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Memories of collective victimhood and conflict in southern Thailand

Muhammad Arafat Bin Mohamad

This article discusses the views and attitudes of the Malay-speaking Muslims of Thailand's Far South (henceforth, simply the Malays) about their collective position in Thai politics. Since 2004, the Far South, comprising the provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala, has been engulfed in political violence that has claimed several thousand lives. Consequently, the conflict is often the subject of conversations among the Malays. More importantly, the Malays sometimes evoke their collective memory of episodes of past violence involving members of the Far South Malay society and the Thai state in their discussions about contemporary incidents. Why do the Malays hark back to the past when they discuss contemporary political violence? What connections do the Malays make between past and contemporary events? In this article, I discuss Malay collective memory about the Pattani Demonstration of 1975 and the Tomb of Martyrs at the Tok Ayoh Cemetery in Pattani province. I argue that, among the Malays, historic graves in Thailand's Far South are commemorative objects that aid the circulation of stories about collective victimhood pertaining to events such as the Pattani Demonstration. Such stories are central to the maintenance of a shared sense of community among the Malays vis-à-vis the rest of Thai society.

'Their corpses were not washed. They were buried as martyrs,' said Muhammad, a forty-something-year-old Malay resident of Pattani province, Thailand. His remark refers to the Muslim youths who were shot dead by Thailand's security officers on 28 April 2004.[1] These young men had organised themselves into bands and attacked

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1 In Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, ethnicity is often associated with religious identity in everyday speech. A Malay person is often assumed to be Muslim and vice versa. In this article, however, I attempt

security officers at several locations in Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala provinces in the early hours of that fateful day. This incident was the first major event in 2004 which gave clear indications that a broader insurgency had resurfaced in these three southernmost provinces on Thailand's eastern seaboard. For the sake of brevity, I shall refer to these provinces collectively as the 'Far South'.[2]

Some of the people who attended the burial of these men at three collective graves around the Far South said that the respective events were well attended. Muhammad, who was present to observe the interment of nine of the casualties of the Krisek Mosque incident at the Tok Ayoh Cemetery (PM. Kubo Tok Ayoh) in Pattani province, told me that the events of that day reminded some of the attendees about the men who died during the bomb attack on civilian protestors who had gathered in front of the Pattani Provincial Administrative Organisation in 1975.[3] Like the casualties of the 2004 event, some of the protestors who died in 1975 were buried in a collective grave known as the Tomb of Martyrs of 2518 (henceforth, Tomb of Martyrs).[4] Similarly, this tomb is located at the Tok Ayoh Cemetery. Their corpses, too, were not washed prior to their entombment as per the widespread burial practice for martyrs in many Muslim societies.

The Malays refer to the 1975 event as the 'Pattani Demonstration' (PM. *Blarok Taning*). It began on 29 November 1975 when some six young Malay men who were travelling back to their homes in Hutae Brangae Village, Pattani province, were brutally attacked near Kaki Bukit Village in the province of Narathiwat. Their assailants were alleged to be personnel of the Royal Thai Marine Corps (Th. *nāwikyōthinhængrāt`ānāčhakthai*).[5] Five of them died in the horrific violence. The sole survivor subsequently recounted his near-death experience to the villagers who found him and to others who visited him at the hospital.

Various groups of civilians, including activists, quickly organised a demonstration when news of the incident spread. The largest protest ever carried out in the Far South to date, the Pattani Demonstration attracted the interest of scholars from the 1970s to early 2000s, but has largely been overshadowed by the ongoing violence and conflict since 2004.[6] Nevertheless, many participants of the demonstration say

to be precise with my usage of both terms. Where the ethnic associations of the object or person are clear, I shall use the term 'Malay' and where they are not, I use 'Muslim'. Additionally, by these terms I refer to objects and persons in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat only unless otherwise stated.

2 Other terms have been used to refer to these three provinces in academic circles and everyday speech in Thailand. They include: the 'three southern border provinces' (Th. *sāmčhangwatchāidǣnphāktai*) or just 'the South' (Th. *phāktai*). In this article, 'Pattani' refers to the province in Thailand's south, while 'Patani' refers to things and persons that are associated with the Malay kingdom, which once occupied an area that roughly corresponds to the contemporary Far South.

3 I spell Malay place names according to their pronounciation in Patani Malay dialect. The following abbreviations are used for translations: Patani Malay (PM.); Standard Malay (SM.); Thai (Th.). Unlike Standard Malay, Patani Malay has a vowel that is voiced out like the IPA 'ɛ', represented here as 'ae'.

4 The full name of the tomb in Malay is *Makam Shuhada 2518*. '2518' is the Buddhist year which corresponds to 1975 of the Gregorian calendar and 1396 of the Islamic calendar. Most Malays of the Far South defer to the conventions of the Thai Buddhist calendar in their daily lives, like the rest of Thai society. Alternatively, they refer to the Islamic calendar from time to time, especially when discussing religious events.

5 Henceforth, the Royal Thai Marine Corps will be referred to as the 'Marines'.

6 See Mohd. Zamberi Abdul Malek, *Umat Islam Patani: Sejarah dan politik* (Shah Alam: HIZBI, 1993), pp. 292–304; Ahmad Fathy al-Fatani, *Pengantar sejarah Patani* (Alor Setar: Pustaka Darussalam, 1994),

that the frequent incidents that have taken place since 2004 remind them of the Pattani Demonstration of 1975.[7] Most Malays in the Far South learn about their community's history and keep abreast with its current affairs through stories that circulate by word of mouth. The Malays make connections between past and present events, political actors, institutions, and societies in some of these stories. In fact, several of them recounted past incidences of violence involving their community and the Thai state to me without any solicitation, even before the resumption of political violence in 2004. Some of these events are recent, while others date back to the Patani–Siamese wars from the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries. Our conversations about such events have led me to ask: Why do the Malays make connections between past violence and current affairs in the Far South? Put differently, what is the relevance of Malay collective memory to contemporary social life in the Far South? How do places such as the Tomb of Martyrs impact on Malay collective memory and consciousness? Against a backdrop of the relative lack of official tolerance for alternative historical discourse, I argue that the Malay collective memory of violence involving their community and the Thai state become central to the formation and sustenance of their collective consciousness as a marginalised community. Stories about events such as the Pattani Demonstration that circulate among the Malays evoke a sense of collective victimhood, which has been defined as a 'mind-set shared by group members that results from a perceived intentional harm with severe consequences, inflicted on the collective by another group. This harm is viewed as

pp. 188–93; Panomporn Anurugsa, 'Political integration policy in Thailand: The case of the Malay Muslim minority' (PhD diss., University of Texas, 1984), pp. 220–23; Ahmad Omar Chapakia, *Politik dan perjuangan masyarakat Islam di selatan Thailand, 1902–2002* (Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2002), pp. 149–55; Ornanong Noiwong, 'Political integration policies and strategies of the Thai government toward the Malay-Muslims of southernmost Thailand (1973–2000)' (PhD diss., Northern Illinois University, 2001), pp. 148–9; Surin Pitsuwan, *Islam and Malay nationalism: A case study of Malay-Muslims of southern Thailand* (Bangkok: Thai Khadi Research Institute, Thammasat University, 1985), pp. 236–40; Chaiwat Satha-Anand, 'The nonviolent crescent: Eight theses on Muslim nonviolent actions', in *Islam and nonviolence*, ed. Chaiwat Satha-Anand, Glenn D. Paige and Sarah Gilliatt (Honolulu: Center for Global Nonviolence Planning Project, Matsunaga Institute for Peace, University of Hawai'i, 1993), pp. 19–22. Most writings about Thai politics during the 1970s have focused on Bangkok and published accounts of the Pattani Demonstration are fragmented. Recent scholarship on this era has shifted to include other regions of Thailand. See for example: Katherine Ann Bowie, *Rituals of national loyalty: An anthropology of the state and the Village Scout movement in Thailand* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 147–266; Somchai Phatharathananunth, *Civil society and democratization: Social movements in northeast Thailand* (Copenhagen: NIAS, 2006), pp. 55–8; and Tyrell Haberkorn, *Revolution interrupted: Farmers, students, law, and violence in northern Thailand* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011).

