia in their quest for entrepôts sympathetic to their trade. Their diaspora helped give new life to a range of port-states like Aceh, Patani, Palembang, Banten, Brunei, Makasar, and Banjarmasin, and even Cambodia and Siam...When dispersed around the Archipelago this diaspora (or at least its Muslim majority) became simply Malays.<sup>135</sup>

While these court types and merchant traders began to establish new communities, they also started to “sponsor Muslim scholars whose erudition was famous throughout the Muslim world. Such scholars played an important role in propagating the Malay language through Malay versions of popular Islamic stories and especially through translations of Arabic and Persian texts.”<sup>136</sup> It was during this renaissance and in the wake of this

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<sup>134</sup> Ferdinand Blumentritt, “Los Maguindanaos, Estudio Etnografico,” *Boletín de las Sociedades de Madrid*, XXXV, 1893, p. 283.

<sup>135</sup> Anthony Reid, “Understanding *Melayu* (Malay) as a Source of Diverse Modern Identities,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (October 2001), p. 300.

<sup>136</sup> Barbara W. Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2001), p. 64.

expansionary period of Southeast Asian Islam that a shared cultural consciousness (Malayness) began to take root in such diverse places as the port-polity of Sulu and the coastal community of Maguindanao.

As previously mentioned, trade had been important factor in the spread of Islam and its cultural heritage. In 1774, for example, the British East India Company dispatched Captain Thomas Forrest to Balambagan, an island in the Sulu archipelago. While scouting the southern islands for the Company—which, having returned Manila to the Spaniards in 1763, considered extending its trading activities into the Sulu Sea region—Forrest noted the commodity exchange that characterized this island world. He explained, “Prows [vessels] go a-trading from Sooloo to Ternate; they carry many Chinese articles and bring back rice, swallo or sea slugs, shark fins, tortoise-shell, a great many loories, and some small pearls; but no spices, except perhaps a very few by stealth.”<sup>137</sup> While in Ternate, Sulu traders were able to visit a variety of “Malay” institutions. The most important and visible often being the local mosque. “On the island of Ternate,” describes Forrest, “are three Missigys (mosques) served by two Caliphas and four Imams and many other inferior clergy called Katibes, Modams, and Misimis.”<sup>138</sup>

Intimately related to the mosque was the pandita school or traditional Islamic school. In particular, panditas, or Islamic teachers, managed the cultural and religious discourses that constituted the “boundaries” of this new Malay world. Likewise, they mobilized

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<sup>137</sup> Thomas Forrest, *Travel Accounts of the Islands, 1513-1787* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1971), pp. 226-227.

<sup>138</sup> Forrest, *Travel Accounts*, p. 227.

critical support against “foreign elements” such as the Spaniards in the Philippine islands, or the Dutch to some extent in eastern Indonesia. This resistance was often in defense of a particular conception of the world, and thus way of life. Leonard Andaya has noted this clearly in relation to the changing world of Maluku in the seventeenth century. Commenting on the growing tension between the Dutch governor of Ternate, Robertus Padtbrugge, and the Sultan of Ternate, Kaicili Sibori (aka Sultan Amsterdam), Andaya has explained:

Some of the Mindanao boats coming to Ternate reported how a number of Islamic teachers from Banten had been secretly smuggled into the islands to foment revolt against the Dutch. [Governor] Padtbrugge found it understandable that the Malukans were now talking of a *jihad*, a Muslim holy war, “seeing that from all sides come such a large flood to God’s churches, causing the Muslim priests to lose their lucrative source of support and come into disrepute”...Religion as a principal reason for hostilities was a European perception; for Malukans it was a struggle between two different ways of life—that of the Dutch and that of the Ternatens—for supremacy in Maluku.<sup>139</sup>

Therefore, panditas were defenders of a cultural world, not just a religious-political order. As Andaya has noted with regard to the “Islamic teachers from Banten”, their mobility through the island world facilitated the spread of ideas, language, script, and time, among other things. In doing so, panditas or teachers socialized villagers and rulers into a global religious community or ummah, teaching “new” Muslims the Malay way of life. Another example from the seventeenth century captures this new way of life in great detail. Writing in 1686, William Dampier noted the role of one such pandita performing a Malay custom while visiting the island of Mindanao:

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<sup>139</sup> Leonard Y. Andaya, *The World of Maluku: Eastern Indonesia in the Early Modern Period* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1993), p. 182.

They circumcise the males at 11 or 12 years of age, or older; and many are circumcised at once. This ceremony is performed with a great deal of solemnity. There had been no circumcision for some years before our being here; and then there was one for Raja Laut's son. They chose to have a general circumcision when the Sultan, or General, or some other great person hath a son fit to be circumcised; for with him a great many more are circumcised. There is notice given about 8 or 10 days before for all men to appear in arms, and great preparation is made against the solemn day. In the morning before the boys are circumcised, presents are sent to the father of the child that keeps the feast; which, as I said before, is either the Sultan, or some great person: and about 10 or 11 o'clock the *Mahometan priest* does his office. He takes hold of the fore-skin with two sticks, and with a pair of scissors snips it off.<sup>140</sup> (emphasis added)

It was through circumcisions and other customary practices that Southeast Asian Islam soon became a cultural vehicle for local Muslims to connect to a broader world; it enabled rulers (such as Raja Laut) to reflect the attributes culturally expected of them, while at the same time, it provided individuals an identity that went beyond their village realm.<sup>141</sup> The presence and maintenance of this "Malayness", particularly among the newly Islamized areas, was linked to the growing number of mosques, which "were all modest structures, often connected with religious schools and institutions."<sup>142</sup> Tidore, a community near Ternate and linked to Sulu and Maguindanao through frequent trade and cultural exchange, it was said to have, "no fewer than 25 mosques."<sup>143</sup> One could speculate based on accounts of the Malay world prior to the fall of Melaka in 1511 that these mosques in the "outer centers" were part of a translocal system of cultural and Islamic learning.

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<sup>140</sup> William Dampier, *Travel Accounts of the Islands, 1513-1787* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1971), p. 55.

<sup>141</sup> Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, p. 57.

<sup>142</sup> Reid, *Southeast Asian in the Age of Commerce*, p. 85

<sup>143</sup> Forrest, *Travel Accounts*, p. 228.



The growth of the pandita school (as well as the importance of the pandita) in Mindanao-Sulu society and the spread of “Malayness” throughout the Sulawesi Sea region indeed reflects the broader cultural transformations that were associated with the travels of Islam. By understanding this “other” Malay world, the one that thrived in the eastern part of the archipelago, one can begin to appreciate the role of the pandita and the function of pandita school beyond purely religious terms. From a variety of historical accounts, notably those of European travelers, we can start to see this Malay heritage through a grammar of culture. More importantly, one can start to approach the place of the pandita and the traditional Islamic school in maintaining, defending, and defining this “other” Malay world. Therefore, in gaining a better sense of these changes, I turn to a discussion regarding the work of the pandita and the contexts of Islamic and cultural learning in Mindanao-Sulu society up to American colonial rule in 1898.

