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Publisher: Routledge

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Asian Security

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fasi20>

'Neojihadism' and YouTube: Patani Militant Propaganda Dissemination and Radicalization

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Available online: 19 Mar 2012

To cite this article: Virginie Andre (2012): 'Neojihadism' and YouTube: Patani Militant Propaganda Dissemination and Radicalization, *Asian Security*, 8:1, 27-53

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2012.669207>

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‘Neojihadism’¹ and YouTube: Patani Militant Propaganda Dissemination and Radicalization

VIRGINIE ANDRE

Abstract: *This article examines the use of YouTube by the new generation of Patani² Muslim militants in their dissemination of propaganda and radical identity formation. These fighters have now brought their neojihadist war to the ‘Virtual’. Videos of Patani shubada and Buddhist beheadings are regularly posted on YouTube, with the aim of legitimizing their ‘defensive jihad’. While most of the efforts in countering virtual terrorist radicalization have focused on jihadist websites, forums and blogs, very little attention has been paid to the relationship between the ‘YouTube effect’ and neojihadist violence. This article offers an analysis of the use of YouTube by the Patani Muslim insurgency in order to extract the ideological themes which enable us to understand the process of glocal neojihadist radicalization in southern Thailand.*

This article examines the use of YouTube by the new Southern generation of militants in their dissemination of propaganda and radical identity formation. While the flow and diffusion of information, especially through the Internet, is undermining state sovereignty and traditional religious authorities,³ it has opened up a new “Muslim public sphere,”⁴ which has become a privileged space for both neojihadist and neo-fundamentalist propaganda and radicalization.⁵

The participation of the Southern Patani insurgency in this new public sphere has allowed the movement to enter the domain of what Olivier Roy has called a “virtual umma.” The locus of this imagined global society that transcends state sovereignty, race, and ethnicity, bonded by a single religious denominator (Islam), finds its normalization in the simplicity of the salafi message.⁶ Hence, it is not surprising to find salafi intonations in the concepts used by the militants in their fighting against the Thai state.

Although the older generation of Muslim secessionists in Southern Thailand were reluctant to use international concepts (such as *umma*) or global spheres of influence to enhance their power vis-à-vis the Thai state, this parochialism is now clearly receding. For example, the current insurgency not only replicates the rhetorical flourishes of jihadist movements in Afghanistan, Iraq, and even Chechnya, but there is now a

A first version of this article was presented during the “Terrorism and New Media: Building A Research Network” Conference organized by the Centre for International Studies, School of Law & Government, Dublin City University, 8–9 September 2010.

The author wishes to thank Dr. Pete Lentini, Dr. Greg Barton, Ekkarin Tuansiri, Professor Tikky Wattanapenpaiboon, and Bruce McFarlane for their helpful exchange of views and suggestions during the preparation of this article, and more particularly Professor Phrae Sirisakdamkoeng, Janjira Sombutpoonsiri, and Muhammad Noor Halil Chalil for their support. Finally, the author would also like to thank the European University Institute and the Global Terrorism Research Center of Monash University for making the research and writing of this article possible.

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stronger tendency to associate their own plight with other Muslim groups in places such as Palestine. This reflexive repositioning of their own struggle within a larger transnational Islamic context has not only raised their own international profile in global Islamist circles, but it has helped revitalize the struggle for a new and more internationally savvy generation of Patani Muslims, allowing them to feel as though they are part of a larger global resistance movement.

Characteristic of the millennial generation (MillGen),⁷ this new wave of fighters, which has grown up with globalization, the expansion of new communication technologies (Internet), and increased territorial mobility, has brought their neojihadist war to the “virtual.” It is a generation predominantly affected by telecommunications technologies such as mobile phones, Internet, the worldwide Web, and computers. Mobile phones are used by young separatist insurgents to detonate bombs or to record beheadings of Thai Buddhists to be posted on YouTube. The Internet and social networking sites such as Facebook and YouTube have now become the main source of information for the MillGen,⁸ particularly for the Melayu youth:

When looking for information, we go on YouTube. You go directly on YouTube and key in the word Patani or any word that is related to here [Patani]. There’s [videos] in Melayu, English and also Thai. If in Melayu, just key in Patani or sometimes Fathoni or the three provinces. You will find both videos of people from here and from the authorities. There is a war over the Internet.⁹

Hence, the battlefield is no longer the privileged space for war; Net wars¹⁰ are now to be fought with counternarratives. While most of the attention was paid to Web sites, forums, and blogs in combating radicalization, only a small number of research¹¹ has been conducted on the “YouTube effect”¹² and neojihadist violence.

Weisburd in his comparative study of visual motifs in jihadist and cholos videos on YouTube reveals that the prevalence of violence in jihadist videos affects adolescents, who are more likely to resort to violence once exposed to such kind of visual material compared with their peers who are not exposed to it.¹³ This is an argument also shared by Ilardi who explains that beyond the propagandist material readily available on the Internet, it provides potential jihadists with the justification and motives to take action and move from the virtual to the real world.¹⁴

In light of the affectivity of the MillGen to the ubiquity of social networks, as both recipients and transmitters, a study of the relationship between the YouTube Effect and neojihadist propaganda has become essential. This article offers an analysis of the use of YouTube by the Southern separatist insurgency and its followers to extract the ideological themes, which would allow unfolding the process of neojihadist glocalization¹⁵ in Southern Thailand and provide the basis for the development of counternarrative strategies.

YouTube: A New Dimension for Patani Propaganda and Radicalization

The use of YouTube by forces of contestation – civil society and subversive movements – is a relatively new phenomenon in Thailand with which the government

was first confronted in 2007, after defaming images of the venerated King Bhumipol were posted on the video-sharing platform, violating blatantly the country's rules of *lèse-majesté*. This resulted in one of the state's longest and most controversial censorship campaigns, during which YouTube access was blocked from Internet users within Thailand for five months (April 4, 2007, to August 31, 2007), until an agreement was finally reached between the Thai government and Google Inc. The media-dubbed "YouTube Battle" consequently led the military-appointed Parliament to adopt the Computer-Related Crimes Act 2007, also known as Cybercrime Law, on July 15, 2007.¹⁶

Under the current act, individuals found guilty of cybercrime incur a penalty ranging from 6 months to 20 years of imprisonment and/or a fine of a maximum of 300,000 baht, depending on the nature of the crime committed.¹⁷ However, until the promulgation of the Cybercrime Law, there was no legal framework to regulate Internet communication. In fact, the efforts of the state were mainly focused on limiting access to Web sites with content deemed undesirable and harmful, mostly Web sites with pornographic content or those posing a threat to national security. Under the Thai Ministry of Information and Technology Communication's classification of material deemed dangerous, Southern insurgent Web sites are blocked because of their "subversive" political content.

A first attempt was made in 1999 by the Royal Thai Police (RTP) to limit access to Web sites operated by Patani Melayu insurgents when they contacted a US-based Webhost and requested that the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO) be shut down.¹⁸ Later, on October 26, 2002, the RTP ordered a Thai Internet service provider to block access to the PULO site, <http://www.pulo.org>, and other associated Web sites.¹⁹ Finally, on August 18, 2005, watchdog Web site Internet Haganah denounced four Web sites promoting jihadist violence in Southern Thailand, namely the PULO and its "news service" (pataninews.com), the official site of the General Union of the Patani Revolutionary Students, which operated from Syria (patanistudents.com), and the Netherlands-based Free Patani Organization. Although the PULO site was shut down, as practiced by many other terrorist organizations, it has now moved since 2006 to a new IP address, <http://www.puloinfo.net>.²⁰ By 2010, access to all official Patani Melayu terrorist organization Web sites is blocked within Thailand.

However, despite the state authorities' efforts in restricting diffusion of "subversive" Melayu insurgent material, the effect of YouTube has been mostly neglected. While most of the censorship is centered on *lèse-majesté* and pro-Thaksin videos on the platform, as shown by the long 2008 blocking list of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT),²¹ very little attention has been paid to readily available Patani neojihadist propaganda. In fact, a close observation of the list reveals that no Melayu insurgent content-related YouTube videos are listed for censoring.

This can be partially explained by the political turmoil that affected Thailand up to 2011, when the battle between pro- and anti-Thaksin factions shook the country. With the Internet, and more specifically YouTube, having then become for Thaksin and his supporters one of the few available alleys of communication with the Thai people, it is not surprising that the number of antigovernment videos blocked by the ruling majority was so important. It is indicative of the state authorities' attempt to

completely shut down Thaksin Shinawatra from his political base, at least virtually. Nonetheless, although cyber warfare has been declared against pro-Thaksin and anti-monarchy forces, more virulent neojihadist Patani militant propaganda continues to populate YouTube. The insurgents have now brought their part of the war to the virtual.