7 The Far South has been engulfed in political violence since January 2004 when some militants raided the Narathiwat Ratchanakharin army camp and escaped with more than 400 rifles, pistols, and machine guns. Although the Malays have a long history of rejecting Bangkok's control, the decline of separatist-related violence in the 1990s led many to anticipate a calmer future for this region. Unfortunately, lasting peace has proven to be elusive for the region. The Thai government responded to the raid in 2004 by imposing martial law in the three provinces. This remains in effect. There have been efforts to resolve the conflict through negotiations involving the various militant groups and representatives of the Thai state. However, the peace process has been riddled with obstacles, including the lack of consensus amongst the various militant groups and political instability in Thailand, characterised by several rapid changes in government since 2006, including from a civilian to a military one since June 2014.

undeserved, unjust, and immoral, and one that the group could not prevent'.[8] In this article, I use the phrase 'self-perceived collective victimhood' to describe the widespread belief among the Malays that their community has consistently suffered the injustices of the Thai state. The phrase should not be taken to mean that there are no legitimate grounds for them to view their troubled relationship with the state in such a manner. The discussion that follows in the rest of this article will clarify this point.

The existence of communal historical sites such as the Tomb of Martyrs is not requisite to Far South Malay collective consciousness. Nevertheless, these sites are viewed as important physical references of victimhood that concretise and anchor Malay memories and discourse about their troubled relationship with the Thai state. In subsequent pages, we, first, turn our attention to the Tomb of Martyrs. My observations of the tomb's physical design and analysis of the information presented at the tomb indicate that its designer(s) sought to utilise its symbolic potency to encourage the remembrance of the bomb attack at the Pattani Demonstration as another episode in the history of the Thai state's alleged victimisation of Malay society in the Far South.[9] My interlocutors who experienced the Pattani Demonstration directly and others who are aware of it speak about the tomb's social significance with conviction. Among those who are incognisant of the event, the physical existence of the Tomb of Martyrs has the potential to spark off interest to search for information about the demonstration while also lending weight to perceptions about the plausibility of the stories that they will encounter. Put another way, the tomb adds a sense of concreteness to these stories.

We, then, consider Malay collective memory about the Pattani Demonstration. The Malays often view the event as a clash between two parties, namely the Thai state and its various institutions on one side and the Malay community on the other. The latter is inadvertently portrayed as a relatively helpless victim of the Thai state's power abuses and failure to uphold justice. By remembering the Pattani Demonstration in this manner, the Malays exemplify a trend observed in other protracted conflicts, such as the Palestinian–Israeli one, in terms of the tendency for group members to 'experience a vicarious empathy when they witness or are informed about distress and suffering experienced by compatriots'.[10] The tendency for many Malay individuals to identify and empathise with the Malay victims of violence contributes to the emergence and sustenance of a sense of self-perceived collective victimhood. Some Malays whom I have met since 2002 admit that this phenomenon is quite central to their group identity. They believe that their community's experiences of

8 Daniel Bar-Tal, Lily Chernyak-Hai, Noa Schori and Ayelet Gundar, 'A sense of self-perceived collective victimhood in intractable conflicts', *International Review of the Red Cross* 91, 874 (2009): 229.

9 I have tried to find out the identities of the persons involved in the planning and construction of the Tomb of Martyrs since 2005. My efforts have not been successful. Even those who claim to have assumed some leadership capacity in the demonstration claim that they, too, never knew about the plan to construct the tomb. They assert that the tomb's construction was carried out in secret. However, it might be possible that the people in the Far South, including my interlocutors, are simply not willing to divulge such information for fear of their personal safety and that of those involved in planning and constructing the tomb.

10 Bar-Tal et al., 'A sense of self-perceived collective victimhood in intractable conflicts': 235.

collective victimhood sets them apart from other ethnic communities that constitute Thai society as well as the Malays in other parts of Southeast Asia.

The data and arguments presented in this article have been collected and developed over more than a decade. Since 2002, I have been engaged in various activities, including field research, community work, teaching, and even leisure in the Far South. Most notably, I have lived there continuously while conducting field research from May to November 2005, June 2010 to November 2011, and May to July 2012. In addition, since 2002, I have also continued to make several visits each year, generally ranging between one to two weeks and sometimes for one month or more. In other words, the area is more than just a research fieldsite for me. Many of my interlocutors now count as personal friends. While social awkwardness often poses a challenge for the newly-arrived field researcher, the relationships I have developed with many of my interlocutors have made us rather comfortable about discussing issues in critical ways. Our conversations have often been characterised by exchanges of ideas and opinions rather than the question and answer mode of interviews.

My interest in various issues pertaining to the Far South, including the Pattani Demonstration and the Tomb of Martyrs, which I began researching in 2005, has been shaped by my discussions with various interlocutors. Such discussions range from small talk to semi-formal and formal interviews that may extend to several hours at a time. Since the outbreak of the ongoing political violence in 2004, I have also attended numerous meetings and workshops among community workers, peace advocates, and activists, as well as bureaucrats. Thus, it is through extensive interaction with members of the Malay community that I have observed the pervasive and shared sense of self-perceived collective victimhood. The following words spoken by Ismail, an electrician in his fifties, during my visit in May 2015, encapsulate how individual Malays empathise with the pain and grief of other members of the community who have been injured or directly suffered the loss of loved ones:

> Think of the Malay society here as a human body. When one body part is hurt, the pain may affect other parts of the body. Sometimes when a toe becomes wounded, the head also feels the pain. Alternatively, when a person becomes sick with flu, the whole body feels weak. Likewise, when a couple loses their child, other people feel the pain too. This is what many of us in the community feel. An attack on one of us is like an attack on all of us. Of course, there is nothing much that we can do. So, we just go about our daily lives. Even so, we keep our anger and sadness inside our hearts.

Place and collective memory: The Tomb of Martyrs

Old places and buildings figure rather prominently in the collective consciousness of the Malays in the Far South. Since 2002, I have come across many Malays who cite the existence of old mosques such as the centuries-old Krisek Mosque and Wadi al-Hussin Mosque (also known as Masjid Telok Manok), palaces such as the ones at Cabae Tigo and Saiburi in Pattani, and the tombs of Malay royalty such as Sultan Ismail Shah (also known as Makam Berahom) in Parit Village and Muslim saints such as Tok Panjae in Datok Village, to support their collective narrative about the independence of the Malay-Muslim kingdom of Patani before its

invasion by Siamese armies in the late eighteenth century.[11] Encouraged by the nodding of her peers, an undergraduate named Fatimah whom I met in Pattani in May 2015 said:

> From my childhood days, my parents have said to me, 'Remember, our society was not like this in the past. We were not under the rule of the Siyae.'[12] They say that we were an Islamic nation. We were ruled by Malay rajas. Then, they tell us the names of some old mosques, the graves of the rajas, other historical places, and some stories about events that happened in the past.

Fatimah's revelation that Malay parents point out certain places in the Far South when they educate their children about political independence from Thai rule in the past highlights the importance that they accord to places in the production and sustenance of collective memory.