### **The Work of the Pandita in Mindanao-Sulu Society**

Although, in the eighteenth century, Thomas Forrest was the first European to “map” the ancestry of the sultans of Mindanao-Sulu society,<sup>144</sup> Najeeb M. Saleeby, an American colonial administrator at the beginning of the twentieth century, was the first person to translate the tarsilas or genealogies of Sulu and Maguindanao. Saleeby’s translations are one of the few indigenous sources available in English. The tarsilas were originally written in the Tausug language using Jawi script. The use of Jawi indicates the reach of “Malayness” in Mindanao-Sulu society. Moreover, according to tradition, two names are attached to the coming of Islam: Tuan Masha’ika and Sharif Auliya Makhdum. The

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<sup>144</sup> Forrest, *Travel Accounts*, p. 225.

tarsilas state that Sharif Makhdum "sailed in a pot of iron" and settled in Buansa on the island of Sulu. Upon landing on the island, it is believed that he began teaching his students the basic elements of Islam by writing on the sands of the sea shore. And in the fifteenth century, tradition has it that Abu Bakr, founder of the Sulu Sultanate, introduced a number of reforms such as the teaching of Arabic and the Qur'an, the building of mosques, and the inauguration of a system of courts.<sup>145</sup>

Consistent with other parts of the Malay world, these early Islamic schools were small and intimate. Classes were either held at a local mosque or at the house of the pandita.<sup>146</sup> It was during the Spanish colonial period that these Islamic schools in fact became known as pandita schools. The Americans also adopted the term in the twentieth century. Within contemporary Mindanao-Sulu society, however, makatib or madrasah is used to refer to an Islamic school. Makatib is derived from the Arabic word kataba, meaning to read.<sup>147</sup> Young boys would stay with or visit their teacher daily until they could read passages in the Qur'an and write using the Jawi script. Once students acquired these two skills, their enrolment in the makatib was no longer expected. Among Tausugs, in particular, the makatib in conjunction with the community would host a completion ceremony (pagtammat). The students would spend about one to three years of tutoring with a teacher for whose services the parents would offer gifts in kind or cash.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Helen Follet, *Men of the Sulu Sea* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1945) p. 6.

<sup>146</sup> Manaros Boransing, *The Madrasah Institution in the Philippines: Historical and Cultural Perspectives, With a Directory* (Tokyo: Toyota Foundation, 1987), p. 10.

<sup>147</sup> Boransing, *The Madrasah Institution*, p. 11.

<sup>148</sup> Ahmad Mohammad H. Hassoubah, *Teaching Arabic as a Second Language in the Southern Philippines* (Marawi City, Philippines: University Research Center, Mindanao State University, 1983), pp.4-7.

Within the chronicles and early travelogues of Europeans, one finds descriptions of pandita schools and how panditas in particular supported and facilitated resistance against Spanish colonization. Chronicles of Spanish destruction of Muslim fortifications (kotas) reveal that panditas were present at these kotas (kota is a Malay word for town/city). Spaniards have noted seeing Arabic inscriptions on doors, books, and other religious artifacts.<sup>149</sup> In 1578 and 1579 the Spanish Governor-General, Francisco de Sande, ordered the commanders of two military expeditions against the sultanate of Maguindanao to arrest the “preachers from Brunei who preach the doctrine of Mahoma.”<sup>150</sup> Similarly, in 1588, Bishop Domingo de Sálazar of Manila complained to the King of Spain that:

In the island of Mindanao, which is subject to Your Majesty, and for many years has paid your tribute, the law of Mahoma has been publicly proclaimed...by preachers from Bruney and Terrenate who have come there—some of them even, it is believed, having come from Mecca. They have erected and are now building mosques, and the boys are being circumcised, and *there is a school where they are taught the Alcoran.*<sup>151</sup> (emphasis added)

However, more revealing have been the travelogues of early voyagers. During a visit to Mindanao in 1686, William Dampier noted:

In the city of Mindanao they speak two languages indifferently; their own Mindanao language, and the Malaya: but in other parts of the island they speak only their proper language, having little commerce abroad. *They have schools, and instruct the children to read and write, and bring them up in the Mahometan*

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<sup>149</sup> Reynaldo C. Ileto, *Maguindanao, 1860-1888: The Career of Datu Utto of Buayan* (Ithaca: Data Paper No. 82, Cornell University, 1971), p. 59.

<sup>150</sup> Emma H. Blair and James A. Robertson, *The Philippine Islands* (Cleveland: Cacho Publishing, 1907), IV, pp. 178, 234.

<sup>151</sup> Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, VII, pp. 58-59.

*Religion.* Therefore, many words, especially in their prayers, are in Arabic, and many words of civility the same as in Turkey; and especially when they meet in the morning, or take leave of each other, they express themselves in that language.<sup>152</sup> (emphasis added)

Dampier's observations are instrumental in imagining the Malay world that existed during the early modern period in Mindanao. He brings to light the qualities of "Malayness" and how these characteristics are linked to education. Similarly, early French travelogues have also described the visible presence of pandita schools. In 1779, Guillaume Joseph Hyacinthe Jean Baptiste Le Gentil de la Galaisiere noted that Muslim schooling was evident and culturally important.<sup>153</sup> Spanish chroniclers attributed great cultural importance to the pandita in Mindanao-Sulu society too. For example, in 1820, Tomas de Comyn reflected:

Jolo is an island governed by a system of administration extremely vigorous and decisive; dread and superstition sustain the throne of the tyrant, and the fame of his greatness frequently brings to his feet the ulemas, or missionaries of the Alcoran, even as far from the furthest margin of the Red Sea.<sup>154</sup>

What one gets from de Comyn's reflections are not just insights into the strength and importance of the ulemas, or panditas, but also the nature of de Comyn's perspective. That is, we are privy to the broader religious influences that informed and shaped his worldly outlook particularly toward Islam. More than seventy years later, a British observer noted in the 1890s that the pandita seemed "to be almost the chief in the

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<sup>152</sup> William Dampier, *Travel Accounts*, p. 49.

<sup>153</sup> Guillaume Joseph Hyacinthe Jean Baptiste Le Gentil de la Galaisiere, *Voyage to the Indian Seas, 1779-1781* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1964), p. 65

<sup>154</sup> Tomas de Comyn, *State of the Philippines in 1810* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1969), p. 124.

district—not in the warlike sense, like the Datto; but his word has great influence.”<sup>155</sup> In addition, the panditas were said to have considerable political and ecclesiastical authority over whole communities and individuals. According to Reynaldo Ileto’s work on Maguindanao in the late nineteenth century, panditas fought alongside Muslim warriors, taking leadership in defensive attacks against Spanish soldiers and rousing Muslims fighters to give their lives for the cause of Allah and the Prophet.<sup>156</sup>

Regarding the role of the pandita in the religious life of Sulu, Father Juan Quintana has written, “the difficulty and the repugnance of the Joloanos in embracing our civilization are due to the strong and powerful influence which the Hajis or moros come from Mecca have always exercised in order to spread the message of the Koran.”<sup>157</sup> In fact, according to Father Estanislao March, panditas were responsible for the great increase in the number of juramentados, or those individuals who had made the Muslim oath to give one’s own life in the process of slaying Christians.<sup>158</sup> However, in response to these colonial narratives, which have played such a formative role in the historical construction of Mindanao-Sulu society, it is important to remember that the Spaniards, like the Dutch in eastern Indonesia, “viewed Islam as a natural enemy of the Christians and expressed a distrust bred of centuries of anti-Islamic European literature and propaganda.”<sup>159</sup> Hence,

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<sup>155</sup> John Foreman, *The Philippine Islands* (Manila: Filipiniana Guild, 1980), p. 148.