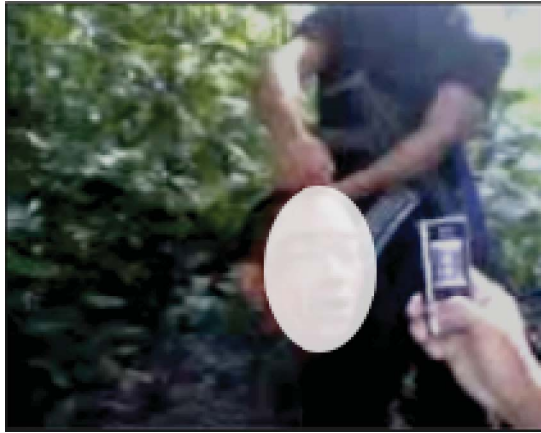
In fact, the use of YouTube by Patani militants and their sympathizers is a recent development of the Southern Thailand conflict, which has simply gone under the vigilant radar of the Thai state, despite the latter's experience in monitoring and restricting its access and of which security forces on the ground have limited knowledge. During an interview with a Thai army officer on the evolution of the movement's *modus operandi* and propaganda, I mentioned to his dismay the intermittent posting by Southern militants of a beheading video on YouTube as early as 2007. After asking me if I was "sure," he admitted to be unaware of the specific utilization of YouTube by Patani militants for propaganda purposes but was not surprised by the diffusion of the recording on the Internet.²² In fact, it is the military recovery of mobile phones containing video clips during its clashes with insurgents that has led him to think that these may be put on CDs or circulated through the Internet. Most of the propaganda materials with which Thai security forces are familiar are mostly classic media such as books, leaflets, audiotapes, videotapes, and more recently VCDs and DVDs sold on local markets, both in Bangkok and in Pattani.²³ However, most of these materials have been searched, confiscated, and prohibited from diffusion or possession at the risk of imprisonment and are now difficult to access. In that sense, it is easy to understand the shift toward the Internet and how Patani propaganda has found its way to inhabit the virtual sphere.

But it is probably not until the discovery of improvised explosive devices detonated with mobile phones (and now radio-length waves)²⁴ that the security forces realized they were facing a different kind of movement, made up of a more savvy generation of militants than the one fought throughout the 1960s to the 1980s. In 2005, the *Matichon* reports that "more than 120 bombs detonated over the past 15 months, including a deadly blast earlier this month [April 2005] at the international airport in Hat Yai, southern Thailand's business hub and a tourist gateway to the region, were triggered by mobiles."²⁵ This savviness not only translates to the innovation and diversification of bomb making but also of propaganda diffusion. As part of this new media campaign, beheadings and other types of brutal violence captured on mobile phones are now posted regularly on YouTube until their removal.

A specific example is the video recording of a beheading statement by Patani militants (Figure 1) recovered from an insurgent's mobile phone and shown to me during a briefing with security forces. This same video was posted intermittently on YouTube from 2007 to 2010 for periods varying from one to two weeks,²⁶ in different languages (English, Thai, and Melayu) with different titles. On the snapshot of the video clip (Figure 1), one of the mobile phones with which the statement was recorded can clearly be seen. From there, the step toward diffusion is easy, from one mobile to another and then onto YouTube. Like the AK47, mobile phones have now become part of the new arsenal of Southern militants.²⁷

In the context of the Southern conflict, the posting of propaganda material on YouTube presents several advantages that more traditional conduits of propaganda

FIGURE 1
 SNAPSHOT OF YOUTUBE VIDEO CLIP: A BEHEADING STATEMENT BY PATANI INSURGENT
 RECORDED BY MOBILE PHONE (COLOR FIGURE AVAILABLE ONLINE).



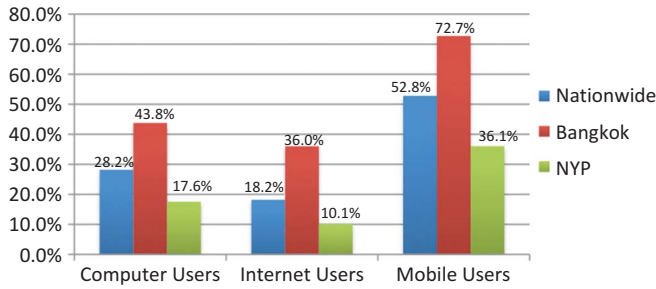
(Source: <http://www.youtube.com>).

lack. Contrary to material like leaflets and VCDs, YouTube opens a new sphere for propaganda diffusion and radicalization, with the possibility of very little control or censorship. With YouTube, there is almost a guarantee of instant visibility and diffusion, even if only for brief instances, but nonetheless long enough for an effective exposure.²⁸ Anyone can connect to YouTube at anytime from anywhere around the world and upload as well as download their videos online to share their “part of the truth” with some parts of their local community, the country, their diaspora, but also the rest of the world. In that respect, YouTube constitutes a safer channel for the diffusion of radical ideas as, unlike hard media such as books, leaflets, or VCDs, it does not leave any “physical” evidence and is ensured to reach a much wider audience.²⁹ For the insurgent movements and their supporters, the platform also offers them the opportunity not only to advertise their cause, but also to build their legitimacy and credibility outside their local sphere of influence, which in turn may lead to the radicalization of certain elements within the region,³⁰ especially the youth, and attract foreign sympathies toward the struggle (as shown by many comments left by YouTube viewers).

At the same time, it is important to note that, despite becoming a new media for the propagation of insurgent ideology, access to YouTube remains limited in the region. Indeed, although the penetration of the Internet in the region is growing rapidly (10.1 percent in 2008), it is still very low in comparison to other parts of the country. With only 1 computer for every 37th individual against 1 in 4 nationwide and 2 in Bangkok, a real technological gap persists between the three Southern border provinces of Narathiwat, Yala, and Pattani (NYP) and the rest of the country (Figure 2), particularly with the capital.

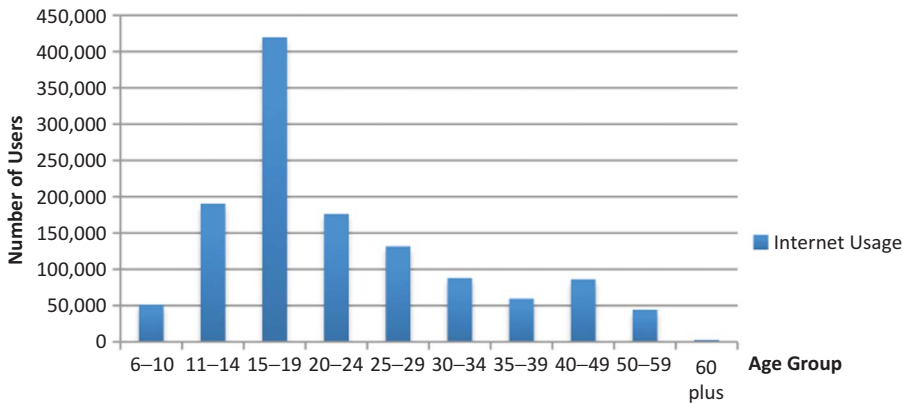
Nonetheless, it is significant to observe that with more than two-thirds of the total numbers of Southern Web users aged younger than 25 years old, the Internet

FIGURE 2
COMPARATIVE PERCENTAGES OF COMPUTER/INTERNET/MOBILE USERS NATIONWIDE, BANGKOK, AND NYP (2008) (COLOR FIGURE AVAILABLE ONLINE).



(Source: National Statistical Office of Thailand).

FIGURE 3
INTERNET USERS PER AGE CATEGORY IN SOUTHERN THAILAND (2008)
(COLOR FIGURE AVAILABLE ONLINE).

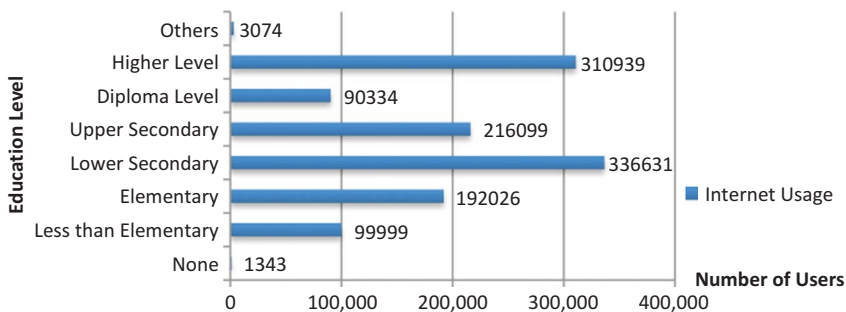


(Source: National Statistical Office of Thailand).

is accessed primarily by the younger generation in this part of the country (Figure 3). According to the National Statistical Office (NSO), youth use the Web mainly to search data and news (73 percent),³¹ play games (15 percent), and e-mail (12 percent). Chat rooms and Web boards are less popular, with only 1 percent. Most youths access the Internet through a formal educational institution (42 percent), at home (11 percent), or in Internet cafes (10 percent). In other words, the typical Southern Internet user is young and likes to surf the Internet to gather information while he or she attends school or university (see Figure 4).

The usage of YouTube follows a similar pattern and user profile. My research findings suggest that the “consumption” of YouTube, both as audience and advertisers, within Southern Thailand and more particularly within NYP, is limited to a very specific stratum of the society (i.e., the youth, an educated youth). The youth possess the

FIGURE 4
INTERNET USERS PER LEVEL OF EDUCATION IN THE SOUTHERN REGION (2008)
(COLOR FIGURE AVAILABLE ONLINE).



(Source: National Statistical Office of Thailand).

technological know-how that the older generations lack. On one hand, YouTube offers for those young (and also not so young) sympathizers of the struggle, a quick and more importantly a safe, free way to advertise their propaganda online. On the other hand, this free advertisement constitutes a persuasive way potentially to assist the undecided or neutral young viewers to “shape their opinions” and “make up their minds.”

Students overseas are also particularly active, as suggested by the posting of a statement by Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) spiritual leader Abu Bakr Basheer on YouTube in which he indicates how “Thai” students informed him of a particular incident that occurred in Pattani and of the more recent propaganda emanating from Turkey. The posting from overseas of YouTube videos with content related to the Southern conflict also suggests the involvement of a wider network composed of overseas students and a Patani diaspora.

For the past 20 years, the neojihadist movement has essentially focused (quietly) its efforts in indoctrinating and recruiting its youth to join their violent jihad against the Thai state. Although, to date, there is no significant evidence that local youth have been influenced by YouTube videos to engage in violence, this article argues that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the platform offers a real potential for youth radicalization.