In his essay about Halbwachsian notions on the relationship between place and memory, Gérôme Truc writes:

> In *La Mémoire collective*, Halbwachs makes the following crucial statement: 'places play a part in the stability of material things and it is in settling in them, enclosing itself within their limits and bending its attitude to suit them, that the collective thinking of the group of believers is most able to become fixed and to last: such is the condition of memory.'[13]

To Maurice Halbwachs, then, memory is more enduring when it can be coupled with place. The fact that place is socially constructed and semantically malleable makes it possible for place to provide a steadiness to the memories which a group associates with the things and spaces they circumscribe. For this reason, the politics of memory often involves a struggle over space, especially in terms of the meanings that a person or group associates with a particular space and how they go about doing it.

One type of place that may aid the production of collective memory is the cemetery. Cemeteries are fertile grounds for social research as they are filled with objects that lend themselves to meaning-making by members of society as they examine and realign their connections to the past and amongst themselves in the present.[14] In the Far South, many Malay children are introduced to the cemetery by their parents, usually their fathers. During their initial visits to the cemetery, Malay children are often informed about their relationships to the various persons buried there. Through this process, the children learn about the ties that connect them and other members of their community, as well as their community's membership of a

11 For an account of the contending mainstream Thai and Malay discourses about Patani's history, see: Thanet Aphornsuvan, *Rebellion in southern Thailand: Contending histories* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies; Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2007).

12 In our conversations, my interlocutors use the Thai word *ratthai* or the Patani-Malay word *Siyae* to refer to the Thai state. However, it is important to note that Siyae may also refer to the Thai people in a general sense. Thus, I often ask my interlocutors to clarify their usage of the term whenever its referent is ambiguous to me.

13 Gérôme Truc, 'Memory of places and places of memory: For a Halbwachsian socio-ethnography of collective memory', *International Social Science Journal* 62, 203–4 (2011): 149.

14 Doris Francis, Leonie Kellaher and Georgina Neophytou, 'The cemetery: A site for the construction of memory, identity, and ethnicity', in *Social memory and history: Anthropological perspectives*, ed. Jacob Climo and Maria G. Cattell (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2002), pp. 95–110.

society that is perceived to comprise all the Malays of the Far South. In other words, we might view such visits as an activity that cultivates Malay collective consciousness. Recall the words of Fatimah about the Malay parents' admonition of the child, which is done in the hope that the Malay child never forgets the perceived lost sovereignty of the Malays. The mention of graves, along with mosques and palaces, clearly shows that these places are prominent signifiers of Malayness in the Far South.

Many Far South Malays consider the Tok Ayoh Cemetery along with the Cabae Tigo Palace (PM. Koto Rajo Cabae Tigo) and the Royal Mosque (PM. Masjid Rajo) as indexes of a nostalgic past during which political power in the area was held by individuals and institutions within the Malay social fabric. The social gravity of this perception about the past is exemplified by the preference of some Malay residents of Pattani town to attend congregational prayers at the Royal Mosque over the Pattani Central Mosque because the latter, which was built using funds provided by the Thai state, is sometimes viewed as a symbol of Thai political dominance.

Some of my Malay interlocutors assert that the Tok Ayoh Cemetery is a place of historical importance to their community. The cemetery's visitors are immediately greeted with a view of several concrete gated enclosures upon entering its grounds. The largest of these enclosures contains the graves of Patanian royalty. Located in the other enclosures are the graves of the members of prominent families who have been granted the privilege of sectioning parts of the cemetery by the Patanian royal family.

I began my involvement in the Far South in 2002 while doing community work at Datok Village, where the tomb of Tok Panjae, which is famous among the Malays, is located. This aspect of my personal history and my subsequent observation of the tendency of various individuals to mention certain cemeteries and graves when discussing their community's history stirred my interest to conduct research about cemeteries in the Far South. My curiosity about the Tok Ayoh Cemetery was ignited during a conversation with Mukhtar, then a thirty-year-old farmer, during the exploratory stage of my research in December 2004. He had suggested at that time that I would see a 'physical marker of Siamese cruelty [PM. *kesae kezolimae Siyae*]' if I visited the cemetery.[15]

Mukhtar was, in fact, alluding to the Tomb of Martyrs. This tomb's eye-catching physical attributes make it the most prominent grave which is located outside the various enclosed sections of the Tok Ayoh Cemetery. Unlike most of the other graves there which only had a pair of matching stone markers, the Tomb of Martyrs stands approximately one metre tall with brown-tiled walls. In the Far South, Muslim tombs of such physical prominence are typically reserved for those of high social standing or religious repute. The four pairs of gravestones aligned at the top also make the Tomb of Martyrs unique. I am unaware of any older Muslim grave in the Far South that has more than a pair of markers. Their identical shapes and sizes hint at the comradeship of the four people laid to rest there and the shared timing of their burial. The tomb also stands out visually because of its colours. The colourful combination of red,

15 'Siamese cruelty', or *kezolimae Siyae* as Mukhtar said in Patani-Malay, refers to the collective victimisation of the Far South Malays by Siam and its armies in the past and subsequently, the modern Thai state, as perceived by many Malays.

Figure 1. The Tomb of Martyrs (Photograph taken by author)

green, and white, which the tomb is painted in, makes it prominent, especially against the background of the dull concrete-grey gates of the Tok Ayoh Cemetery. Owing to its unusual aesthetics, the Tomb of Martyrs appears to be beckoning the cemetery's visitors.

Upon approaching the tomb, visitors encounter a barrier comprising one-foot-high concrete columns linked together by metal chains, which appear to cordon off this part of the cemetery. This creates a sense of solemnity around the tomb. This wedging of physical distance between the tomb and its visitors steers them into treating it with some respect.

The Tomb of Martyr's distinctive design clearly aims to impress its importance on the cemetery's visitors. Resembling a historical monument, the Tomb of Martyrs is a commemorative object which owes its existence to something past while simultaneously being oriented towards the future. Alois Riegl has asserted that the monument 'in its oldest and most original sense is a human creation, erected for the specific purpose of keeping single human deeds or events (or a combination thereof) alive in the minds of future generations'.[16] Lucia Volk takes Riegl's point further by suggesting that monuments often refer to 'an event in history not in a detached, analytical, backward-looking way but in a vested and forward-looking

16 Alois Riegl, 'The modern cult of monuments: Its character and its origins, trans. by Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo', in *Oppositions reader: Selected readings from a journal for ideas and criticism in architecture, 1973–1984*, ed. K. Michael Hays (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), p. 621.

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manner'.[17] Following Volk, we may assert that the monument lends itself to the process of narrating the past in ways that serve its creators' present and future goals. Benedict Anderson puts this point across eloquently:

> It is a peculiarity of monuments of this type that, by and large, they face two ways in time. Normally they commemorate events or experiences in the past, but at the same time they are intended, in their allweather durability, for posterity. Most are expected to outlive their constructors, and so partly take on the aspect of a bequest or testament. This means that monuments are really ways of mediating between particular types of pasts and futures.[18]

In other words, Anderson suggests that monuments are didactic places that enable the construction of perceptions of certain pasts to shape people's opinions and actions in the present and the futures that they should strive for. To achieve this, Riegl observes that a monument's designers might combine literary means with visual manipulation to increase its efficacy as a commemorative object. He remarks that a monument:

> can be artistic or literary, depending on whether the event to be remembered is brought to the viewer's consciousness by means of the visual arts or with the help of inscriptions. Most of the time both genres are used simultaneously.[19]

The design of the Tomb of Martyrs mirrors Riegl's point as both literary and visual means are used to enhance its communicative efficacy. The tomb provides some information about the persons and events that it commemorates. This information is strategically located on the façade of the tomb's cubic structure facing the only footpath from which a visitor may approach it. The names, villages, and provincial origins of the four people interred in the tomb are engraved and painted in white letters on four green concrete slabs. These slabs are placed beside one another at the foot of the individual grave markers. The information is provided in Thai as well as Malay, which is written in the Arabic-derived Jawi script. The description reads as follows:

1. Ajarn Ismail Wan Doloh of Telubok (Pattani),
2. Afandi Mat Rashid of Bangnara (Narathiwat),
3. Hasbullah bin Ibrahim (Tok Yeng) of Kedai Burok (Yala),
4. Harun Muhammad of Kampong Melayu-Bangkok (Yala).