<sup>156</sup> Ileto, *Maguindanao*, p. 58.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, p. 60.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, p. 60.

<sup>159</sup> Andaya, *The World of Maluku*, p. 182. Andaya notes: “In the Middle Ages, Muslims were commonly described as a race of dogs, and in one painting illustrating St. Augustine’s two centers of humankind, one of the two great families of nations is depicted with black skin, dog’s head, and wearing clothes associated with Islam,” p. 273.

the Spaniards referred to the Muslims in general as “Moros” because of their bitter Iberian experience with the “Moors”.

Based on these varied historical accounts, we can begin to understand the broad place of the pandita and the pandita school in Mindanao-Sulu society. We can see that the pandita’s role went clearly beyond teacher and religious authority. He was an intimate element in the workings and maintenance of the Malay world, imparting the essential qualities and characteristics appropriate for a life committed to Islam and Malay culture. In the face of oppression or unwelcome change, the pandita would mobilize resistance and, in doing so, provide the cultural and religious logic for battle. The pandita school, on the other hand, prepared countless generations for a life in the Malay world. Boys that attended the schools learned how to read and write in Jawi. They accumulated the values and customs of their local society, while at the same time, being taught about their membership in the broader ummah. The pandita and the pandita school, in effect, cultivated a Malay heritage that was both a source of pride and strength. However, with the arrival of the Americans at the end of the nineteenth century, this heritage and the teachers and schools that fostered it would be directly challenged by the colonial school system. The colonial education challenge to the pandita tradition was different in that it was a rival system of cultural and religious learning. The panditas were perceptive to these changes and organized resistance efforts accordingly.

In understanding the nature of resistance to colonial education, which was notably led by panditas, I now turn to the founding of the government school system in Mindanao-Sulu

society. In doing so, I look at three aspects of public education. The first is the use of American and Christian Filipino teachers in the colonial schools. Second, I look at enrolment statistics. While colonial administrators often understood poor attendance as an indicator of ignorance or backwardness, as in southern Thailand, I instead see the low enrolment figures as a deliberate move by parents and communities to resist colonial rule and preserve their local heritage. Thirdly, I explore the curriculum used in the public school system. For the most part, the curriculum was aimed at developing capable workers for the growing number of agricultural farms. Moreover, the curriculum was culturally and religiously insensitive. Finally, I discuss several unique approaches to state educational development in the Muslim region. These strategies included vernacularizing school material, developing a bilingual newspaper, and financially supporting pandita schools.

#### **“The Officers Wept”: A Colonial Transition in Mindanao-Sulu Society**

The actual beginning of the American colonial period in Mindanao-Sulu society was indeed unlike most other transitions into colonial rule. The American occupation of Sulu began in May 1899. Two battalions of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry were stationed in the Sulu Archipelago. Private Needom N. Freeman observed the moment of colonial transfer from Spanish to American rule in the southern islands. In his journal, Private Freeman remarked:

I learned that the commanding officer, who was an old man, had been there twenty-eight years. In the evening at two o'clock the Spanish flag on the blockhouse was hauled down by the Spanish soldiers and the Americans unfurled to the breeze the Stars and Stripes. The Spanish seemed to be very much grieved,

the officers wept; the Americans were jubilant. Everything passed into our hands, and the various responsibilities of the place with all its dangers also passed to us. The natives, who belong to the Moro tribe, are treacherous. We knew nothing about them and their intentions. Guards were put on duty at once.<sup>160</sup>

After the transfer of power, the daunting task of governing the south became real. Colonial population figures estimated in 1899 that there were a total of 280,000 Moros in Mindanao and Sulu. However, because of the magnitude of the ongoing Philippine-American War in Luzon and the Visayas, "only two battalions of infantry could be spared for service in the Sulu Islands, and none for that part of Mindanao which was inhabited by Moros."<sup>161</sup> Colonel Hobbs had expressed the challenge of governing the southern region this way:

How could a few hundred soldiers be expected to govern these people...a people whom the Spaniards had not been able to conquer in three hundred years? How could men from Ohio and Pennsylvania and Wisconsin even stay alive in these tropical islands, scorched by the tropical sun, soaked by tropical rains, and plagued with tropical disease?<sup>162</sup>

The central method upon which the colonial government sought to impose its order and territorial sovereignty was through a system of public education. In the south, the establishment of government schools began shortly after the Americans occupied Sulu in 1899. The first teachers were soldiers from the United States Army. In his annual report to the Philippine Commission, General William A. Kobbé stated that there were 25 schools that opened in 1900, which enrolled more than 2,000 students. On the island of

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<sup>160</sup> Quoted in Horace P. Hobbs, *Kris and Krag: Adventures among the Moros of the Southern Philippine Islands* (Privately Printed, 1962), p. 43.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, p. 44.



Sulu, the only school consisted of a "motley but well-dressed and well-behaved bevy of 200 pupils of almost every Eastern race."<sup>163</sup>

However, to improve the overall governance of the south and thus the administration of the Moros, in 1903 the Organic Act was signed. This law created the government of the Moro Province, essentially formalizing through legislation the inclusion of Mindanao and Sulu into the colonial state. Geographically, the law constructed the Moro Province as consisting of:

All the islands of Mindanao...except the provinces of Misamis and Surigao, which had theretofore been established as Christian Filipino provinces under the general provincial act...The Moro Province also includes the island of Isabela de Basilan and all the islands to the south of Mindanao in the Archipelago. It embraces within the boundaries, therefore, all the Moros in the Archipelago except a small number of them resident in the south half of the island of Paragua or Palawan...<sup>164</sup>

Administratively, the law created a governing legislative council, which was authorized to design local governments among the Moros and other non-Christian tribes; provide local governors with the power to adjust all differences between sultans and datu; develop a legal system, which would uphold the criminal code and substantive civil law of the Philippine Islands; regulate the use, registration, and licensing of Moro boats of less than 10 tons; work toward the abolition of slavery and the suppression of all slave hunting and slave trade; and, most importantly, organize a public school system for girls

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<sup>163</sup> William A. Kobbe, *Annual Report of the War Department* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 265.

<sup>164</sup> Leonard Wood, *First Annual Report of Major General Leonard Wood, Governor of the Moro Province* (Zamboanga City: Mindanao Herald Publishing Co., 1904), p. 76.

and boys.<sup>165</sup> In effect, the Moro Province initiated the processes of cultural, territorial, and political integration. Commenting on the diversity and political future of "Moroland", Tasker H. Bliss, governor of the Moro Province in 1909, noted: "It is this mixture of races, separated by wide gaps in development and differing in religion and thought, that the Government of the Moro Province must some day weld into a homogenous whole."<sup>166</sup> From the outset, these changes attracted widespread resistance because they affected the Moros' island world and cultural way of life. In Lanao province, for example, a pandita expressed his contempt for the colonial government in a letter to Governor Tasker H. Bliss. The pandita wrote in 1907:

The Lion of God to District Governor, Tomas, and Baltazar:

Do not come in the nights, pigs. If you do I will crush you. Come in the daytime so that the Moros can see the dead Americans. Ashamed be God. All of you that come I will give as Sungod [marriage portion] to the Virgin. Durum pacal [the kris that cuts fast] is ready.<sup>167</sup>

Unlike other periods in Mindanao-Sulu history, the resistance toward the public school system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was unique in that it crosscut regional, linguistic, political, and cultural differences. To gain a better understanding of the extent of this resistance, I turn to school enrolment statistics. Following my treatment of enrolment figures as an indicator of resistance, I then will engage the problems and perceptions surrounding the government's use of American and Christian Filipino

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<sup>165</sup> Wood, *First Annual Report*, p. 78.