Patani YouTube Videos: Genre, Language, and Visual Motifs

Unlike former generations of separatists, this new generation has not formulated any formal claims, although literature on their ideology is abundantly available. Indeed, despite the skepticism of some on the validity of this literature,³² the movement’s ideological rhetoric and its evolution can be first located in the propaganda leaflets scattered throughout the region by the insurgency. A close study of these leaflets indicates an evolution of the separatist rhetoric since the beginning of the conflict in 2004, evolving from the rhetoric of injustice and oppression to the one of jihadism, which reveals the significance of the religious dimension and its increasing instrumental role.³³ In its reinterpretation of the scriptures and mobilization of religious symbolism, the insurgency

has paid particular attention to religious concepts instrumental in the legitimization and waging of a jihad and its enactive violent form.

By bringing these concepts to “life,” YouTube videos provide another dimension to the conflict. From the transference of its physical domain into the virtual, the Net has become a new battleground where a war of emotions and ideas is waged, opening up new opportunities for propaganda and radicalization. Ideas are brought to life through the face of a child, a widow, an elderly man, or the lifeless body of a young man fallen on the battlefield, all intended at generating a palette of emotions. As will be discussed later, the images strike a chord among Patani youth and provoke vivid reactions ranging from sadness, empathy, acquiescence, and anger to, in some instances, feelings of revenge.

The close examination of these clips not only informs us further on the instrumentality of religious symbolism and concepts within the movement’s ideology but, more importantly, on the process of glocalization of these ideas within the Patani struggle. In fact, this glocalization is symptomatic of the movement’s progressive transformation from an ethnonationalist struggle into a *cosmic war*, by which the Patani insurgency has, almost inadvertently, successfully positioned itself within the periphery of global jihadism – a success that can be measured by the interest it has sparked among the Muslim world. Indeed, in addition to being evoked by Imams across the world during their *khutbahs* (sermons), the Patani conflict has also been recently described within some jihadist circles as a *Pintu-Pintu Syurga* (a door to Heaven) enjoining those longing for martyrdom to join the jihad, carry arms, and kill the infidels because it is their religious duty.³⁴ The repositioning of their own struggle within a larger transnational Islamic context not only has raised their own international profile in global Islamist circles but also helped revitalize the struggle for a new and more internationally savvy generation of Patani Muslims, allowing them to feel as though they are part of a larger global resistance movement.

The instrumentalization of Islam by the Southern separatist insurgency should not be reduced to a fashionable trend characteristic of post-September 11, 2001 Islamic resistance movements from which it has drawn upon its rhetorical inspiration, but rather, it should be envisaged as a necessity to the survival of the movement. In fact, by injecting new meaning to their struggle through the adoption of the locus of global jihadism, not only has it transformed the pursuit of the struggle into a religious obligation for all Melayu Muslims, but it has also created a motivational appeal for its core group, the Patani youth – an appeal that nationalism alone could no longer generate in a new globalized era.

In fact, the Islamization of the insurgency constitutes a two-edged process, which on one hand provides the movement with a much-needed renewed legitimacy in the eyes of its followers, forcefully extended to a population that it claims to represent and simultaneously reaching further out to a global Muslim community and some of its more radical elements. Furthermore, the ensuing recognition of the legitimacy of the Patani struggle by the *umma* and of its holy nature by some of its more radical elements confers, like in a snowball effect, further legitimacy to the conflict and strengthens its holy character. In fact, the cause of the Patani struggle was already long known among jihadist circles as illustrated in Osama Bin Laden’s declaration of jihad against the United States of America in 1996. In his statement, Bin Laden associates indistinctly

the Patani plight to other struggles across the Muslim world. "Their blood is flowing in Palestine, Iraq, and Lebanon (. . .), not to mention the massacres in Tajikistan, Burma, Kashmir, Assam, the Philippines, Pattani, Ogaden, Somalia, Eritrea, Chechnya, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Muslims have been the victims of atrocious acts of butchery."³⁵ Although the ultimate purpose of this statement diverges from the goal pursued by the insurgency, the association drawn by Bin Laden generates legitimacy to the rise against the infidel oppressor, incarnated by the United States and in our present case by its longstanding ally, Thailand.³⁶

On the other hand, the insurgency's process of Islamization presents some risks that the insurgency may have not fully weighed, such as attracting unsolicited assistance, which would dangerously propel the conflict from the periphery of global neojihadism to its heart. Nevertheless, by localizing the struggle in the locus of global neojihadism, not only has the separatist insurgency successfully injected new meaning to its fight, but it is also successfully elevating the conflict to unprecedented levels of legitimacy and authority, that is of a holy war.

Production and Genre

Patani YouTube videos come in different production forms, ranging from slide presentations, animations, cartoons, mainstream videos, and real-time footages, with varying durations, running from a few seconds to a quarter of an hour. Different genres of videos are available for viewing – cultural, political, comedy, fiction movies, private, and family videos³⁷ – each of them noteworthy in exposing the region to a global audience. Nonetheless, only videos with political content are considered here, as the focus of this article is on Patani neojihadist propaganda.

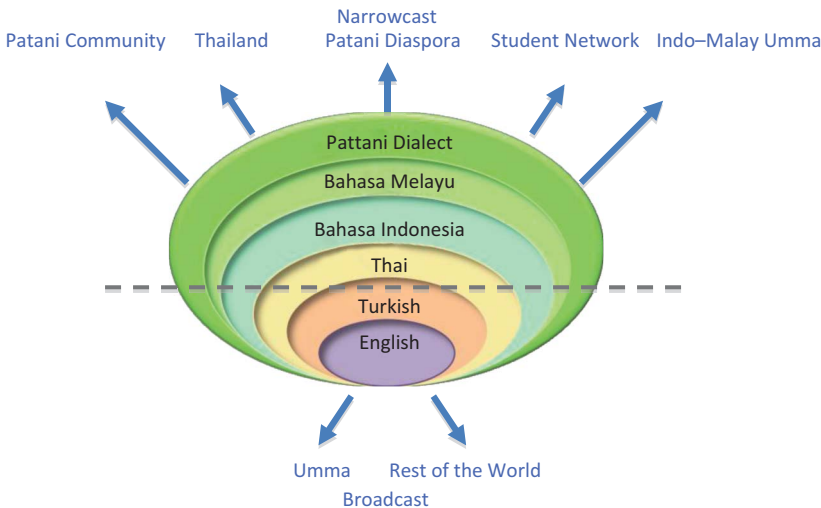
By applying the typology of jihadist videos developed by the IntelCenter³⁸ to Patani political-content videos, it is possible to see that only three of the seven types of images listed by the institution are uploaded on YouTube. Operational videos in the form of slideshows or short clips showing attacks, bombs, and explosions,³⁹ clashes with Thai security forces, and acts of gruesome violence are common. Produced videos, not authored but identifiable by the nature of their content, are the most common ones and are often in the form of motion videos,⁴⁰ slide presentations, or animations.⁴¹ Finally, statement and tribute videos, less common but with an increasing presence since 2009, depict *shuhadas*, fallen innocent Muslim victims and leaders' interviews. Statement videos are rare because of the intentional nature of remaining a faceless movement characterizing this new generation of insurgent. To date, there is only one recording of a statement that has been uploaded to the video-sharing platform, pronounced by an insurgent on the ground (Figure 1) threatening Thai Buddhists with decapitation if crimes were to be committed against the Melayu Muslims. More formal statements are not available. Patani YouTube statements are often constructed from images extracted from news reports of media outlets such as Al Jazeera, Indonesian and Malaysian news channels, or Turkish television programs,⁴² which have had the opportunity to interview some of the older-generation leadership, namely the PULO.⁴³ Other categories of recordings – hostage, internal training, and instructional videos – are absent from Patani YouTube propaganda, for obvious reasons.

Finally, YouTube videos are readily available material that can be extracted, recycled, and adapted to any context. For instance, a *bahasa Indonesia* YouTube video with radical consonance was “hijacked,” edited with Patani propaganda material, and uploaded as a new video with the title, “Patani People Are Not Terrorists.” Although not an exclusive particularity to Patani videos, the way in which some material can be downloaded, edited, and rediffused, almost like ready-made templates, is illustrative of the insurgent movement’s hybridization or recontextualization process by which it localizes global ideological codes to suit its own cause and produces new original Patani-specific propaganda signifiers.

Language

The majority of the videos posted online are in *bahasa Melayu*, the language of the region, followed by Thai, while an increasing number is in Turkish, and a minority is in English (Figure 5). Particular attention should be paid to the use of *bahasa Melayu*. Malay, the *lingua franca* of peninsular Malaysia, Southern Thailand, and the Indonesian archipelago, is in fact a *pluricentric* language of Southeast Asia. A *pluricentric language*, such as *bahasa Melayu*, is a language that has several interacting centers, in our case Malaysia and Indonesia, each providing a national variety, *bahasa Melayu* and *bahasa Indonesia*, with its own codified norms.⁴⁴ As Rappa and Wee note, “there are linguistically different Malay languages and dialects that are habitually spoken by about 200 million people in the southeast region and parts of the Middle East and Africa.”⁴⁵ This pluricentrism has the effect of both unifying people through the use of a same language and dividing them through the development of national linguistic variables, with which the speakers identify.⁴⁶ In Pattani, the question of language is an essential identity marker with which people identify their community belonging – in other words, “who belongs and who does not.” It is a fact often put forward by the

FIGURE 5
LANGUAGE USED AND THEIR TARGET AUDIENCE OF PATANI PROPAGANDA VIDEOS
(COLOR FIGURE AVAILABLE ONLINE).



movement (and the Patani Malayus in general) in its discourse of ethnic and religious differentiation against the Thai Buddhists.