On the side of the tomb which is directly underneath the slabs, a tablet with the same combination of colours provides the details for the seven other persons who died during the event. It states that these seven persons are buried in their respective villages. The final words on this tablet are 'Built on 9 Muharram 1396'.[20] Above the names of the seven other casualties are two critical expressions, one in Thai and the other in

17 Lucia Volk, *Memorials and martyrs in modern Lebanon* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 4.
18 Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Language and power: Exploring political cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 174.
19 Riegl, 'The modern cult of monuments', p. 621.
20 The given date is based on the Islamic calendar. It corresponds with 11 Jan. 1976.

Malay, which reveal the tomb's creators' wish regarding the way in which the 1975 event and the listed persons are to be remembered. The Thai-language section on the left-hand side of the slab begins as follows: 'Name List of the Martyred Warriors of 13 Thanwakhom 2518 at 1940 hours'.[21] The Malay section starts by naming the grave as 'The Tomb of Martyrs of the Tragedy of 13 Thanwakhom 2518 = 10 Dhu al-Hijja 1395 at 7.40pm. 11 lives were lost.'[22] In naming the Tomb of Martyrs as such, the designers of the tomb were, in effect, conferring martyrdom on the 11 persons with the aim that they would be remembered as heroes. Furthermore, the choice of the Malay term *makam*, which is typically reserved for the burial sites of prophets, saints, and sultans, to label the tomb mirrors its extraordinary physical design.

The Arabic-derived Malay words *shuhada* and *shahid* are also invested with religious meaning.[23] Among the Far South Malays, as in many other Muslim societies, *shuhada* refers to religious martyrs or those who have died in the struggle to defend the Islamic way of life. In the Quran, martyrs are promised an eternal place in heaven. Therefore, to become a martyr is highly coveted, but a destiny that most people feel they are unlikely to achieve. In other words, the martyrdom conferred on the 11 named persons is something to be admired.

I observe, however, that there is no consensus regarding what constitutes a martyr's death in the Far South. There are some Malays who believe that one needs to die in a religious struggle to be considered a martyr. What qualifies as a struggle for the religion, however, is vague. In the case of the Pattani Demonstration, some of my interlocutors raised doubts about whether the victims had indeed died as martyrs. Muhammad, a former teacher at his village's weekend religious school, says that the demonstration revolved around secular issues. As such, he is uncertain about their status as martyrs. Others who agree with the decision assert that the victims died while defending the Far South Muslims' right to justice. According to Muhammad, most of the Malays believe that God is the ultimate arbiter of martyrdom. Consequently, they often avoid any extended technical debate about the issue.

The lack of agreement about the victims' martyrdom does not detract from the fact that the Tomb of Martyrs was clearly constructed as a site of memory. However, one might wonder about the commemorative efficacy of this tomb. There are two spatial frameworks of memory in Halbwachsian thought about collective memory — material and symbolic.[24] In the material spatial framework, the production and maintenance of memory depend on the existence of material objects, including monuments, houses, streets, and museums, among others. However, physical objects and structures are susceptible to physical change and even destruction. Consequently, Truc asserts that if memory were solely dependent on the material characteristics of a place and objects associated with it then it is 'always living on borrowed time'.[25] The symbolic spatial framework of memory, on the other hand, purports that memory depends heavily on imagined realities about places and objects.

21 Th. *rāichūwīrachonphūplīchīp mūa 13 thanwākhom 2518 wēlā 19.40.*

22 SM. *Shuhada Trajedi Pada Hari 13 Thanwakhom 2518 = 10 Dhu al-Hijja 1395 Pada Jam 7.40 malam. 11 Jiwa Terkorban.*

23 The Malay word *shahid* is loaned from the Arabic *shaheed* (sing.) and *shuhada* (pl.).

24 Truc, 'Memory of places and places of memory'.

25 Ibid.: 149.

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According to Halbwachs, 'The notion of a neighbouring street is more familiar, but it is a notion. The image of the distant monument is less familiar, but it is a living image.'[26] In other words, memories may survive long after the destruction or modification of the places that they are coupled to. It follows then that the symbolic function of place might, in fact, be more robust in sustaining memory than its materiality.

Many of the Malays who participated in the Pattani Demonstration are well aware of the Tomb of Martyrs' existence. All my interlocutors answered in the affirmative when asked if they considered the tomb to be an important object. This includes those who have never visited the tomb, but know of its existence. Some of them assert that the tomb provides a sense of concreteness and realness to the stories about the Pattani Demonstration that circulate in their community. Aminah, a fifty-something-year-old seamstress who participates actively in a women's rights group, said:

> I have never visited the tomb, but I think that it is important. We are lucky that someone decided to construct the tomb like that. So, when we discuss about incidents that happen in the past like the Pattani Demonstration, we can say, 'Look at the Tomb of Martyrs'. These things are the physical proofs that the events really took place and not just mere tales.

The significance of Aminah's words can be observed among many Malays who were not yet born or were too young during the Pattani Demonstration to possess personal memories of the event. They include Mukhtar, who was the first person to direct my attention to the event and the Tomb of Martyrs. He was still an infant when the demonstration took place in December 1975. Nevertheless, he spoke with conviction about the tomb's socio-historical significance. I have met many young Malays like Mukhtar who are aware of the tomb and view it as a monument of a painful episode in their community's history.

There are, however, Malay youths who know of neither the Pattani Demonstration nor the Tomb of Martyrs. For example, all except one person in the group comprising Fatimah and her friends whom I met in May 2015 were unaware of the event and the tomb. Nevertheless, they became curious and wanted to know about the event and the tomb. Ismail, who was present during the conversation, then related a brief account of the Pattani Demonstration. During Ismail's recounting of the event, Fatimah and her friends listened attentively. When asked for their thoughts and feelings about what they had just heard from Ismail, they said that they felt saddened by what had happened. However, they were not particularly surprised, since the story mirrored other episodes of violence between the Far South Malays and the Thai military. Their similar reactions to Ismail's retelling of the Pattani Demonstration corroborates my earlier assertion that a shared perception of victimhood pervades Far South Malay collective memory.

Many Malays have told me that they learn about the past through the recollections of other members of society. Ismail's recounting of the Pattani Demonstration to Fatimah and her peers that night in May 2015 illustrates this process clearly. Nadia, another undergraduate who was present, said:

26 Ibid.: 149.

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> I think that old places like the Tomb of Martyrs are important. Sometimes even the (ethnic) Thai professors here ask us, 'Are you sure that these stories that you hear from the older people are true? Did these incidents really happen?'. When we do not know about the histories and existence of these old places, we cannot answer them with confidence. We believe that our parents are not spreading lies. But, how do we respond to people who question the truth of the stories that we hear? I am going to find out more about the Pattani Demonstration. The tomb cannot exist if something did not happen, right?