<sup>166</sup> Tasker H. Bliss, "The Government of the Moro Province and its Problems," *Mindanao Herald* (February 3, 1909), p. 6.

<sup>167</sup> Tasker H. Bliss, *The Annual Report of the Governor of the Moro Province for Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1907* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1907), pp. 28-29.

teachers. Afterward, I will explore the colonial school curriculum as another factor in compelling Moro parents to not support the public school system.

### **Low Attendance as a Form of Cultural Resistance**

As was the case in Greater Patani, resistance to colonial schooling in Mindanao-Sulu society occurred at the very inception of the government-sponsored education system. While some individuals embraced the ideas of public education out of political expediency, most Muslims were in opposition.<sup>168</sup> In spite of the statistical reality, it was reported throughout the annual reports of the Moro Province that Moro parents grew less suspicious of public schools. In 1904, General Wood stated: Moro communities were “commencing to send their children to school [and] a number of requests for schools have been made...in most instances the Moro making the request has guaranteed to supply a school building.”<sup>169</sup> Similarly, the 1905 report highlighted a range of “good” results, which were accomplished in the historic town of Jolo “in spite of very unfavorable conditions.” It also mentioned that the attendance in Siasi and Bongao had improved markedly. These statements were also informed by actual events. For example, in 1905, the school at Maymbun, the residential town of the Sultan of Sulu, was destroyed by “hostile Moros.” Governor Leonard Wood in the 1905 report added that the “remarkable attitude” of Datu Amay-Tampugaw in the Lanao district made his community a favorable

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<sup>168</sup> See for example, Patricio N. Abinales, “From Orang Besar to Colonial Big Man: Datu Piang of Cotabato and the American Colonial State,” in *Lives at the Margins: Biography of Filipinos Obscure, Ordinary, and Heroic*, ed. Alfred W. McCoy (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University, 2000), p. 210.

<sup>169</sup> Leonard Wood, *First Annual Report*, p. 583.

site for a small school.<sup>170</sup> The report further adds that it was Datu Amay-Tampugaw's willingness to cooperate with the Americans that made him stand out as having a "remarkable attitude." Aside from Datu Amay-Tampugaw, and a few Muslim elites, the Lanao district remained a troubled place for American colonialism. For example, Ralston Hayden, an American colonial administrator, noted in 1928, "there are school districts in Lanao today which the division superintendent of schools, an American, cannot safely visit without an escort of soldiers."<sup>171</sup>

To strengthen support for the government school system in Mindanao-Sulu society, the Americans solicited the help of prominent Muslim leaders like Haji Usman of Bongao.<sup>172</sup> Haji Usman published a poem in 1911 in the *Sulu News*, a short-lived bilingual newspaper based in Zamboanga City. In both Tausug (Jawi script) and English, his poem articulated support for a central objective of the American colonial government in Mindanao and Sulu: to increase Muslim enrolment in the new public school system. Originally written in Jawi script, the poem was translated and included in the English version of the inaugural issue of the *Sulu News*. The poem's inclusion in the English version of the *Sulu News* was aimed at informing the local American readership of the new publication's essential purpose: to promote colonial policies among literate Muslims. The *Sulu News* was an unprecedented attempt at "winning the hearts and minds" of many Moros, young and old. Haji Usman's poem, moreover, provides us with a unique window

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<sup>170</sup> Leonard Wood, *Third Annual Report of Major General Leonard Wood, Governor of the Moro Province* (Zamboanga City: Mindanao Herald Publishing Co., 1906), p. 21.

<sup>171</sup> Ralston Hayden, "What Next for the Moro?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 6 (July 1928). Cited from Milligan, *Islamic Identity*.

<sup>172</sup> *Sulu News*, Vol. 1, No. 2, June 31, 1911.

into how one popular Muslim approached and understood the resistance to the colonial school. Haji Usman wrote:

If a town has a school  
That is not hurtful to our worship  
But the children are rightly taught  
And education is an advantage  
All parents are advised  
That the school affords education  
And a youth, well instructed  
Can earn a good salary

However, in 1912, the year after Haji Usman's poem was published, the total number of Moro students in the public school system was 1,274 or only 2% of the total of the school-aged population (50,000 in 1907). In line with Haji Usman's poem, which outlined the benefits of education, a letter was sent by Mr. Gaston Schmuck (a German resident of Zamboanga and friend of Sultan Jamal-ul Kiram II) to Major Scott, District Governor of Sulu, reporting a conversation overheard at the Sultan's court in Maimbung, Jolo. In the company of the Sultan and a number of Parang chiefs, Schmuck listened to a prominent datu talk about his son who had learned to write and count.<sup>173</sup>

The datu went on telling them that his boy would be a great assistance to his family if he went on learning. He asked the other people if they could not send their sons to school, because, (turning to the Sultan) to my idea it is like this, only during your lifetime will there be preference given to the man of family in consideration to our customs, but if you are no more and our sons have grown up it will be the man that has learned something that will rule and if we do not send our children to school, you shall see that our slaves will be our masters. The Sultan said he was right. So he went on telling them that they should send their sons to school, but do not send your slaves, because it will fall back on our sons.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland*, p. 135.

<sup>174</sup> Schmuck to Scott, June 10, 1906, in *Scott Papers*, container 57. Cited from Peter G. Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland*, p. 135.

The letter reveals the workings and realities of political expediency, and the transformation of certain datus and the Sultan into modern political subjects. From the Sultan of Sulu to Datu Piang, some individuals within the older structures of Mindanao-Sulu society saw education as an opportunity. However, such experiences, despite their common occurrences in colonial reports, do not reflect the sentiments of Mindanao-Sulu society. Thus, going beyond these moments of political expediency, a stronger indication of whether Moros endorsed the colonial school system or resisted it can be found in early school statistics.

The number of Muslim children participating in the public school system remained disproportionately low for the first decade of government schooling in the Moro Province. It was even less for other groups like the Manobo and Bagobo. Overwhelmingly, Christian Filipinos benefited from the colonial school system. It was initially believed that this was because of their cultural and religious background. However, it is apparent from the annual reports of the Moro Province that most public schools were built in Christian Filipino communities, or near military installations. As schools developed in the province, it is clear that Moro parents maintained their resistance. For example, in 1907, the total enrolment of 5,394 students for the 1906-7 school year included 4,414 Christian Filipinos (81%), 793 Moros (14%), 165 "pagans" (3%), and 22 Americans (.4%). Colonial authorities noted that there were 60,000 Christian Filipinos in the province in 1907. Of that number, there were 12,000 children of school age, and one-third of which, or 4,000, that should have been in school. By

contrast, the Moro and non-Christian predicament was explained in a report written by Tasker H. Bliss, governor of the Moro Province in 1907. He noted:

This enormous discrepancy between the proportion of Christian and non-Christian children enrolled is due to various reasons aside from the greater natural friendliness of the Christians toward our schools.<sup>175</sup>

It was a conventional view for the colonial government to understand the enrolment figures as simply a reflection of “the greater natural friendliness of the Christians toward our schools.” This perspective exemplifies the insights provided by Andaya regarding the Dutch in eastern Indonesia, namely that the Dutch perceived Islam as a natural enemy of the Christians and expressed a distrust bred of centuries of anti-Islamic European literature and propaganda.<sup>176</sup> While the Americans did not have such a heritage of distrust toward Islam, they did inherit the knowledge of the Moros from the Spanish who did. As a consequence, the colonial government assumed “so long as Mohammedanism prevails, Anglo-Saxon civilization will make slow headway.”<sup>177</sup>

It was the aim of the Moro Province since its inception to establish a public school system that would effectively reduce “all the customs that have...governed their habits of life” in order to “bring them to an intelligent understanding and appreciation of” American rule.<sup>178</sup> However, as has been noted earlier, enrolment data from this period has

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<sup>175</sup> Bliss, *The Annual Report of the Governor of the Moro Province*, p. 17.