This notion of “pluricentrism” is particularly significant within the context of Southern propaganda on YouTube. Indeed, significant variances of the Malay language (written and spoken) are used on the platform, which provides some indication on the users and their community of belonging and the targeted audiences. A close examination of the variety of Malay language used indicates that the authors of the videos originate (although their real physical location may differ) from Pattani, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Currently, a great majority of material posted is in *bahasa Melayu* rather than *bahasa Indonesia*. This can partly be explained by the close kinship and historical ties that bind Patani Malayus and Malaysians. However, as shown by the increasing interest of radical Indonesian Web sites in Muslim-related conflicts⁴⁷ and the various comments left on YouTube by *bahasa Indonesia*-speaking viewers, there is today a growing interest in Indonesia in the Southern struggle.

In the Indo-Malay world, the idea of pluricentrism, by which people are united through a common language, underlies another concept that is the notion of *Malaya Raya* (the Greater Malay world), the specter of an old nationalist aspiration, which attempted unsuccessfully to bring the Malay people of British Malaya and the Malay Netherlands Indies under a same state and *umma*.⁴⁸ More recently, this idea of a “pan-Malaysian” state has been revived by JI’s ambition of creating a *Daulah Islamiyah* (Islamic state) that would be composed of Indonesia and Malaysia, along with the Southern Philippines and Southern Thailand.⁴⁹ Although the Southern separatist insurgency plays with similar registers of regional and global *umma* in its mobilization of religious symbolism, it is without adhering to JI’s Islamic state or al-Qaeda’s pan-Islamic Caliphate.

The use of these various Malay languages on YouTube demonstrates not only the linguistic dynamism of the Southern struggle but also its historical and cultural interactions with the wider Malay world that shape and influence Malay identity and to some extent the movement. For the militants, Patani is the “land of origin for the great Melayu Raya.”⁵⁰

Significantly, the predominant use of *bahasa Melayu* on YouTube over the Thai, Turkish, and English languages suggests that the images are intended mainly toward a local and regional audience (narrowcast), which strengthens the idea that the conflict remains a locally driven defensive jihad, inspired by global and perhaps regional forces. However, as images often do not need comment, they remain accessible to “foreign” audiences, as some of the English and Thai comments left by viewers suggest (broadcast).

Lastly, the vehicular language of the Patani movement and its supporters on YouTube contrasts considerably with the language used in propaganda leaflets. These are mainly written in Thai with a small number in Yawee, the local script (Figure 7). This divergence between the two types of propaganda campaigns (virtual and on-the-ground) is particularly significant as it informs us of the differences of targeted audiences as well as the aims of the propaganda campaigns. Where leaflets in the Thai language are aimed at frightening the local populace and caution their coreligionists against collaborating with state authorities, online propaganda target a much

wider audience with a more subversive objective than the only propagation of their movement's radical ideas (i.e., the radicalization of its viewers and in this case the youth).

Visual Motifs

The instrumentalization of Islam by the Southern separatist insurgency should not be reduced to a fashionable trend characteristic of post-September 11, 2011 Islamic resistance movements from which it has drawn upon its rhetorical inspiration, but rather it should be envisaged as a necessity for the survival of the movement. In fact, by injecting new meaning to their struggle through the adoption of the locus of global neojihadism, not only has it transformed the pursuit of the struggle into a religious obligation for all Melayu Muslims but also created a motivational appeal for its core group, the Patani youth – an appeal that nationalism alone could no longer generate in a new globalized era.⁵¹

This transformative process translates also onto the imagery and symbolism the movement and its sympathizers use. Indeed, this is characterized by the intertwining and overlapping of jihadist and Malay cultural visual motifs and sounds. Common visual motifs can be grouped into four categories of visual markers: ethnocultural, victimization, religious, and jihadist codes.

While the identification of these distinct visual motifs results from the study of Patani YouTube videos, it is important to note that they are also illustrative of the increasing influence of jihadist themes within Patani YouTube propaganda. Indeed, while the ethnocultural motifs characterize only a small number of videos, religious and victimization motifs are consistently used. Typical jihadist symbols alone populate an increasing number of online productions testifying explicit connections with the Malay insurgency.

Firstly, *ethnocultural* markers revolve around both Patani Melayu and Muslim cultures. An emphasis is made on the richness and diversity of traditional Malay culture, with the intent of building a sentiment of community belonging and the need to preserve Melayu Muslim identity against corrupting Thai influences. Images of traditional clothing and traditional Malay arts are common.

Secondly, *religious motifs* depict images of *masjids* (mosques), worshippers, *pondok* (Islamic boarding school), and rare images of (bloodied) Quran. The most commonly represented *masjids* are the *Krue Se* and the Patani Central mosques. Both symbolize the Islamic faith of the Melayu community but also a historical continuity of the Patani struggle against the Thai state. The two *masjids* not only are places of worship but also holy places that have witnessed important events in the local history. Following the killing of 5 local youths by security forces in December 1975, one of the largest demonstrations was held in front of the Patani central mosque for more than a month, leading to the death of another 25 individuals. On May 31, 2007, following four murders and a rape allegedly committed by army rangers, a second mass rally was organized in front of the Central Mosque, bringing together 3,000 protestors. In the community's conscience, the *masjid* symbolizes the rallying point for political resistance against the Thai state, whereas for the separatist movement, the revolts associated with the place

are interpreted as popular support to their cause.⁵² On April 28, 2004, after raiding a police checkpoint near the village of Krue Se, some 30 insurgents stormed into the ancestral local mosque where they sought refuge and through the mosque's loudspeakers declared a jihad against their pursuers in the Thai military. The insurgents died in the mosque during the assault, transforming the holy place into an icon of Patani victimization. Bodies of the *Krue Se* insurgents were buried together with the remains of the victims of the 1975 demonstration in the section of a local graveyard reserved for *shuhadas*.⁵³ The use of these sacred places within Patani YouTube imagery establishes a historical continuity of the struggle.

Pondok are traditional Islamic boarding schools. They not only represent the transmission of Islamic knowledge from one generation of Patani to another but also are closely associated with Melayu identity. In fact, as Singaporean academic Joseph Liow explains, "pondok are important repositories for and progenitors of Malay language, history and culture."⁵⁴ As such, *pondok* have almost always been considered by the government as obstacles to the assimilation of Patani Malayus into mainstream Thailand, whereas educational policies emanating from Bangkok were perceived as a threat to Melayu identity, spearheading the resistance.⁵⁵ Since 2004, *pondok* have come under immense suspicion resulting in their excessive scrutiny by Thai security forces and further alienation of the local community, further fanning the flames of separatism.

Thirdly, similar to jihadist imagery, Patani visual markers of *victimization* are constituted mostly by pictures of women, children, elderly men, widows, and lifeless bloodied bodies of innocent victims. Images of women in general and more specifically of mother and widows hold within Islamic culture powerful symbolic values and are utilized both to instill notions of masculine pride and honor in the Muslim audience and to inspire jihadist activism.⁵⁶ In other words, "they serve to inspire anger against the enemy, and present a symbolic choice to Muslim men who may be vulnerable to such appeals: whether sit back and do nothing, or to join the fight and regain their honor"⁵⁷ – an injunction replicated in the propaganda leaflets which is gaining momentum among the Patani youth. Visual motifs of young male children are overwhelmingly represented in Southern imagery, evoking notions of innocence, purity, pride, honor, and injustice,⁵⁸ which symbolize the need to protect Patani Darussalam from the Thai oppressor. The very young age of some of the children depicted suggests that a new generation of Patani fighters is on the rise, and therefore, the cause will live on through these children.⁵⁹ This is clearly illustrated in Figure 6 depicting a baby boy with his heart bleeding, symbolizing the oppression and injustices committed against Melayu people, calling for revenge. Finally, images of dead innocent victims are utilized to inspire feelings of injustice, anger, and revenge provoking the desire to retaliate against the Thai state.

Lastly, *jihadist visual motifs* are increasingly present and sophisticated within Patani YouTube videos. Three main flora images are used – the red rose, greenery, and palm trees – symbolizing martyrdom through violent means, the Islamic concept of *janna* or paradise, and a sense of Islamic pride and concern.⁶⁰ The intent is to locate the Patani struggle within the first Islamic jihads with the aim of reinforcing its religious legitimacy. The visual motifs of the dove and the camel further strengthen the themes of jihad and *umma*. In Figure 6, although the doves are carrying olive branches in their

beaks, a biblical symbol evoking the notion of peace, when combined with the other visual motifs, it signifies the need to wage a jihad to bring back peace to the people. The camel, on the other hand, creates an associative link between the Patani struggle and the *umma*. Finally, some of the predominant colors in Patani YouTube imagery are green and red, visual signifiers of Islam, the Prophet, jihad, tyranny, and oppression.

A significant aspect of Patani neojihadist YouTube videos is the intertwining of cultural Malay identity codes with jihadist ideological codes within its visual motifs. This trait is particularly informative of the process of glocalization transforming the movement. For instance, traditional jihadist visual markers such as the sword (Figure 6), the *al raya* flag (Figure 7) symbolizing the jihadist struggle, or the *keffiyeh* (traditional

FIGURE 6
 SNAPSHOT OF YOUTUBE VIDEO CLIP 'PATTANI MERDEKA': A BABY BOY WITH TWO BLOODIED
KERIS SYMBOLIZING THE STRUGGLE FOR THE RESTORATION OF PATANI DARUSSALAM
 (COLOR FIGURE AVAILABLE ONLINE).