Place and memory are thus connected in a circular relationship.[27] For example, a monument may provide memory with a sense of concreteness. Memory, in turn, contours the monument's meaning. For many Far South Malays, the Tomb of Martyrs is a place that they associate with their collective victimisation by the Thai state. Amongst those who are unaware of the Pattani Demonstration or the Tomb of Martyrs like Fatimah and Nadia, learning about the tomb's existence might ignite their curiosity about the historical event and the tomb itself. Furthermore, the existence of the tomb makes the Malays inclined to believe the stories about the past that have been orally transmitted by the older generation even when others raise doubts about the accuracy of such stories.

Memories of collective victimhood

In recent decades, scholars of nationalism have paid much attention to the use of the past as political resource, especially by the state.[28] For the Thai case, Maurizio Peleggi and Thongchai Winichakul have argued that official historical narratives have been influenced by the Bangkok-based ruling elites' political interests, including for the purposes of encouraging patriotism, nation-building, and national pride.[29] Thongchai demonstrated that the mapping of a geographically-bounded Thai territory was central to the political reorganisation of Thai society from a feudal to a modern state in the late nineteenth century.[30] He added that the forging of a national memory based on the espousal of a unitary nationalist history that serves the centralising interests of the Bangkok rulers has been vital to the long-term endurance of the modern Thai state. Patrick Jory eloquently summed up what Thongchai has since called a 'royalist-nationalist history' as 'the straitjacket which restrains any attempt to present a revisionist interpretation of Thai history'.[31] Nevertheless, the process of shaping national memory has not been free from challenge. The struggle over Far South Malay collective memory is a case in point.

27 Robert S. Nelson and Margaret Rose Olin, 'Introduction', in *Monuments and memory, made and unmade*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Margaret Rose Olin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 1–10.

28 See various contributions in: *The invention of tradition*, ed. Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

29 Maurizio Peleggi, *The politics of ruins and the business of nostalgia* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2002); Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam mapped: A history of the geo-body of a nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997).

30 Winichakul, *Siam mapped*, pp. 140–65.

31 Patrick Jory, 'Problems in contemporary Thai nationalist historiography', *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*, http://kyotoreview.org/issue-3-nations-and-stories/problems-in-contemporary-thai-nationalist-historiography (last accessed 1 Jul. 2015).

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'All lies! Their [Thailand's official] version of history is filled with lies. This is what we were taught in school, and this is what our children are taught now,' said Ismail during our conversation in Pattani in September 2014. Thanet Aphornsuvan asserts that Thailand's official narrative about the history of the Far South Malays and the latter's own narratives are at odds. He writes:

> From the Thai nationalist view, Patani was ruled by Siam, and this 'fact' serves to justify the Thai government view (one that is now shared by the great majority of Thais as well) that Patani was always 'under' the Thais; hence the provinces that made up the former Kingdom of Patani belong to Thailand.[32]

Consequently, the history of the violent clashes between the state's troops and the Malays is viewed as a history of internal rebellions in the dominant perspective of the Thais. The Malays, on the other hand, perceive the Thais as invaders of their homeland, according to Thanet. The history of their community's integration into the modern Thai nation is fraught with accounts of Siamese invasion and subsequent state coercion, encroachment into their religious and social life, as well as excessive use of force to thwart the efforts of Malay leaders seeking redress for their community. The collective memory of the Malays is poignantly full of stories about conflicts in which they deem the Thai state as the aggressor and their community as the victim. In short, theirs is a history of self-perceived collective victimhood.

Thanet's point about the conflicting historical perspectives of the Thais and the Malays of the Far South matches my own observations. However, Thanet relies almost exclusively on textual sources. Aside from a handful of scholars, most of my Malay interlocutors readily admit that they have never read a single book about Patani history. They assert that it is highly probable that most Far South Malays know nothing of these texts, let alone their contents. Thanet does not show how the Far South Malays relate to the historical events mentioned in his text at either the personal or collective levels. The data that I have gathered through ethnographic fieldwork, however, begs for this process to be discussed.

Alessandro Portelli has argued that oral history has the potential to contribute to a richer understanding of the past.[33] According to him, skilfully executed oral historiography requires that attention be paid to the 'orality' of oral sources — their tone, volume, rhythm, and style of speech, among other elements. Such careful and critical treatment of oral sources might uncover not only the historical narratives of marginalised individuals and communities, but also their beliefs and attitudes about the past. Underlining the elitism that lends weight to social position and power on our perceptions about the credibility of historical sources, Portelli asserts that there is a tendency to privilege written accounts of the past vis-à-vis oral ones even though 'very often, written documents are only the uncontrolled transmission of unidentified oral sources'.[34]

32 Aphornsuvan, *Rebellion in southern Thailand*, p. 7.
33 Alessandro Portelli, 'What makes oral history different', in *The oral history reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 63–74.
34 Ibid., p. 68.

Portelli's treatise about the usefulness of oral history is especially germane to the historiography of the Far South, where oral and textual histories are not always as distinct as one might think. Owing to the dearth of primary textual sources, historians writing about the area often have little recourse but to rely on oral accounts. Published texts that mention the Pattani Demonstration narrate the event in line with written conventions whose clarity tends to obscure the fragmentary nature of the sources — and that the data mostly comes from oral accounts.[35] Here, I weave these fragments of information gathered from oral sources with textual ones to show how the Malays of the Far South remember the Pattani Demonstration. I do not aim to produce the most comprehensive account. Nor can I claim to provide the most objective account of the event. Instead, my goal is to discuss Malay collective memory about the Pattani Demonstration so that we might arrive at a better understanding of their perception of their community's position in contemporary Thai society. I rely largely on the primary data that I have collected through formal and semi-formal interviews with various interlocutors in the Far South. However, oral historical accounts of the Pattani Demonstration usually emphasise its significance rather than provide a detailed narrative of the way the event unfolded. Consequently, I still refer to available publications to fill gaps in factual data about the event.

Malay narratives about the Pattani Demonstration simultaneously feed and have been shaped by their sense of collective victimhood. The Pattani Demonstration is portrayed as a conflict involving two opposing sides — the Thai state and the Far South Malays — in nearly all the narrations that I have encountered. The Thai state, through the actions of its security personnel, is portrayed as the aggressor, while the Malays are depicted as victims who are equipped with little more than a strong desire for justice. This approach to narrating the Pattani Demonstration fits neatly with Malay collective narratives of other episodes of conflict between their community and the Thai state. In fact, some of my Malay interlocutors have repeatedly told me that the Pattani Demonstration should be placed in a chronology of clashes between their community and the Thai state, including the Patani–Siamese wars (1785–1839), Dusun Nyior Rebellion (1948), the murder of Haji Sulong (1954), the massacres at Krisek Mosque and Tak Bai in April and October 2004, respectively, as well as various other incidents up to the present.

Many of my interlocutors began their recounting of the Pattani Demonstration with the attack on the six Malay men, allegedly by Thai military personnel, on 29 November 1975. Mohd. Zamberi Abdul Malek claims that the six victims were brought to a temple where they were instructed to worship a Buddha statue.[36] When the abductees refused to comply with their demands, the perpetrators walloped and stabbed them with bayonets. He also alleges that one of the victims was dragged along the road and then run over with an armoured vehicle. According to Chaiwat Satha-Anand, the men were stabbed in the back, and their skulls were crushed.[37] The six victims were then dumped into the Saiburi River near the Koto Bridge.[38]

35 See: Abdul Malek, *Umat Islam Patani*, pp. 292–304; Fathy al-Fatani, *Pengantar sejarah Patani*, 188–93; Anurugsa, 'Political integration policy in Thailand', pp. 220–23; Chapakia, *Politik dan perjuangan masyarakat Islam di Selatan Thailand*, pp. 149–55; Pitsuwan, *Islam and Malay nationalism*, pp. 236–40.
36 Abdul Malek, *Umat Islam Patani*, p. 292.
37 Satha-Anand, 'The nonviolent crescent', p. 19.
38 Ibid.