<sup>176</sup> Andaya, *The World of Maluku*, p. 182.

<sup>177</sup> Patricia Horvatic, “The Martyr and the Mayor: On the Politics of Identity in the Southern Philippines,” in *Cultural Citizenship in Island Southeast Asia: Nation and Belonging in the Hinterlands*, ed. Renato Rosaldo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 18.

<sup>178</sup> Horvatic, *The Martyr*, p. 18.

suggested that Moro parents throughout the province resisted the school system. It is therefore important to note that in 1911, only one-fourth of all the pupils were non-Christian, although the non-Christians contributed about three-fourths of the taxes of the province.<sup>179</sup>

The following is the total yearly enrolment and average daily attendance for each year since the organization of the Moro Province<sup>180</sup>:

School Year	Total Enrolment	Average Daily Attendance
1903-04	2114	1582
1904-05	3617	2033
1905-06	4235	2021
1906-07	5394	2968
1907-08	4894	2829
1908-09	5042	3003
1909-10	4946	2870
1910-11	5302	3218
1911-12	6427	3807

The following is the enrolment by "nationalities" in 1912:

"Nationalities"	Enrolment in 1912
Christian Filipinos	4648
Moro	1274
Pagan	384
Chinese	83
American	33
Spanish	5
Total	6427

<sup>179</sup> John J. Pershing, *Annual Report of Brigadier General John J. Pershing, U.S. Army, Governor of the Moro Province, for the Year ending June 30, 1911* (Zamboanga City: Mindanao Herald Publishing Co., 1911), p. 16.

<sup>180</sup> John J. Pershing, *Annual Report of Brigadier General John J. Pershing, U.S. Army, Governor of the Moro Province, for the Year ending June 30, 1912* (Zamboanga City: Mindanao Herald Publishing Co., 1912), p. 9.



To address the low enrolment of Moro children, the provincial government devised a plan to educate and train a select group of pupils. Regarding the proposed school, Governor Wood remarked: "If this can be carried out, and it is believed it can, it will give the province a large number of well-trained natives as assistants in the various departments of the government and especially as teachers among their own people."<sup>181</sup> However, Wood's proposition reveals several disturbing aspects regarding American colonialism in Mindanao-Sulu society. Foremost, it highlights the extent to which the colonial state would go to develop a cohort of functionaries, who would support the colonial project and facilitate the expansion of the public school system. The plan also underscores the effectiveness of Moro parental resistance to the colonial school system. More importantly, Wood's plan did not address or even consider the cultural reasons for low enrolment. Nor did it explore the reasons, other than religion, that might explain why communities refused to send their children to government schools. To shed light on just one cultural factor that may have supported resistance, and thus explain the low enrolment, I now turn to a discussion regarding "teachers".

#### **"Christian Filipinos are Unable to Act as Teachers"**

Among the teachers working in the public schools in Mindanao-Sulu society, a majority were Christian Filipinos. In 1904, for example, the Moro Province had fifty-two schools. Most of these schools were located in predominantly Christian Filipino communities such as Zamboanga, Davao, and Dapitan. The schools employed a total of seventy-four teachers. The table below demonstrates the "national" breakdown of these teachers.

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<sup>181</sup> Wood, *First Annual Report*, p. 583.

Number of Teachers Working in the Moro Province, 1904

American	Christian Filipino	Moro
15	50	9

The Christian Filipino teachers were often recruited from provinces that were located outside of the Muslim region. When Christian areas such as Bukidon, Agusan, and Surigao in northern Mindanao became districts of the Moro Province, Filipino teachers were aggressively recruited to meet the needs of the expanding school system. However, in general, host communities did not welcome these Filipino recruits.

This unwelcoming attitude toward Filipino teachers can be explained in reference to the region's history of slave raiding. Moro ships would sail to the Visayas and Luzon to capture local Christian Filipinos. These Filipinos would then become slaves of a particular datu, or local chief. What is more, in Maranao (a language in the Lanao district) the word for slave is Bisayan referring to this slave-raiding period of local history. Given the context and memory of slave raiding, it should be no surprise that Moro communities did not welcome the Christian Filipino recruits because they saw them as being inferior. From a Moro parent's perspective, these Filipino teachers would have been responsible for "educating" his or her children. An excerpt from the 1907 report of the governor of the Moro Province provides an insight into the real dangers and prejudices that confronted the teacher and the school system. It was noted:

In communities where Moros predominate and Moro sentiment is strong, Christian Filipinos are unable to act as teachers. Moros qualified to be teachers are as yet few in number, and consequently it is often necessary to assign Americans to the Moro schools.<sup>182</sup>

However, assigning Americans to Moro schools also had its problems. Americans carried their own prejudices and needs (i.e. diet, comforts). One report described the predicament of being an American working at a Moro school this way: "They frequently have to live where there is no other white person and where it is difficult to produce the proper food supplies and necessary medical attendances."<sup>183</sup> To address the teacher shortage yet maintain the value of English (a paramount feature of the school system), Governor Pershing suggested in 1909 that:

English-speaking Malays might be obtained from Singapore. They would soon learn the native dialect, would be free from the religious and racial prejudices of the Filipino and would be safe from molestation by the outlaws. The Moro of Jolo looks upon the Malay of Singapore as belonging to a superior people and would gladly welcome his presence among them. Steps have been taken to secure Malay teachers for the ensuing year.<sup>184</sup>

Unfortunately, there is little information beyond this passage in the annual report. To some extent, the proposal speaks to the cultural and religious differences that constituted Mindanao-Sulu society. The Americans, on occasion, made reference to this broader Malay world. But in spite of this awareness, and aside from the notion of bringing Malays from Singapore to teach in the public schools, the colonial government

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<sup>182</sup> Bliss, *The Annual Report of the Governor*, p. 13.

<sup>183</sup> George T. Langhorne, *Second Annual Report of the Governor of the Moro Province, for fiscal year ended June 30, 1905* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1905), p. 22.

<sup>184</sup> Raph W. Hoyt, *Annual Report of the Governor of the Moro Province, for the fiscal year ended June 30, 1909* (Zamboanga City: Mindanao Herald Publishing Co., 1909), p. 20.

consistently looked to and depended on Filipino teachers. In the end, the colonial state concluded that it was the Moros' "peculiar religious prejudices and their barbaric state," which made "school progress a difficult task. The racial prejudice of the Moro against the Filipino prevents the latter from engaging in the work."<sup>185</sup> This assessment reflects the colonial government's inability to understand the cultural and religious bases for Moro resistance to government schooling—particularly a type of schooling delivered by Christian Filipino teachers. Therefore, from the perspective of a Moro parent, to embrace this change and succumb to the colonial school system would, on a personal and cultural level, mean the end of their known world. The panditas, for their part, maintained these "peculiar religious prejudices" throughout Mindanao-Sulu society because they knew what was at stake. They knew, as did the parents that listened to them, that education was of paramount importance to the identity, culture, and future of a "people".