FIGURE 7
 SNAPSHOT OF YOUTUBE VIDEO CLIP 'FREE PATANI,' AN ANIMATION VIDEO; FEATURES SPOKEN
BAHASA MELAYU AND THE PATANI LOCAL YAWEE SCRIPT. READ HERE: 'PATANI NATIONAL ANTHEM'
 (COLOR FIGURE AVAILABLE ONLINE).



FIGURE 8
 SNAPSHOT OF YOUTUBE VIDEO CLIP: YOUNG BOY WEARING THE KEFFIYEH
 (COLOR FIGURE AVAILABLE ONLINE).



Palestinian headdress), symbol of Palestinian identity (Figure 8), are adopted and recontextualized within the context of the local jihad, producing unique Patani neojihadist ideological codes.

For example, in Patani neojihadist imagery, the motif of the sword, symbol of the jihadist struggle, is replaced by the *keris*,⁶¹ a traditional Malay weapon (Figures 6 and 7). The *keris*, literally meaning stab or pierce, is an elongated dagger or a short sword that is found in Southern Thailand and throughout the Malay world, where it symbolizes hierarchy and sovereignty and is primarily a weapon of defense and assault.⁶² In the Indo–Malay colonial context, it also came to symbolize resistance against the Dutch invaders.

On the battleground, warriors would usually carry three *keris*: their own, one from their father-in-law, and one as a family heirloom. Within the Patani imagery, only two daggers are represented, one symbolizing Malay culture (community belonging) and the other the struggle to liberate the homeland from its oppressor. Sometimes these are also crossed (Figure 7) implying, in the context of Southern Thailand, the movement's location within the contemporary global neojihadist sphere of influence.

Another particularly noteworthy type of *keris*, as it is also used as a visual motif, is the “executioner’s dagger.” This one differs characteristically from other *keris* because of its long, slender blade and is primarily used for executions. As Frey explains: “adultery, incest and treason were punishable by being krissed [stabbed], as were also murders and thefts committed during the night.”⁶³ The use of this particular motif (Figure 6) here suggests the notion of punishment. The concepts of violence, martyrdom, sacrifice, injustice, tyranny, oppression, and victory in battle are also represented through the motif of a bleeding *keris*.

The choice of the *keris* rather than the sword indicates a link with a specific cultural history, additionally to the first Islamic jihads, that is a return to a golden age of Patani Darussalam and the first movements of resistance against Siam. This brings to

light clearly the process of glocalization at play within Southern Thailand, where different cultures of references, global and local, are merged together producing a culturally specific discourse of Patani neojihadist violence.

Another hybridized marker is the Patani flag. The flag and maps representing the Patani state are used interchangeably. However, there is a particularity in the use of the flag, which can be seen in Figure 7. In place of the *shahada* (the Muslim confession of faith) is the national anthem of Patani Darussalam in white Arabic-like script against a black background representing the *al raya*, the ensign carried by the Prophet Muhammad during the first jihad. This suggests that the banner of revolt and battle has been raised over Thailand, advocating a defensive jihad against the Siamese state. Here, the Yawee script has been superposed with the *al raya*, producing a visual code specific to the Southern struggle.

Finally, the *Keffiyeh* is often used as a visual motif of Patani YouTube imagery in association with the Palestinian struggle. Like Hamas in Palestine, the Southern separatist movement is fighting a defensive jihad against its oppressor, the Thai state and its people. The association is also drawn more explicitly as exemplified in the posting of a slide presentation titled “Palestine in Asia,” in which the viewer is asked: “Do you know, what is happening in Palestine? And do you know there’s a Palestine in Asia?” By comparing the Patani struggle to the Palestinian conflict, the movement attempts to frame their jihad in terms of a defensive one against the Thai invader and elevate it to similar levels of “legitimacy.” Because Palestine and Palestinians have great resonance among Muslims and serve to produce sentiments of Islamic nationalism,⁶⁴ the movement uses the reference to locate its struggle within the locus of global jihadism and Islamic nationalism and to associate themselves with the broader interests of the Muslim community. In Figure 8, the young boy with the keffiyeh with a green background indicates both Islamic and nationalist connotations.

Patani Neojihadist Ideological Concepts

History

For many who have chosen to fight alongside the insurgency for the restoration of the independence of their ancestral homeland, the History of the Sultanate of Patani – a history of a golden past and of victimhood – has been instrumental in the recruitment and indoctrination of Melayu Muslim youth.⁶⁵ It is a historical narrative with a purpose and continues to be a remarkably powerful political force in the region. It is a storytelling that has been perpetuated through oral tradition, from one generation of Patani Muslims to another, inspiring earlier generations of militants up to the generations of today. These narratives have now found their way to the Internet. Some of the early Patani videos posted on YouTube present a skewed recounting of that history.⁶⁶

The instrumentalization of this history provides an aura of legitimacy to the separatist insurgency, which claims that it is fighting a defensive war on behalf of an oppressed people. However, this defensive war can no longer find its sole impetus within the locus of historical nationalism, a concept that resonates very little with today’s Patani youth.⁶⁷ Nationalism *per se* cannot appeal to and ideologically sustain this new generation of militants. With the advent of the Internet and satellite television,

the new Muslim youth have entered a new borderless world and have become part of a global community in which traditional boundaries and national identities (such as the Melayu identity) are progressively blurred.

Notion of Territory

It is important to stress that although embracing the concept of “Cosmic War” has led to greater violence against the state and Thai society, it remains largely bound by a conventional notion of territory (Figure 9). For the more extreme elements of the insurgency movement, the *darul harbi*⁶⁸ (“region of war”) in which their part of the cosmic battle is waged, is the geographically bounded area of the three Southern provinces.⁶⁹

As long as the insurgents pursue the liberation of their homeland through a “defensive jihad,” their scope of action will be limited to the geographic area where the injustices against God occur. If they were to consider expanding it to other parts of the country where Muslims are a minority, including the capital Bangkok, the conflict would immediately be inscribed into a new register, one characteristic of an “offensive jihad.”⁷⁰ This would in turn imply a wider goal, namely the submission and potentially the conversion of Thailand to Islam. In short, the *darul harbi* is not only a geographical space but also a psychological one within which terror reigns. It is not so much about the control of geographic space but rather mental space.

Defensive Jihad

In the 1970s, secessionists in Southern Thailand described the Thai state as “colonialist” constituted by “Siamese fascist officials”⁷¹ who had “illegally colonized Patani.” The flavor of this discourse shows the importance of historical context in shaping the way resistance movements interpret their own struggles. In the case of the resistance groups in Southern Thailand, it reflects the influence of the wider international anticolonial

FIGURE 9
SNAPSHOT OF YOUTUBE VIDEO ‘PATANI! PATANI! PATANI!’ SHOWING THE TERRITORIAL DELIMITATION OF THE PATANI ISLAMIC STATE (COLOR FIGURE AVAILABLE ONLINE).



movement and its embrace of nationalism and socialism. Translating these concepts into a political agenda was complicated by the centrality of Islam in defining the grievances of the Patani Muslims. Islam was the reason they were considered marginal by wider Buddhist society, and hence it was Islam that became a core identity marker and the fulcrum upon which the resistance movement grew. Merging the predominantly secular themes of anticolonialism with Islam was complex, and as a result, for much of its existence, the insurgency failed to define clearly an ideology beyond the general maxim of “liberating the homeland” to create the *Republic of Patani*.

By the onset of the 21st century, the situation had changed, and although the goal remained the same for many Patani Muslims, it was based on firmer ontological ground. By defining itself in Islamist terms, the separatist movement managed to distance itself from the secular concepts that defined the Thai state (“nationalism”) and that precluded support for its struggle from other states (“sovereignty”). The objective now is the creation of *Al Faton Darussalam* “Islamic Land of Patani” by “purging all Siamese infidels out of our territory to purify our religion and culture.”⁷² The “liberation of the Republic” has now evolved into a “struggle to liberate an Islamic Land.” From being a “colonialist” and “fascist” state, the Thai state has assumed the status of “infidel.”

The *defensive* nature of Patani jihad is particularly emphasized in Patani neojihadist YouTube videos where the notions of invasion and oppression are predominant (see Figure 10). It is on these two notions that the movement and supporters bank to justify their claims of waging a legitimate jihad:

A prosperous land of Darussalam
 Patani was a country before it was colonized
 Before Siam spread wrong accusation
 Patani stood strong with greatness. (. . .)
 A lush land that is most beautiful

FIGURE 10

‘WE ARE THE CROSSROADS NOW. TO THE RIGHT LIES VICTORY, TO THE LEFT MARTYRDOM IN THE PATH OF THE LORD; TO TURN BACK IS SOMETHING WE HAVE NEVER THOUGHT OF.’



A shimmering country adjacent to Mecca
 A state with God's shariah
 An old city⁷³

The ideological shift undertaken by the movement – moving from the domain of the secular into the sacred – is clearly visible in the YouTube propaganda. Indeed, within the online narratives, Patani is sacralized. It is described as a “land of Darussalam,” “a shimmering country adjacent to Mecca,” “a state with God's shariah,” or as “the holy land where I shed my blood.” In other words, defending Patani is defending Islam; it is a Holy war waged to protect the Islamic faith from oppression. The theme of global jihad is superposed with the Melayu struggle, further conflating its defensive legitimacy.