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The sole survivor of this horrific attack was a fifteen-year-old boy, who subsequently recounted the incident to others. The Governor of Pattani province at that time argued that the boy's description of the perpetrators' attire cast doubts over the allegation that they were Marines.[39] Panomporn Anurugsa disagrees and asserts that 'the description from the survivor of the murderers' clothes, the military jeep, and conversations suggest that the perpetrators were personnel of the Marines'.[40] Moreover, it appears that such acts of violence and extra-judicial killings were not unheard of.[41] In 2005, I followed members of Thailand's National Reconciliation Commission on their visits to the families of several Malay men who have allegedly gone missing after following orders to report in person to various police stations across the Far South.[42]

News of the events of 29 November 1975 spread rapidly. By early December, the killings had attracted the attention of a student organisation known as the Southern Group (PM. Klum Selatae), which comprised students from the Far South who were enrolled at various universities in Bangkok. This group's membership overlapped with the National Students Council of Thailand, which had been instrumental in bringing down the military dictatorship of Field Marshall Thanom Kittikachorn just two years earlier.[43] The Southern Group held a meeting on 6 December 1975 to discuss the ongoing discontent in Pattani.[44] The congregation chose 11 representatives who were dispatched to Pattani the following day on a fact-finding mission.

Awang, a retired fisherman in his seventies, recalls the political atmosphere during that period. Many people in the Far South felt encouraged by the political developments that had led to the transfer of power from military to civilian government following the student-led protests in 1973. His fellow villagers began to follow the events occurring around Thailand as reported in the newspapers because they believed that their voices would finally be heard. He said:

> After the student leaders forced the military government out in the fifteenth year [2515 of the Buddhist calendar or 1973] many people became interested in discussing politics. The students, they were a strong group. If the event in the fifteenth year did not occur, the Pattani Demonstration would not have taken place too.

39 Anurugsa, 'Political integration policy in Thailand', pp. 220.
40 Ibid., pp. 220–21.
41 This situation has continued until recent times, see: National Reconciliation Commission, (NRC), *Overcoming violence through the power of reconciliation: Report of the National Reconciliation Commissio* (Bangkok: NRC, 2006), pp. 18, 45–6.
42 In 1954, a prominent Malay-Muslim religious scholar named Haji Sulong Abdulkadir disappeared after reporting to a police station in Songkhla province. He is believed to have been murdered by officers of the state. His disappearance has been a constant source of Malay distrust of the Thai state. See: James Ockey, 'Individual imaginings: The religio-nationalist pilgrimages of Haji Sulong Abdulkadir al-Fatani', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 42, 1 (2011): 89–119.
43 For accounts of Thai politics and student movements during the turbulent years from 1973–76, see: Bowie, *Rituals of national loyalty*; Haberkorn, *Revolution interrupted*; Sudarat Musikawong, 'Between celebration and mourning: Political violence in Thailand in the 1970s', in *Toward a sociology of the trace*, ed. Herman Gray and Macarena Gómez-Barris (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), pp. 257–87; Phatharathananunth, *Civil society and democratization*; Thongchai Winichakul, 'Remembering/Silencing the traumatic past: The ambivalent memories of the October 1976 massacre in Bangkok', in *Cultural crisis and social memory: Modernity and identity in Thailand and Laos*, ed. Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles F. Keyes (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), pp. 243–82.
44 Chapakia, *Politik dan perjuangan masyarakat Islam di selatan Thailand*, p. 150.

The military was immediately wary of the student activists' involvement, especially in view of their part in the recent political turbulence in Bangkok. Lieutenant-General Sant Chitpatima, then Commanding Officer of the Royal Thai Army's Fourth Region, whose coverage includes the Far South, pre-empted the outbreak of massive protests by entering into negotiations with the victims' families. However, this move proved ineffectual as the families held firm to their demands that the government arrest and punish the perpetrators of the attack on the six young men.

The victims' families and their supporters reacted to the failed negotiations by staging a mass protest in front of the Pattani Provincial Administrative Organisation building on 11 December 1975. The first day of the demonstration drew more than 1,000 participants.[45] With the Southern Group's assistance, the protestors established the People's Defence Centre (PDC) to coordinate the burgeoning demonstration.[46] Other members of the PDC included university-student activists and some academics. Collectively, they demanded that the government admit to the allegation that military personnel were indeed responsible for the murders on 29 November 1975. The government was asked to arrest and punish the officers involved. The victims' families were also to be compensated for their loss. Additionally, the prime minister, Kukrit Pramoj, was asked to accept the petition in person. He was also urged to conduct a review of the various administrative institutions in the three provinces, whose perceived inefficiency had long been a sore point among the Malays.

The demonstrators organised a procession after the Friday congregational prayers the next day. They carried effigies of the victims as they marched around Pattani town. Awang recalls the procession's massive scale, 'There were so many of us that day. Imagine this, when the head of the procession had finished walking around the old part of Pattani town and reached the starting point, the tail end had not even moved off.'

Ismail and Muhammad participated in the ill-fated protests in December 1975. Both of them became motivated to join the protest after hearing rumours that the military had killed several Malay youths on a whim. Both men said that they were awed by the size of the crowd that had gathered in front of the Pattani Provincial Administrative Organisation. For them, the Pattani Demonstration was significant because it displayed the solidarity of the Far South Malays. Ismail recounted the extensive logistical cooperation throughout the protest:

> I can still remember the womenfolk in my community coming together to prepare food for the demonstrators. When we arrived, we distributed the food to anyone within reach, regardless of the villages that they came from. For me, this was one of the things that made the Pattani Demonstration memorable. For the first time in my life, what I saw with my own eyes proved to me that the people of the three provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, are one.

The third day of the Pattani Demonstration (13 December 1975) coincided with the Islamic celebration of 'Eid al-Adha. The crowd continued to swell as throngs of people came to the protest in a show of solidarity with the organisers, who took the

45 Fathy al-Fatani, *Pengantar sejarah Patani*, p. 189.
46 Th. *sūnkānpǭngkanprachāchon*; SM. Pusat Pembela Rakyat.

opportunity to hold mass 'Eid al-Adha prayers at the site. Today, many of the Malay demonstrators remember their loud, continuous, and synchronised recitation of *takbeer al-'eid* throughout the day.[47] The police and military reacted by blockading the city to prevent more people from joining the protest and to halt the donations of supplies to the protestors.

The protest leaders took turns delivering speeches throughout the day. At about 7.40 p.m., a bomb exploded while the crowd was listening to a panel discussion.[48] Gunfire then filled the air and chaos quickly spread as the crowd panicked. A religious teacher, Mahmud Abdul Latif, hurriedly approached the microphone and began to recite the *azan* (call to prayer), purportedly to calm the atmosphere.[49] He was shot and died instantaneously. During the escalating panic, police and military personnel moved in swiftly to occupy the PDC's operations centre.