The number of teachers rose through the course of the first decade of public education. In 1907, according to the annual report, there were sixty-five native teachers on duty—forty-three men and twenty-two women. Fifty-six were Christian Filipinos (six moain 1904) and nine were Moros (the same as in 1904). Of the fifty-six Christian Filipinos, two gave instruction exclusively in Spanish and fifty-four gave instruction in English. Of the nine Moro teachers, four gave instruction exclusively in Moro and five gave instruction in English. Of the fifty-nine native teachers who gave instruction in English, forty-three had received a grade of instruction equaling or exceeding the primary course.

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<sup>185</sup> Hoyt, *Annual Report of the Governor*, p. 20.

Regarding the ability to teach, twenty-three were able to teach the primary course in its entirety, while three of this number could teach grade 5.<sup>186</sup>

Number of Teachers Working in the Moro Province, 1904-1911

Year	1904	1905	1907	1909	1911
Moro	9	6	9	8	15
Filipino	50	58	56	79	62
American	15	27	X	14	X
Chinese	0	0	0	0	2
Total	74	91	65	99	79

As the table above indicates, the number of Christian Filipino teachers would continue to grow throughout the American colonial period. In doing so, the teacher factor would continue to contribute to Moro parents' resistance to public education. This in turn, would affect school enrolment and student performance for many years to come. However, it was not only the Filipino teacher, but what he or she was instructing that also caused Moro parents, panditas, and communities to resist the government school system. To gain a deeper understanding of the "content" of a colonial education, and how this content was perceived by Moro parents and panditas, I now turn to a discussion regarding school curriculum.

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<sup>186</sup> Bliss, *The Annual Report of the Governor*, p. 13.



### Contesting School Curriculum in Mindanao-Sulu Society

During the first decade of the public school system, a uniform course of instruction was used. As in the central and northern Philippines, emphasis was on the three R's—reading, writing, and arithmetic—though some attention was given to other fields of study such as homemaking and farming. Peter Gowing has noted that a concerted effort was made within the school system to initiate the principles of good citizenship and respect for law and order. School children were instructed on the symbolism of the American flag, which was present on a pole in every schoolyard.<sup>187</sup> In addition, curriculum was used to spread ideas of the nascent nation. In the picture below, one can see a portrait of Jose Rizal, the American-engineered “national” hero. The Moro Province’s annual report dedicated a section to reporting on the development of Rizal statues, which were often located at public schools.



Moreover, it was clear that the provincial government used the school system, particularly the curriculum, to disseminate the values and ideas of an American-approved

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<sup>187</sup> Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland*, p. 134.



Filipino nationhood. It is, therefore, also apparent that the colonial state, aside from a few administrators (notably Najëeb Saleeby and Charles Cameron), saw no reason to preserve the local culture of education, which was so valued among the Moros. In 1904, Leonard Wood, governor of the Moro Province, had noted:

There is no object whatever in attempting to preserve the native dialects, as they are crude, devoid of literature, and limited in range. The Moro dialects have been used as a medium for translating the Koran and the recording of such rudimentary laws and regulations as remain from the old Mohammedan teaching and laws. There is little or nothing of a historical character which has been made of record, and absolutely nothing in the way of literature. The language is limited and crude and is not believed to present any features of value or interest other than as a type of savage tongue.<sup>188</sup>

Wood's summation of Moro culture, and language in particular, reflects how the government saw religious education, and how they saw the Moros. Inspired by the ideals of an imagined community, colonial administrators worked to prepare the conditions for a Philippine nation-state. While the school and its curriculum were essential to this endeavor, so was "eradicating the structures that governed Moro life". These structures included the "Malay" language that had once been used to communicate with Bugis, British, Dutch, and Ternaten traders; the script that had once been used to record the genealogies of local rulers; and, system of learning that had once connected local communities to the Malay world. Therefore, given the cultural implications of colonial curriculum, it is surprising that few Philippine historical or educational studies have engaged it within the context of Mindanao-Sulu society.<sup>189</sup> As a result, Moro parents resisted government education. They knew that their children would not only be exposed

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<sup>188</sup> Wood, *First Annual Report*, p. 582.

<sup>189</sup> A good example of such research has been Milligan (2005).

to a Christian Filipino teacher, but that the teacher would be espousing a competing set of values and ideals.

Cognizant of these more fundamental challenges to its curriculum, the colonial government thought that the answer was in communication. Because most American teachers, a minority in Mindanao-Sulu society, often only spoke English, the Moros—the government perceived—were unable to understand the colonial message. It was believed that through language, the provincial government would be in a better position to advance its colonial objectives and gradually dismantle “the structures that governed Moro life”. Additionally, colonial administrators believed that through language, teachers (Filipino and American) would be able to improve Moro enrolment and appease parental resistance. To this effect, in 1911, the governor’s report noted:

The American teacher is more valuable if able to speak a native dialect. The Province has recognized this fact, and has offered an extra compensation of one hundred dollars per annum to all American teachers who pass a satisfactory examination in any native dialect, but the reward is too small and should be increased. The recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools that teachers who read, write and speak a native dialect be given 10 percent increase of pay is now before the Legislative Council.<sup>190</sup>

Based on the annual reports, it appears that the issue of bilingual American teachers became less important over time. This was in large part because more Filipino teachers were hired possessing a wide range of language skills. In addition, more Filipinos moved to or were resettled in Mindanao often with the assistance of the colonial government. These Christian Filipinos were encouraged to participate in the political, economic, and

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<sup>190</sup> Pershing, *Annual Report*, p. 17.



social development of the southern region. They regularly found employment in agriculture and the government, including the public school system. Consequently, the language needs were less Moro, and more Filipino (Bisayan, Ilonggo, etc.). Curriculum change reflected political change, and so as agricultural development became more important to the colonial government the schools followed with a revised primary course of instruction. The change in colonial curriculum was aimed at meeting specific labor needs. The new curriculum required four years of primary study, and accorded great emphasis to industrial work. Governor Bliss explained the new course in his annual report:

- The work prescribed should be simple, so as to require the minimum outlay for tools and at same time provide the maximum amount of manual training.
- The work should be suited to the locality in which it is taught; that is, should be either a standard local industry which can advantageously be taught to children, or some new industry which it is feasible and desirable to introduce.
- The materials should be cheap, or, better still, obtainable by the children themselves.
- The produce should be useful, salable if possible.
- It should be artistic, so as to develop to the highest degree the artistic sense of the pupil.<sup>191</sup>

This change in curriculum policy is significant because it underscores not only a demographic shift, but also a change in purpose: from functionaries to laborers. While, the school system might have always had the intention of developing productive laborers, the new curriculum of 1906 made this particularly clear. It was believed that "no greater blessing could come to native children than the knowledge of how to perform some kind

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<sup>191</sup> Bliss, *The Annual Report*, p. 15.

of profitable labor."<sup>192</sup> During this time, the role of the teacher also changed. The responsibility was "to teach them [children] discipline and English, and to show them how to work and cultivate suitable agricultural crops."<sup>193</sup> Industrial work, as prescribed by the new course, would come to include:

Sticklaying, slat-plaiting, paper-folding, block-building, and other kindergarten occupations, the materials for which can usually be provided by the teacher, are prescribed for the first grade. Second grade pupils take up the weaving of hats and mats, and other articles, from pandan and buri. One or the other of these materials can usually be obtained by the pupils themselves. By the use of colors and patterns this weaving gives the pupil an opportunity to develop his artistic sense. In the first and second grades the boys and girls work together. In the third and fourth grades, the work of the sexes is separated, the boys taking up rattan working and the girls needlework. During the intermediate course the girls continue needlework, while the boys spend one hour each day in carpentry.<sup>194</sup>

Moreover, native teachers were educated in industrial work too. At the normal school in Zamboanga, the American teachers held summer workshops in order to train local instructors in industrial and agricultural education. It was reported in 1907 that all native teachers stationed within a radius of five miles were required to attend and receive instruction from the American teachers. In 1910, a normal school of eight weeks was held for teachers in Zamboanga. And a similar school of ten weeks was held for all teachers outside of Zamboanga. At these normal schools in Zamboanga, Captain Percy L. Jones, of the Medical Corps of the Army, acted as a hygiene instructor, "dwelling especially upon the most prevalent diseases in part because the public schools will be utilized to an increasing extent to disseminate a knowledge of sanitary matters, and military drill, as a

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<sup>192</sup> Pershing, *Annual Report*, p. 17

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, p. 17

<sup>194</sup> Bliss, *Annual Report*, p. 15.

means of discipline.”<sup>195</sup> Therefore while education supported broad transformations and rearrangements at the societal level, colonial curriculum aimed specifically to supplant traditional forms of knowledge and power; that is, it aimed to displace the role and position of the pandita in Mindanao-Sulu society.

Because the government school during the early American colonial period (1899-1913) was in large part about neutralizing the pandita and dismantling the traditional system of cultural and religious learning, it is remarkable to see how effective resistances were. Even in 1919, it was reported that some panditas “openly pronounced themselves in opposition to the education...in Government schools, considering this measure as a violation of the “gentleman agreement” into which the Government has entered with them to respect their religion, habits, and customs.”<sup>196</sup> As a consequence, throughout the early period, school enrolment among Moros remained disproportionately low.

## Conclusion

Far too often, academic studies have portrayed the government schooling experience as a coherent moment in modern Philippine history. Therefore, the goal of this case study was to focus on a “marginal” part of the history of public education in the Philippines. In doing so, and using archival materials, I tried to shed light on a different school history, one that disrupts Charles F. Keyes’ understanding that the Philippines’ experience with

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<sup>195</sup> John. J. Pershing, *Annual Report of Brigadier General John J. Pershing, U.S. Army, Governor of the Moro Province, for the year ended August 31, 1910* (Zamboanga City: Mindanao Herald Publishing Co., 1910), p. 16.

<sup>196</sup> Frank W. Carpenter, *Report of the Governor of the Department of Mindanao and Sulu (Philippine Islands), 1919* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), p. 72.

educational development was somehow “exceptional” in comparison to other Southeast Asian countries.<sup>197</sup>

I focused on the widespread resistance to public education in the context of Mindanao-Sulu society. Though, in the beginning I discussed the traditional Islamic teacher in the southern region, I did so in order to present the pandita as a cultural worker, not just a religious teacher. I also tried to convey the idea that Mindanao-Sulu society, prior to American colonial rule, had been deeply connected to the Malay world.

Upon the establishment of the government school, the Americans sought to dismember the south from this world. Ostensibly, this process invited resistance. However, rather than suggesting that the resistance was purely religious or orchestrated in the sole defense of Islam, I tried to look at three aspects of the public school that help explain the struggle over knowledge in cultural terms. These aspects included enrolment statistics, the use of Filipino teachers, and the government curriculum. I approached the enrolment figures as an indicator of resistance. While the annual reports often suggested that the poor participation of Moros in the school system was due to their “backwardness” or “remoteness”, I saw the enrolment figures as a mark of cultural activism. To support this proposition, I explained how Filipino teachers might have been perceived given the local histories of slave raiding. Consequently, parents were not willing to expose their children to such an education. Additionally, I mentioned that the curriculum sought to transform

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<sup>197</sup> Keyes, “State Schools,” p. 5.

the Moros' world and cultural way of life. The parents, with the support of the panditas, understood this quite clearly and fought back through their non-compliance.

## **Conclusion:**

### **Connecting the Past to the Present**

While their historical experiences with public education are quite similar, the modern challenges facing the government school system in southern Thailand and the southern Philippines are quite different. In this conclusion, I will try to connect the past to the present. In doing so, I will offer some explanations as to why the Thai situation remains violently contested, while state schooling in the southern Philippines has been in some sense successful in cultivating and accommodating a “Muslim Filipino” identity.

Historically, both regions resisted the development and expansion of public education. However, contemporarily, resistance to state schooling has been less obvious in the Philippines than it has in Thailand. Several important reforms to state education in Mindanao and Sulu can shed light on this difference. I will address these reforms in relation to the ongoing violence destabilizing the public school system in southern Thai society. In doing so, I will underscore the value and importance of the comparative method.

### **“Gun-handling and...the Fundamentals of Being a Teacher in Southern Thailand”<sup>198</sup>**

On July 6, 2005, the International Herald Tribune (IHT) reported a story that situates the cultural politics of the state school in southern Thai society. In the context of ongoing

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<sup>198</sup> “Schools in Thailand under Ethnic Siege”, International Herald Tribune, 6 July 2005 [<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/06/international/asia/06thai.html>] (16 February 2006)

violence toward the Thai state school system in the southernmost provinces of Thailand, the IHT noted that Duangporn Visinchai, the state school principal at Baan Trang in Narathiwat province, openly subscribes to carrying her government-issued handgun everywhere, including the inside of her little schoolhouse. She received her gun-handling skills at a public primary school turned weapons training ground in Narathiwat, Thailand. However, to better understand this unraveling predicament in the south and the problematic place of the state school, one must turn to the events of 2004.

On January 4, 2004 a raid occurred at an army depot in Narathiwat province. Narathiwat is one of the five Malay-speaking provinces in southern Thailand. It was a swift raid, taking place on an early Sunday morning in the district of Joh Airong. Local reports claimed thirty gunmen had appropriated a hundred rifles. In response to the incident, a foreign news report noted, "Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra cut short his holiday to hold an emergency meeting of security officials."<sup>199</sup> At the time of the event, it was unclear who was responsible.

As the day unfolded, it became apparent that a number of attacks occurred that morning. The Thai army, an already visible presence in Narathiwat, stressed that the attacks were coordinated by several different groups "who moved on the same night against targets in nine districts near Thailand's border with Malaysia."<sup>200</sup> In addition to the morning raid at the army depot in Joh Airong, eighteen state schools were burned down using mosquito

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<sup>199</sup> "Armed raids in southern Thailand", BBC News, 4 January 2004  
[<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/3366359.stm>] (15 February 2006).