Martyrdom

Muslim martyrdom is not uncommon to Southern Thailand. In fact, the usage of the term *shahid* can be traced back to the incidents of December 1975 during which 12 Muslims were killed and buried as *shahid*. However, in the wider ethnoreligious landscape of Southern Thailand, the term *shahid* refers to a person who has died violently or prematurely, falling under the specific category of “martyr in the next world only.”⁷⁴ A distinction is made between the “martyr in the next world only” (*shuhada al-akhira*) and the “battlefield martyr” (*shuhada al-mara'ka*) whose burial rites differ from those accorded to other Muslims.⁷⁵ With the progressive disappearance of battlefield martyrdom, the term *shahid* gave way to the mundane expansion of the “martyr in the other world only,” only to admit in paradise anyone who had died a worthy death⁷⁶ – a definition commonly used in the Southern region. Nonetheless, although both notions of *shahid* continue to compete in Southern Thailand, a contemporary primacy is now given to the battlefield martyr, as attests the recording of cases where bodies of insurgents were buried unwashed. The distinct usage of the notion of battlefield martyrdom and its enforcement by the separatist insurgency in Southern Thailand denotes a trend common to contemporary jihadist groups. The struggle of today inscribes itself within a logic of martyrdom as stated by Melayu propaganda: “We will sacrifice our blood and soul without reservation for the sake of our religion and country.”⁷⁷

Images of the *shuhada al-mara'ka* are starting to spring up on YouTube (see Figure 11) but also on blogs with explicit invitations to jihad with the promise of Heaven if falling in the battlefield, as illustrated by the lyrics of a poem posted on the platform,⁷⁸ titled *If I Fall on the Battlefield of Fathoni Darrusalam*:

When you die in the battlefield,
 Shahid will be yours, as God has promised,
 Although your body is engulfed by the earth,
 Your good deed will be eternal⁷⁹

Another video shows the ritual preparation of the body of a battlefield *shahid* before his burial with the recitation in Arabic of the verses of the sword in the background.⁸⁰

FIGURE 11
 SNAPSHOT OF YOUTUBE VIDEO: PREPARATION OF THE DECEASED FOR HIS *SHAHID* BURIAL
 (COLOR FIGURE AVAILABLE ONLINE).



The deceased, according to Patani youth, was a “general,” indicating the “high rank” within the movement, someone important and for which the burial was “a big deal.”

This call to jihad with the promise of martyrdom resonates particularly well with the younger insurgent generation and among the local youth. During my interviews with some Patani youths, the notion of martyrdom evoked for them sentiments of pride and sacredness but also excitement.

Munafiq and Kafir

In the realm of the virtual, the reidentification process of the enemy – from “colonialist” and “fascist state” to infidel – is less clear than in the written literature, despite the predominance of the religious dimension. The concepts of *munafiq*, or hypocrite, and *kafir* are not articulated as well as within the leaflet literature. In fact, while the notion of *munafiq* is omnipresent in the written literature, it is absent from the video-sharing platform. On YouTube, the emphasis is on the enemy, the oppressor who is embodied by the Siamese state and its representatives (mostly security forces):

Dear Patani people worldwide,
 let’s come and unite to resist the **colonizer** of our land Patani.
 (. . .) The sacrifice in Jihad is a proof of the truth.
 Let us Muslim unite to face the **kafir**.⁸¹

Thailand has become the *kafir*, the “terrorist” (“like the Zionists”) but at the same time remains the “colonizer” and the “imperialist” nation. But on the ground, the enemy is the *kafir harbi Siam*, or belligerent Siamese infidel. By redefining the Thai state as *kafir*, the insurgents have proclaimed violent jihad not only against the Thai state but also on its ontological essence, its “Thainess,” including *chart* (nation), *satsana* (religion), and *phramahakasat* (the monarchy). The new generation of insurgents’ stated goals to purify their religion and culture requires a purge of “Siamese infidels” and is the

raison d'état behind the movement's recent expansion of its targets to include civilians, including children, women, and elders.

It can be argued that the divergence in the uses of ideological codes between the virtual and the ground battlefields underlies a difference in targeted audience and hence necessitates a different type of propaganda, as online campaigns are aimed at legitimizing the struggle and youth radicalization. This can be further illustrated by the preference in the choice of visual motifs the movement displays online. It would appear that the Patani insurgency and online supporters avoid purposely showing images of Thai Buddhist civilian victims, as it would constitute "bad publicity" that would discredit their claims of waging a legitimate defensive jihad. Instead, images of killings of Thai security forces are predominant,⁸² together with those of innocent Muslim victims (mainly used for its symbolic value, i.e., the victimization of Melayu people by the Thai state).

Patani Youth Radicalization on YouTube

The study of the language, visual motifs, and ideological codes used in Patani neojihadist YouTube videos has revealed meaningful common grounds but also some significant divergences in terms of target audience and goals between the online and the ground propaganda campaigns. The online propaganda campaign carried out on YouTube is primarily intended for a young audience of Malay Melayu descent (narrowcast), speaking *bahasa Melayu*, living within a local, regional, and global geographical scope.

Compelling appeals are explicitly directed toward the *pemuda*, the Patani Melayu Muslim youth: "To all young generations, let's fight for our religion and nation. Let's chase the Siamese away from our land. Let's move forward to fight together,"⁸³ and "Young generation be steady in the struggle; the future of a peaceful and tranquil society is in your hands; Patani will be free."⁸⁴ Calls for jihad are framed in a way that encompasses implicitly the youth within the struggle, as if the youth were already part of the struggle but needed to be awakened to their duty to defend and free their homeland. These statements clearly aim to engage the youth in the resistance dialogue and invite them to join the jihad.

The Patani YouTube propaganda campaign outreaches to the younger segment of online Melayu users with the aim of bringing religious and political awakening in the view of radicalizing the youth. Lyrics from the Patani YouTube national anthem further reveal the confidence the movement has in its youths as "the youth will for sure **work together** with bravery and military spirit."

As the Internet and YouTube in Thailand are mostly accessed by a younger generation of Web users, it is therefore not surprising that the militants have chosen this particular medium to reach out to the youth, a core component of the contemporary insurgency fighting force.⁸⁵ This suggests a certain awareness on the part of the movement and their sympathizers of the country's Internet user profile (i.e., a more savvy generation of Melayu Muslims). Another important aspect that the analysis has revealed is the strong emphasis on the use of Islamic and jihadist symbolism over the themes of nationalism within Patani YouTube videos. The local narratives of nationalism are framed within a larger global narrative to generate a motivational appeal for Patani

youth for whom nationalism alone could no longer generate in a new globalized era. A Melayu youth explains:

The [narrative] angle is the same with Bangkok and elsewhere; they (the videos) have this sense of Muslim brotherhood with the only difference that they have information on Melayu identity. But in general they will encompass the different conflicts: Southern Thailand, Afghanistan, Iraq, from many places. It depends on the information they give on these videos, for radicalization or conscientization. For me, they build conscientization, but for some, it is emotions. Some are hurt by those images and they use emotions. But for some of those who watch [these videos], if you can make them accept more Islam, it will be a good thing. Some have emotions and they want to kill people. So these images have both negative and positive impacts.⁸⁶

While globalization weakens the degree to which the insurgency can inspire and unite a younger generation of Muslims under the banner of Melayu nationalism, the separatist leadership had to search for a new binding force – a cement that it has found in Islam.⁸⁷

Almost all the tenets of radical Islam are instrumentalized on the YouTube video-sharing platform but to varying degrees. Prominence is given to the notions of defensive jihad and martyrdom (sacredness of the conflict), while less stress is made on the *kaafir* and *munafiq* – a fact that can be explained by the goal pursued by the online campaign. The aim is to radicalize and possibly recruit and not caution or terrorize a population.

The potential for Patani youth radicalization through YouTube is not imaginary; there is a real danger. Indeed, the response of the local youth to the online propaganda is extremely worrying. According to the youths⁸⁸:

When I see these images, [I also ask myself] how can these children grow up? So yes, this kind of thinking is interesting because how can we make sure that these children [have a future]? It could be by taking arms. I agree with this feeling.

Well, they are trying to do something. Sometimes, they (insurgents) have a particular way to call the use of violence, but it is not always like that. Sometimes they try to use peaceful means first, but then once this way does not work, they have to elevate the level [up] a notch, to signify that ‘now we have reached it’ . . . [it is time to fight].

People who would watch this type of images would immediately feel the need to rise and fight, especially after we see the [YouTube] clip on history. Some may come to the conclusion, ‘Oh, so that is how it is,’ and who didn’t know about this history before? But once they know [are made aware of it], it explains why it is like this [today]. In fact, it is almost a proof, an evidence, which makes us angry, rise.

These images change my feelings. I would say it increases my perception [of the violence]. It shows me a different image. I never asked myself why they (insurgents) act like that. I would think ‘Why are you doing this?’; ‘Why are you harming

them?'; 'Why do you need to harm them?' I never really asked myself. But these [YouTube] clips give me an answer to why, why they had to come out. It really changes my perception of why they need to do what they do. It explains what they are fighting for and why they have to fight. It provides me with more information on the Southern problem.

What these comments demonstrate is the compelling power of the Patani YouTube video narratives and frames. Not only does it have the ability emotionally to affect the youths, but it also has the ability to shape and alter their attitudes, inner perceptions, and understanding of the Southern struggle, which are leaning toward the neojihadist movement. These narratives ignite a cascade of emotions among the youths, from sadness, empathy, and acquiescence to anger. The question now is whether or not – and if so, to what extent – this YouTube-generated affectivity leads youth engagement in violence. In light of the Patani youth commentary above, the line between the virtual and the reality seems to be thinning.