There is no consensus about the death toll from the December 1975 tragedy. The sign at the Tomb of Martyrs claims that eleven persons died. Chaiwat alleges that the incident claimed twelve lives while thirty persons were injured, including seven women and children.[50] Ahmad Omar Chapakia cites a Thai-language newspaper, the *Daily News*, which reported thirteen deaths and five injuries.[51] Panomporn reports eighteen fatalities and more than forty wounded.[52] Mohd. Zamberi claims that eight protestors died immediately, while six others died on the way to the hospital, and another seven died while receiving treatment in the hospital; approximately fifty persons sustained serious injuries.[53]

Wan Yusof, a man in his sixties whom Ismail introduced to me, gave the most heart-rending account of the events of 13 December 1975. Finding an appropriate time and place to meet up with Wan Yusof was difficult as he was uncomfortable with the unnecessary attention that we might attract should we visit him at home. He claims that Thailand's security personnel have monitored him since his involvement in the Pattani Demonstration, especially after the resurgence of violence in 2004. They have also searched his home on several occasions.[54] I finally met Wan Yusof at the market one morning in August 2005. Wan Yusof described the 13 December 1975 incident:

47 The *takbeer* is an invocation that proclaims a Muslim's faith in the greatness of God. The *takbeer al-'eid* is a formulaic invocation that is only recited during the two annual Islamic celebrations known as the *'Eid al-Fitr* and *'Eid al-Adha*.

48 Mohd. Zamberi alleges that there were actually three explosions. See: Abdul Malek, *Umat Islam Patani*, p. 295.

49 Ibid.

50 Satha-Anand, 'The nonviolent crescent', p. 19.

51 Chapakia, *Politik dan perjuangan masyarakat Islam di Selatan Thailand*, p. 152.

52 Anurugsa, 'Political integration policy in Thailand', p. 221.

53 Abdul Malek, *Umat Islam Patani*, p. 295.

54 Many Malays in the Far South have made claims about such surveillance. In a brief essay, Rosidah Da-oh, a forty-something-year-old female resident of Pattani, recounts the attempts of Thailand's security personnel to coerce her father, a religious teacher, to admit to his alleged involvement in the organising of the Pattani Demonstration during visits to their home. Fearing for his personal safety, her father fled to live in neighbouring Malaysia eventually. See: Rosida Da-Oh and Rohani Juenara, 'phændinnīphūathœ̄ [This land is for you], in *Sīang khp̣ng khwāmwang: rūang lao khp̣ng phūying phūa krabūankān santiphāp chāidǣn Tai* [Voices of hope: Stories of women in the Southern border peace process], ed. Thitinop Kōmonnimi (Bangkok: Khrōngkān Phūying Phāk Prachāsangkhom, 2555 [2015]), pp. 24–41.

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> I was involved … as the leader of one section of the demonstrators, similar to the guerrilla-style. We heard rumours that they were going to bomb us. I remember thinking that it will surely be the end for us should the bomb fall near us. True enough, the bomb exploded close to where I was standing. The rain was falling heavily. The water rose to this level (Wan Yusof pointed to his knees.) I helped carry two of my friends into the car and sent them to the hospital. One of them died, while the other one was badly injured on one side. I was very lucky to escape with minor injuries.

Wan Yusof's emotions intensified as he continued recounting the event. He began to cry. Pointing to an area on the left-side of his face, Wan Yusof said that this was where his friend's face was blown off. The image of his friend's deformed face was still vivid in his mind. While wiping away his tears he said:

> I really cannot talk about this. I feel much pain here all the time (pointing a finger at his heart.) After the explosions, we shifted the demonstration to the central mosque. As the mosque is a religious place, the Siyae would be more constrained. We continued with the demonstration as we just wanted justice to be served as we desired before the bomb explosions.

Portelli has observed that textual history often strives for a fact-based narration of events while oral history emphasises the social significance of events to its narrators.[55] Oral accounts of the Pattani Demonstration, like Wan Yusof's, give us insights into the emotional trauma and social significance of the event to those who experienced it directly. Wan Yusof re-experiences some of the emotional pain and personal grief whenever he recalls the injuries and deaths that he witnessed during the explosions in December 1975. Husaini, a forty-something-year-old businessman, recalled the demonstrators' deep mistrust of the Thai state and his own emotions upon seeing the victims:

> I remember hearing the commotion when some people brought the victims to Krisek that night. The injured victims were laid down in front of our houses. I remember the commotion because my sister who was also watching the people was stung by fire ants and so, she cried. Her loud wails just added to all the noise. When I think again about that night, these things help me remember it more clearly. I was still young then. I remember thinking, 'Oh! This is what gun wounds look like.' Oh yes, I remember the people saying that they did not want to send the victims to the hospitals because they were worried that they (the victims) would be given fatal injections. So, the victims' wounds were wiped with *yādēng*.[56] I cannot say that I felt very sad when I saw the victims. I just felt sombre. At the same time, I started to feel resentful. It was like I wanted to do something in response.

The government refused to assume responsibility for the bombing. Instead, it pointed fingers at the Southern Group. The speedy and coordinated actions of uniformed personnel immediately after the explosion(s), however, convinced the demonstrators they

55 Portelli, 'What makes oral history different', pp. 67–8.
56 Literally, 'red medicine', *yādēng* is a topical antiseptic solution known as merbromin or mercurochrome.

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were responsible for the attack.[57] The demonstrators refused to be defeated and quickly regrouped in spite of close surveillance. The protest was moved to the Pattani Central Mosque as the demonstrators believed that the security personnel were unlikely to attack them again lest they be accused of desecrating a place of worship. This would risk the wrath of not only the Thai Muslim population, but possibly other Muslims around the world.

The bomb attack aggravated the situation as the Muslims came in their tens of thousands to the protest site in a show of solidarity and to participate in the funeral procession from the Pattani Central Mosque to Tok Ayoh Cemetery where four of the deceased were given a martyrs' burial.[58] This was extremely powerful in fuelling the religious overtones of the protest and the demonstrators' commitment to it. Husaini said:

> I am quite sure that the bomb attack and the government's refusal to admit to their involvement in it were the reasons that caused more people from the three provinces to join the protest. One can even say that everyone here (the Far South) was supportive of the protest. People just stopped thinking about their own interests. For example, those with transport, including taxi drivers, gave free rides to anyone who wanted to go to the protest site. So, if they saw someone walking there, then they would ask, 'Are you going to the protest?' If they (the pedestrians) said, 'Yes' the drivers would say, 'Come in, come in. I'll send you there.' We did not have to pay any fee for the rides.

An anxious Lieutenant-General Sant Chitpatima attempted to convince the Pattani Provincial Islamic Committee and the local ulama to retract the martyr status that they conferred on the victims. The religious leaders turned down the general's request.[59]

On 19 December 1975, Muslim public schools students in the Far South, along with the students and teachers of private Islamic schools, made a joint statement urging the government to accede to the PDC's demands. On 27 December 1975, representatives of the Muslim civil servants of the Far South attended a special meeting at Cabae Tigo's Masjid Rajo. A massive crowd gathered on 28 December 1975 in response to claims made by the government that the Pattani Demonstration was merely a minor incident with no more than a few hundred participants. The government reacted by dispatching a negotiating team to Pattani to draw the protestors into a dialogue. The team comprised of the Minister for Interior, the chief of the Royal Thai Police, and the Sheikh al-Islam, who was the state-recognised leader of Thailand's Muslim community. The PDC-led protestors were adamant that the Prime Minister should travel to Pattani to accept their demands personally.

The Prime Minister's refusal to travel to Pattani and the protestors' own uncompromising position kept up the stalemate. Both the demonstrators and the state's armed personnel became more agitated during the prolonged stand-off. Husaini said:

57 Chapakia, *Politik dan perjuangan*, p. 152.
58 Mohd. Zamberi claims that total number of demonstrators rose to approximately 200,000. See Abdul Malek, *Umat Islam Patani*, p. 297.
59 Ibid., p. 296.