<sup>200</sup> "Armed raids in southern Thailand", BBC News.

coils put on gas-soaked sacks. Efforts to put the fires out were prevented “by nails placed on approach roads.”<sup>201</sup>

On January 28, 2004 Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra firmly responded to the string of attacks by closing more than a thousand public schools in the Malay-speaking provinces. The closure came as teachers explained, “they were terrified by recent death threats against them.”<sup>202</sup> A teacher in Pattani province reported she had received leaflets threatening attacks on teachers and students in the province. Another teacher confessed, “This is the worst time I have had in my entire career for 22 years.”<sup>203</sup> In June 2005, the violence sparked “national outrage” when a school director in Narathiwat province was murdered. It was reported that, “Kobkul Runsaewa, aged 47, was shot dead in June while traveling home by motorbike to prepare lunch for her elderly mother.”<sup>204</sup>

In a surprise reaction to the violence against state schools, the Education Ministry announced that it planned to provide guns to Thai teachers. In July 2005, education officials in Bangkok approved state spending for guns and informed teachers that they could buy them for self-defense. If teachers did not have enough money to purchase protection, the Ministry suggested borrowing the money from the local teachers’

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<sup>201</sup> “Armed raids in southern Thailand”, BBC News.

<sup>202</sup> “Schools closed in Thai south”, BBC News, 28 January 2004  
[<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/3436795.stm>] (15 February 2006).

<sup>203</sup> “Schools closed in Thai south”, BBC News.

<sup>204</sup> “Learning to live with Thai violence”, BBC News.



cooperative. In addition to guns, the teachers in the southern region insisted on acquiring “bullet-proof vests and greater police and military protection.”<sup>205</sup>

Lending its support, the Thai military announced that it would provide weapons training for educators.<sup>206</sup> To do so, the army moved into Baan Jut Deang, an elementary school in Narathiwat province. Soldiers began using the facilities at Baan Jut Deang for defense skills and gun training.



Soldier and students in southern Thailand.<sup>207</sup>

Soon thereafter, teachers began attending soldier-instructed sessions at the elementary school. Aside from the weekend courses offered at Baan Jut Deang, teachers also began

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<sup>205</sup> “Hundreds of schools close in southern Thailand after teachers killed”, *China Daily*, 23 December 2004  
[[http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/English/doc/2004-12/23/content\\_402758.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/English/doc/2004-12/23/content_402758.htm)] (20 February 2006)

<sup>206</sup> “Education Ministry to provide guns for Thai Teachers”, *Education Week*, 10 August 2005, Vol. 24, Issue 44, p. 12.

<sup>207</sup> Ryan Anson, “Thailand’s Underground War,” *SAIS Review* 25.2 (2005) pp. 141-156.

to visit the local firing range. At the range, it was reported that soldiers “offer instructions in gun-handling and in the fundamentals of being a teacher in southern Thailand today.”<sup>208</sup> Duangporn Visinchai, the school principal at Baan Trang, a neighboring elementary school, subscribed to carrying her government-issued handgun everywhere, including the inside of her little schoolhouse. She received her training at the local firing range. Describing a recent visit to the shooting range, Ms. Duangporn quoted her soldier-instructor as saying:

Pay attention to your surroundings, make it a habit. When you are driving, keep looking around. If a motorcycle comes close to your car, speed up. If your instinct tells you something is wrong, turn your car into them, attack them before they attack you.<sup>209</sup>

Ms. Duangporn’s desire for protection and willingness to be “trained” is echoed by a number of teachers in the southern provinces. The increased violence toward state schools has prompted many teachers to request transfers out of the southern region. Rather than addressing the cultural violence purported by the state school, Thai education officials in Songkhla conducted a survey of teachers in the Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat provinces, which found that some 2,000 teachers wanted guns. Therefore, arming teachers with guns was the Thai state’s response to the anti-school violence in southern

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<sup>208</sup> “Schools in Thailand under Ethnic Siege”, International Herald Tribune, 6 July 2005 [http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/06/international/asia/06thai.html] (16 February 2006)

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

Thailand. Of which, nearly 2,000 people have died, including more than 80 teachers since January 4, 2004.<sup>210</sup>

In reflecting on the recent violence aimed at “symbols of control by the distant government in Bangkok” including state schools in southern Thai society, I want to think beyond religion and separatism, and instead engage the “Thainess” that is taught in the classroom.<sup>211</sup> Given the Ministry of Education’s responses to the burning down of schools and the killing of teachers, namely militarizing the area and arming teachers with guns, it is quite clear that the Thai state is trying to address the physical violence coordinated toward its educational institutions and civil service. However, it is also apparent that the Thai state remains deeply unaware of any cultural violence being perpetuated by the national school system. In other words, the government has taken few measures since the establishment of state education in the south to accommodate the Malays into Thai society. Through the state school system, the government has continued to impose the national aesthetics of “Thainess” including the use of Thai as the language of instruction. As a result, the state school and its teachers have been seen as “symbols of control.” The current violence in the south, particularly toward the state schools, therefore reflects the Malays’ historical effort aimed at resisting the state’s Thaicizing policies—in effect, turning Malay Muslims into Thai Muslims—and not necessarily a growing network of jihadists or the spread of radical Islam emanating out of pondok schools.

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<sup>210</sup> “Thai Bombs Linked to Chinese New Year, Military Says,” *The New York Times*, 19 February 2007 [<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/19/world/asia/19cnd-thai.html?ref=world>] (19 February 2007)

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

In contrast to the violent uncertainty in southern Thailand, steps have been taken to accommodate the cultural heritage of the Muslims in Mindanao and Sulu. In this regard, much has changed since the days of Wood, Pershing, and other American colonialists. For example, the public school calendar now allows for a Ramadan “break”.<sup>212</sup> The month or so missed for Ramādan is made up during the winter break. This adjustment in the school calendar sets a bright example for other societies that have Muslim minority populations. Additionally, the Department of Education in the Philippines has begun training Muslim teachers in Arabic language and Islamic values. According to education officials, the “Pre-service Language Enhancement and Pedagogy (LEaP) prepares the asatidz [instructor] to teach Arabic language and Islamic values to Muslim children in schools.”<sup>213</sup> Initiated in 2005, the government effort is aimed at improving the quality of government-sponsored madrasah education. Another significant difference in the Philippines has been the creation of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. This administrative reform has allowed the predominantly Muslim provinces to coordinate and decide, among other things, their own educational affairs. As a result, a number of teachers working in the school system are local Muslims.

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<sup>212</sup> The author observed this during a field visit in 2006. The author discussed the details of this change with local education officials in Marawi City.

<sup>213</sup> “DepED intensifies nationwide training for Muslim teachers” *Education Posts*, 1 July 2006 [<http://www.deped.gov.ph/posts.asp?dp=61>] (15 November 2006)





Public school teachers at a training in Marawi City, Lanao del Sur, Philippines.<sup>214</sup>

Because of these important reforms, the situation in the southern Philippines is vastly different from the predicament in southern Thailand despite their shared historical experiences. Given their common heritage and educational pasts, it seems that the Thai state may in fact benefit from adopting similar school reforms. From implementing a Ramadan break to supporting the use of Malay, the government school system could work in southern Thailand if approached from a more accommodative position. Additionally, if greater political autonomy could be given to the Malay-speaking provinces in southern Thailand, especially in determining the nature of their school curriculum, signs of peace and hope may begin to emerge. At the very least these changes would indicate the value and importance of the comparative method, as well as the relevant role of an historical perspective in policy formulation. In making these policy suggestions, it is clear that much can be gained in understanding the contexts of schooling in one area and relating it to the experience of another. As in the case of

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<sup>214</sup> Photograph taken by author in 2006.



Thailand and the Philippines, though their historical experience with the state school was common, their present schooling situation is very different. It is in the face of these modern challenges that comparison and history are increasingly more relevant.

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