To this date, there is no evidence suggesting the crossing of this threshold by Melayu youth. However, some disturbing material has found its way on YouTube these past four years with a growing number mimicking videos of Patani and neojihadist-like beheadings by local youth (both Buddhist and Melayu), indicating the “cool” effect of neojihadist violence. Nevertheless, with such a wide technology gap, Internet access in Patani remains limited to a small number of users restraining the possibility of youth radicalization.

Conclusion: Patani YouTube Counternarratives

The increasing role played by YouTube video productions in the insurgency propaganda campaign calls for the definition of counternarratives to generate alternatives to mainstream Patani neojihadist videos. Younger users of the video-sharing platform constitute an audience much more at risk, readily accepting mainstream narratives, as illustrated by the words of a Patani youth: “It (a Patani YouTube video) explains what they (insurgents) are fighting for and why they have to fight. It provides me with more information on the Southern problem.”

Although currently YouTube is mostly used for the diffusion and propagation of radicalism, at the same time, it offers the possibility to state agencies for the countering of Patani radical storylines. So far, state authorities have mainly concentrated their efforts in countering on the ground the diffusion of jihadist ideas by engaging with the local *ulama* (religious scholar) and the youth. As a result of this collaboration, a state-sponsored manual promulgating the teachings of Islam was produced. The document was distributed across the three provinces and has met some limited success with young militants surrendering to the authorities.⁸⁹ However, little action has been taken on the front of online propaganda, apart perhaps from restricting access within Thailand to jihadist Web sites.

Now, with this new generation of fighters having brought their neojihadist war to the “virtual,” Net wars are to be fought and local *ulama* have a role to play. In light of the instrumentalization of Islam by the separatist insurgency (embodied in their belief

that they are fighting a “cosmic war”), there needs to be a greater space for Islamic leaders to enter the debate to rescue their religion from the narratives of conflict perpetuated by the insurgents and open the door to dialogue. YouTube can be one of the platforms to facilitate such dialogue.

As some of the Patani salafi *ulama* have already experienced, YouTube can be used to preach and outreach to a wider, more global, but also younger community. In this way, the *ulama* appear less intimidating and more accessible; hence, the contact becomes more “personal,” privileged, and less confrontational.⁹⁰ It would enable the local *ulama* to reach out to their younger worshippers with narratives distancing them from youth engagement in violence, and this without the fear of confrontation or reprisal.

With the Internet penetration growing rapidly in Thailand, although admittedly slower in Pattani, the YouTube effect is not likely to dissipate in the near future. With the increasing propagation of Patani radicalism on the video-sharing platform and the positive response from youth, home and possibly abroad, more serious attention should be paid to the YouTube radicalization effect and more importantly to its potential to enact crucial counternarratives.

NOTES

1. Neojihadism has been defined as “a religious, political, paramilitary and terrorist global movement, a subculture, a counterculture and an ideology that seeks to establish states governed by laws according to the dictates of selectively literal interpretations of the Qur’an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, through enacting violence (Peter Lentini, “Antipodal terrorists?” in Richard Devetak and Christopher Wo Hughes, eds., *The Globalization of Political Violence: Globalization’s Shadow* [London: Routledge, 2008], p. 181). By leading a defensive jihad that aims to restore the Islamic Patani state by waging a vengeful violent war against the Infidel Siamese oppressor, the Southern separatist insurgency falls within the sphere of influence of “neojihadism.” Neojihadism is an ideology that can be knocked off and localized within the context of the struggle in Southern Thailand to achieve its own end.
2. Please note the different of ‘Patani’ when referring to the people of Patani or the former Sultanate of Patani, which derives from the Malay language and of ‘Pattani’ when relating to the administrative territorial division.
3. Ulrich Beck, *What Is Globalization?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Gary R. Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: e-Jihad, Online Fatwas, and Cyber Islamic Environments* (London: Pluto Press, 2003); Peter G. Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London: Routledge, 2001); Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Umma* (London: C. Hurst, 2004).
4. Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, *New Media in the Muslim world: The Emerging Public Sphere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).
5. Roy, *Globalised Islam*, p. 180; Peter Lentini, “The Transference of Neojihadism: Towards a Process Theory of Transnational Radicalisation,” in Sayed Khatab, Muhammad Bakashmar, and Ela Ogru, eds., *Radicalisation Crossing Borders: New Directions in Islamist and Jihadist Political, Intellectual and Theological Thought and Practice* (Melbourne: Global Terrorism Research Centre, 2009), p. 23; Gaetano J. Iardi, “Home-Grown Terrorism and Radicalization Activities: More Than Meets the Eye,” *Australian Police Journal* (September 2009), pp. 110–119.
6. Roy, *Globalised Islam*, p. 190.
7. William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America’s Future, 1584 to 2069* (New York: Morrow, 1991); Nan Bahr and Donna Pendergast, *The Millennial Adolescent* (Victoria: Australian Council for Educational Research Press, 2007), pp. 41–70.
8. Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais, *Millennial Makeover: MySpace, YouTube, and the Future of American Politics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), p. 164.
9. Personal interview with Melayu youth, Pattani, July 2008.
10. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2001).
11. Maura Conway and Lisa McInerney, “Jihadi Video and Auto-Radicalisation: Evidence from an Exploratory YouTube Study,” in EuroSI 2008-First European Conference on Intelligence and Security Informatics, 3-5 December 2008, Esbjerg, Denmark, pp. 108–118; Moises Naim, “The YouTube Effect,” *Foreign Policy* (January/February, 2007), pp. 103–104.
12. Naim, “The YouTube Effect.”

13. Aaron Weisburd, "Comparison of Visual Motifs in Jihadi and Cholo Videos on YouTube," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* Vol. 32 (2009), p. 1071.
14. Ilardi, "Home-Grown Terrorism and Radicalization Activities."
15. In the context of this article, the term globalization is defined as the intertwining of the global and the local, a process through which universal ideas are locally interpreted and absorbed according to cultural and historical particularities. It is a process of cultural mixing across locations and identities, which gives rise to a global melange (Pieterse, 2009, pp. 44, 65). This phenomenon known as "glocalization" or "hybridization" (Roland Robertson and JoAnn Chirico, "Humanity, Globalization, and Worldwide Religious Resurgence: A theoretical Exploration," *Sociological Analysis* Vol. 46, No. 3 [Autumn, 1985], pp. 219–242; Ulrich Beck, *What is Globalization?* [Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000]; and Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and culture: Global Melange* [Latham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2009]) is driving political violence in Southern Thailand in unprecedented directions (Virginie Andre, "Southern Thailand: A Cosmic War?" in Sayed Khatab, Muhammad Bakashmar, and Ela Ogru, eds., *Radicalisation Crossing Borders: New Directions in Islamist and Jihadist Political, Intellectual and Theological Thought and Practice* [Melbourne: Global Terrorism Research Center, 2009], pp. 169–189; Virginie Andre, "Globalization: A New Driving Force in Southern Thailand," in David Wright-Neville and Anna Halafoff, eds., *Terrorism and Social Exclusion: Mislplaced Risk - Common Security* [Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2010], pp. 116–135).
16. For full information, please refer to the Computer-Related Crimes Act 2007.
17. The implementation of the act is exemplified in the arrest and imprisonment without bail of a 37-year-old Thai businessman after he posted comments on his political position on Facebook and therefore violated the lèse-majesté law.
18. Report issued by London-based human rights group Privacy International. *Silenced – Thailand*, September 21, 2003. Available at [http://www.privacyinternational.org/article.shtml?cmd\[347\]=x-347-103785](http://www.privacyinternational.org/article.shtml?cmd[347]=x-347-103785) (accessed 17 August 2010).
19. According to the Thai Ministry of Information and Communication Technology's 2006 Internet Web site block list, the sites for which access within Thailand has been blocked are the following: <http://www.pppb.org>; <http://www.pulo1.netfirms.com>; <http://www.pulo99-2000.netfirms.com>; <http://www.puloinfo.net>; <http://www.beritadapatani.mine.nu>; <http://www.geocities.com/beritadaripatani>; <http://www.pattani.news.netfirms.com>; <http://www.pataninews.com>; and <http://www.utusan.netfirms.com>
20. *OpenNet Initiative – Thailand*, June, 2010 Available at <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/thailand>
21. "2008 MICT Secret Thai Blocklists – 1,303 New Websites Blocked," *FACT – Freedom Against Censorship Thailand*, June, 2010. Available at <http://facthai.wordpress.com/2008/12/20/2008-mict-secret-thai-blocklists-1303-new-websites-blocked>
22. Personal interview with Thai military officer, Pattani, July 2008.
23. During my fieldwork in 2007 and 2008, I was able myself to acquire some of these videos for research purposes, some of which I have found posted later on YouTube, notably *Tak Bai* and *Muslim Blood*.
24. Personal interview with Dr. Khunying Pornthip Rojanasunand, Director of the Central Institute of Forensic Science, Ministry of Justice, Bangkok, October 2009.
25. "Thais Monitor Mobiles for Militants," *Agence France Press*, April 20, 2005.
26. I first saw this video during a closed-door briefing with Thai military in Pattani in 2007. From my monitoring of the posting of propaganda material on YouTube, the same video of beheading was posted four times and later removed.
27. Mobile phones are small and portable, easily slipped into one's pocket during combat, and readily accessible for action recording.
28. Once diffused on YouTube, a video clip can also be captured and saved on a computer or a memory stick and can be then shared and reposted online without any limitation.
29. Although physical evidence such as insurgent leaflets, which are scattered across the three Southern-border provinces on a daily basis, remains the most efficient way to reach out to the local community, it is not the safest medium of propaganda, as arrests of local youth charged for the production of subversive cartoons demonstrates. Personal interview with Patani youth, Bangkok, December 2007.
30. Links of Patani YouTube video clips can be found on some radical Indonesian, Malaysian, and Turkish blogs.
31. This category of activity, "search data and news," developed by the National Statistical Office of Thailand, includes the use of YouTube.
32. Duncan McCargo, *Tearing Apart the Land: Islam and Legitimacy in Southern Thailand* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).
33. Virginie Andre, "Southern Thailand: A Cosmic War?" in Sayed Khatab, Muhammad Bakashmar, and Ela Ogru, eds., *Radicalisation Crossing Borders: New Directions in Islamist and Jihadist Political, Intellectual and Theological Thought and Practice* (Melbourne: Global Terrorism Research Center, 2009), pp. 109–189
Virginie Andre, *Localised Neojihadism*, unpublished manuscript; Virginie Andre, "Globalization: A New Driving Force in Southern Thailand," in David Wright-Neville and Anna Halafoff, eds., *Terrorism and Social Exclusion: Mislplaced Risk – Common Security* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2010), pp. 114–135.
34. "Pintu-Pintu Syurga di Pattani Darussalam," PowerPoint presentation, *Pattani Darussalam*, May 12, 2008.
35. Gilles Kepel, Jean-Pierre Milelli, and Pascale Ghazaleh, *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 47; Gilles Kepel, *Al-Qaida dans le Texte* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2005), p. 51.