> Even though I was young, I remember being moved by the student leaders who led the protest. Not all of them were Malay. There were also Thai student leaders. One of them was Sutham Saengprathum. He would use the microphone and repeatedly ask, 'We do not want to "separate" [Th. *yākdindān*], right?' Then, we would respond, 'No!' He would then ask, 'We want justice, right?' We answered, 'Yes!' Additionally, I remember the demonstrators calling the *nor por phor* names. Instead of *nuaipatibatkānphisēt* [Th. Special Operations Unit] we called them *nuaipràpprāmprachāchon* [Th. Unit for the Suppression of the People].[60]

The prolonged demonstration and the protestors' name-calling stirred up the police and military. They became less restrained in their reactions elsewhere than they were towards the assembly at the Pattani Central Mosque. Some Malays alleged that soldiers had burned down some schools in Pattani and Narathiwat.[61] Furthermore, rogue police officers were rumoured to have set fire to 12 homes in Jaha district, Yala province.[62] On 19 January 1976, several demonstrators reacted against the persistent provocations of some security personnel. An army officer was caught by the protestors and butchered on the spot. The protestors alleged that he had antagonised them by revving his motorcycle loudly while riding towards them. The military responded to the murder by charging at the assembly with four armoured vehicles to retrieve the officer's corpse.[63]

The government's special envoy, Preeda Pattanathaboot, and the PDC finally established an agreement a few days later. Under the terms of the agreement, the government acceded to the protestors' demands. In addition to this, the government also promised to compensate the victims of the bombing on 13 December 1975 and their families. Following this agreement, Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj travelled to Pattani. He publicly stated to the demonstrators that all Thai citizens, regardless of their religion, were equal under the law. He also reiterated that his government would carry out its promise. On 24 January 1976, the PDC announced to the demonstrators that it had reached an agreement with the government and the protestors then finally disbanded and returned to their respective communities.

Stories such as those told by Wan Yusof, Ismail, Muhammad, and Husaini continue to circulate widely across generations in the Far South. They sustain Malay collective memory of the Thai state's victimisation of their community. The relationship between the community and the Thai state had been so badly damaged in 1975 that the event would continue to shape Malay attitudes until the present. Ismail said:

> The demonstration made us want to know more about our history. After the demonstration, I found out that Patani was ours. Patani was the place where the blood of our ancestors was spilled. Our ancestors were oppressed. We became angry and sad. We began to feel this way only after the demonstration. From the stories that we heard from the older members of our community, we began to link the Pattani Demonstration with other events that occurred before it. The events that have taken place since 2004 are a

60 *Nor por phor* is the popular acronym for the Royal Thai Police Special Operations Unit.
61 Satha-Anand et al., *Islam and nonviolence*, p. 20.
62 Chapakia, *Politik dan perjuangan*, p. 154.
63 Abdul Malek, *Umat Islam Patani*, p. 297.

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> continuation of this sad history. So, when a new incident happens, we are not angry solely because of it. The new incidents make us recall earlier events like the Pattani Demonstration and the stories that we have heard about the wars between Patani and Siam that occurred a long time ago. So, the anger and disappointment have always been there in us because we are aware of the history of injustices that our community has gone through.

Conclusion: Graves and the future of the conflict in the Far South

'Too much nationalism,' said Saleh, a former history teacher at a public school, who was in his fifties during our conversation in 2005. Nevertheless, Saleh claimed that he is not completely opposed to the encouragement of nationalist sentiments in Thai society. 'After all, nationalism is part of life in every society today,' he added. However, he thinks that Thailand's nationalist project favours the dominant Thais over other ethnic communities. Saleh told me that he yearns for a more level sociopolitical environment where diversity is respected and appreciated.

Many researchers and observers have attempted to seek reasons for the re-emergence of political violence in the Far South since 2004. These reasons include the harsh and insensitive actions of political leaders and the military, economic underdevelopment, and the rise of religious fanaticism.[64] There is also some recognition that history weighs heavily on the current conflict: much of the attempts to recover the history of the Far South from the Malay perspective has been text-based.[65] The contribution of such works to our knowledge about the Far South's history is highly appreciated by my Malay interlocutors. Like Fatimah, the female undergraduate whom we encountered earlier, the use of textual sources in such recent publications strengthens their conviction in the collective memories that they have inherited from their elders and increases their confidence when responding to those who doubt the plausibility of such accounts of the past. I have sought to add to such efforts to recognise the relevance of the past to contemporary political attitudes of the Malays. Using data gathered through a long-term ethnographic study, I have argued that the ways in which many Malays relate to the past reveal a pervasive sense of collective victimhood. With each additional Malay life lost in the ongoing conflict, the past weighs more heavily. As Ismail once said to me, 'Each event that takes place now must be placed alongside events that occured in the past, even as far back as several hundred years ago.'

The connecting of recent events to earlier ones might also be observed in the use of graves as sites of Malay collective memory of victimisation by the Thai state. The Tomb of Martyrs is neither the first nor the last grave that the Malays have constructed as a physical marker of state injustice. When 107 Muslim youths died after clashing with Thai armed force personnel on 28 April 2004, the event triggered

64 Duncan McCargo, *Tearing apart the land: Islam and legitimacy in southern Thailand* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008). See also: Various contributions in *Rethinking Thailand's southern violence*, ed. Duncan McCargo (Singapore: NUS Press, 2006).

65 See: Aphornsuvan, *Rebellion in southern Thailand*; Francis R. Bradley, 'Siam's conquest of Patani and the end of *mandala* relations, 1786–1838', in *Ghosts of the past in southern Thailand: Essays on the history and historiography of Patani*, ed. Patrick Jory (Singapore: NUS Press, 2013), pp. 149–60.

Figure 2. Graves of martyrs at Jaha district, Yala (Photograph taken by author)

Figure 3. Graves of martyrs at Saba Yoi district, Songkhla (Photograph taken by author)

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memories of the Pattani Demonstration which, in fact, had never been too far away from the minds of many Malays who had experienced the event directly or learnt about it through stories. Many of them viewed the youths who died on that day as martyrs. The graves of these martyrs at Jaha district, Yala province, and Saba Yoi district of Songkhla province are physically reminiscent of the Tomb of Martyrs. Visitors to these graves will recognise their social significance at first glance. At both locations, the tombstones' uniformity and design reflect the shared circumstances of the deaths of those interred. The graves in Jaha communicate the martyrdom of the six with the inscription of '*shaheed*' on each tombstone. The names and the date of their passing are also etched. The construction of the graves of the 18 martyrs at Saba Yoi was still incomplete during my last visit there in 2005. Nevertheless, a concrete fence, which separates these graves from others in the cemetery, had already been built. Residents of the area whom I met said that construction of the tomb as a physical reminder of the community's 'pain' (PM. *kepedihae*) would be undertaken progressively as funds become available.

More than a decade has passed since 28 April 2004. Memories of the events of that day remain vivid among many Malays, who continue to talk about it when lamenting the contemporary sociopolitical climate. This may very well be an indication that graves such as the tombs of martyrs at Tok Ayoh Cemetery, Jaha and Saba Yoi will continue to shape the collective memory of the Malays and sustain their collective distrust of the Thai state. Perhaps, Ismail's musing about the relationship between the *Makam Shuhada 2518* (1975) and Malay remembrance about the Pattani Demonstration is an appropriate manner to conclude this discussion about the role of past events in shaping and sustaining contemporary Malay political attitudes:

> If the tomb does not exist, many of us would still remember the incident. However, we would only know about it from stories. The tomb's existence makes us feel pain and the sadness. Sometimes we even tear when we think about the past. The tomb is the evidence! It intensifies our emotions. Our ancestors and relatives died and went through a lot of hardship to defend our rights!