36. The alliance between the United States and Thailand is often mentioned as a cause to the upsurge of the conflict in the Southern provinces. Thailand is often criticized by Southern Muslims for its close ties with the superpower, especially for its support to the US-led War on Terror. Leaflets depicting Bush and Thaksin were found throughout Pattani. The government arrested and imprisoned individuals for drawing and distributing such material.
37. The article uses the same YouTube video genres category developed by Vergani and Zuev (2009) in their study "Uyghur YouTube: theoretical and methodological issues". Proceedings of 5th International Conference on e-Social Science, Maternushaus, Cologne, Germany, June 24–26 2009. In the context of this study, a predominant genre is the cultural one, mainly musical videos starring traditional Patani performing arts such as the Malay martial arts *punjasilat*, folk dances *rong-ngaeng*, and *diker hulu* and *mayong*.
38. IntelCenter, *Jihadi Master Video Guide* (Alexandria: IntelCenter, 2006), pp. 6–8.
39. Often, videos of explosions or bombs are caught on CCTV cameras of which glimpses are diffused on the national news to finally end up on YouTube, sometimes edited. A "popular" clip titled *Pattani Mother* is a recording caught on CCTV of a Muslim mother hopping on her motorcycle after having securely seated her two young sons, seconds before a bomb detonates.
40. Some of the most popular motion videos since 2004 are probably the ones on the *Tak Bai* incident of November 2004 during which 85 Muslim demonstrators died of suffocation due to the carelessness of Thai security forces. More recently, images of Tak Bai have been re-edited and diffused by Turkish activists on television and the Internet (a number of radical Web sites in Turkish address the Southern issue and have posted photos of beaten faces of Tak Bai protestors). With the increased interest of Turkish activists in the Southern conflict and the recent opening of an orphanage this year by the İnsani Yardım Vakfı nongovernmental organization in Southern Thailand, YouTube videos in Turkish on the conflict are increasing in number.
41. Although the nature of produced videos differs from those described by the IntelCenter, I believe this category is relevant to Patani propaganda. Although the technology available to Southern militants and sympathizers may be more limited than al-Qaeda resources, the process of production, "intensive video editing and graphics work" (IntelCenter, *Jihadi Master Video Guide*, p. 6), remains the same.
42. Before 2009, there were only two Patani YouTube videos in Turkish. Post-2009, five other clips have been posted. One is an interview of Turkish Gerçek Hayat Dergisi journalist Adem Özköse (who was on board the Mavis Marmara Flotilla) on the Ülkede Bugün program of Ülke TV in 2009 explaining the plague of Southern Thai Muslims. Another one is a live interview with Turkish antizionist Adnan Oktar on Güneydoğu Olay TV in May 2010.
43. Only Al Jazeera has had access to the suspected current leadership, namely the National Revolutionary Front-Coordinate.
44. Michael G. Clyne, *Pluricentric Languages: Differing Norms in Different Nations* (Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992), p. 1.
45. Antonio A. Rappa and Lionel Wee, *Language Policy and Modernity in Southeast Asia: Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand* (New York: Springer, 2006), p. 37.
46. Clyne, *Pluricentric Languages*, p. 1.
47. Jennifer Yang Hui, "The Internet in Indonesia: Development and Impact of Radical Websites," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* Vol. 33, No. 2 (2010), p. 175.
48. Angus McIntyre, "The 'Greater Indonesia' Idea of Nationalism in Malaysia and Indonesia," *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 7 (1973), pp. 73–83.
49. Joseph Chinyong Liow, *The Politics of Indonesia–Malaysia Relations: One Kin, Two Nations* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 154.
50. Extract of Patani National Anthem YouTube video.
51. Andre, *Localised Neojihadism*.
52. Wan Kadir Che Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand* (Singapore, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 101.
53. Personal interview with local youth, Pattani, August 2010.
54. Josephin Chinyong Liow, *Islam, Education, and Reform in Southern Thailand: Tradition and Transformation* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), p. 23.
55. Liow, *Islam, Education, and Reform in Southern Thailand*, p. 34.
56. Combating Terrorism Center (CTC), *The Islamic Imagery Project: Visual Motifs in Jihadi Internet Propaganda* (West Point: Combating Terrorism Center, 2006), p. 89.
57. CTC, *The Islamic Imagery Project*, p. 89.
58. CTC, *The Islamic Imagery Project*, p. 90.
59. CTC, *The Islamic Imagery Project*, p. 90.
60. CTC, *The Islamic Imagery Project*, pp. 22–24.
61. Please note that there are many different spellings of the word *keris*. The non-Malay speakers write it "kriss" or "krit." The original Malay spelling has been preserved here.
62. Edward Frey, *The Kris: Mystic Weapon of the Malay World* (Singapore, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 3; Suthiwong Phongphaibun, *Saranukrom watthanatham thai phak tai* [The Encyclopedia of Thai Culture: The South] (Bangkok: Thanakhan Thai Phanit Munnithi Saranukrom Watthanatham Thai, 1999), pp. 112–139.

63. Frey, *The Kris*, p. 24. A *keris* execution, by which the culprit is stabbed through the heart, is perceived to be a fast, bloodless, and merciful death and was preferred over the use of decapitation (Frey, *The Kris*, p. 25).
64. CTC, *The Islamic Imagery Project*, p. 56.
65. Andre, "Southern Thailand: A Cosmic War?"
66. *Sejarah perjuangan Patani* [Bloody History of Patani]. Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ESpWbfmVZKQ&feature=related> (accessed April 2008); *Serajah patani* [Patani Struggle]. Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksEXkqQnFuM&feature=related> (accessed April 2008).
67. Personal interview with Patani Ulama, Yala, June 2008.
68. To reflect the usage of the Arabic term Dal Al-Harb by the community, the Indonesian Malay transliteration of the term has been kept.
69. Andre, *Globalization*.
70. Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 2.
71. Press release by Patani Republic Liberation Front, December 10, 1970; public letter addressed to President of Republic of Korea by National Liberation Front of the Patani Republic, November 7, 1970; press release No. 14, Patani Republic Liberation Front, November 28, 1971.
72. Statement written by separatist militants and published in Human Rights Watch 2007 report. "No One Is Safe: Insurgent Attacks on Civilians in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces," *Human Rights Watch* Vol. 19, No. 13 (2007), p. 45.
73. Extract from YouTube video titled "Patani Merdeka."
74. Andre, *Localised Neojihadism*.
75. Michael Berenbaum and Reuven Firestone, "The Theology of Martyrdom," in Rona M. Fields, ed., *Martyrdom: The Psychology, Theology, and Politics of Self-Sacrifice* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004), p. 141; David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Etan Kohlberg, "Shahid," in Peri Bearman, Thierry Bianquis, C. Edmund Bosworth, Emeri van Donzel, and Wolfharit P. Heinrichs, eds., *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Vol. IX (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 203–207.
76. Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, p. 33.
77. Extract of Patani National Anthem YouTube video.
78. The video first shows a young man sharpening his machete on a rock intoning enthusiastically the poem, followed by pictures of his lifeless bloodied body.
79. Link to the video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W01wtirPXbk&feature=channel> (accessed September 2009).
80. Link to the video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRBLjNs444s> (accessed September 2009).
81. Extract from YouTube video titled "Lagu orang patani bukan terroris" [Patani People Not Terrorists].
82. This is illustrated by a YouTube slideshow titled "Jihad in Pattani," presenting the "results" of attacks conducted by Patani "Mujahedeen" against Thai military.
83. Extract from YouTube video titled "Lagu orang patani bukan terroris" [Patani People Not Terrorists].
84. Extract from YouTube video titled "Free Patani."
85. Andre, "Southern Thailand: A Cosmic War?"
86. Personal interview with Patani youth, Pattani, July 2008.
87. Patani Ulama, personal interview.
88. A pilot test was conducted on a voluntary basis with a control group of five undergraduate Melayu Muslim male students who are regular visitors of YouTube and who have a certain awareness of the violent political environment. Five videos downloaded from YouTube, representatives of different concepts instrumentalized by the insurgency, were projected and discussed with the students. They recognized immediately the messages conveyed by the videos, which evolved around the notion of history, victimization, revolution, jihad, and shuhada.
89. Personal interview with vice-governor Grisada Boonrach of Yala province, Yala, July 2008.
90. Personal interview with Patani youth, Pattani, July 2010.

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