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# **Nation Building in Southeast Asia: Conflict, Ethno-Religious Nationalism and Islamic Education in Indonesia and Thailand**

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## **Abstrak**

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan wacana dan gerakan pembangunan bangsa di Asia Tenggara, khususnya di Aceh-Indonesia dan Pattani-Thailand. Signifikansi penelitian ini terletak pada kenyataan bahwa kedua wilayah ini memiliki beberapa kesamaan. Diantaranya adalah situasi sosial budaya dan religio-politik sebagai wilayah yang terkena dampak konflik dengan dinamika wacana nasional, dan pandangan yang fluktuatif tentang integrasi nasional dengan negara. Lembaga pendidikan Islam di kedua wilayah ini telah memberikan kontribusi yang signifikan dalam pembentukan negara-bangsa. Dayah di Aceh dan Pondok di Pattani tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai pusat studi Islam dan pembentukan karakter bagi masyarakat, tetapi juga berfungsi sebagai panggung gerakan sosial, budaya dan politik. Dengan demikian, Dayah dan

Pondok menjadi lembaga pembentuk ekstrimis Islam sekaligus agen untuk memperkuat identitas politik etnis. Artikel ini mencoba mengulas silsilah pendidikan Islam dan metamorfosis wacana nasional di dua wilayah tersebut. Selain itu, artikel ini juga akan mengungkap peran aktor lokal dalam wacana dan gerakan etno-religius, serta respon negara dan aparturnya dalam upaya menjaga persatuan dan kenegaraan

Kata kunci: Asimilasi, dayah, integrasi, nasionalisme ethno-religious, pendidikan Islam

## Abstract

This article aims to describe the nation-building discourse and movement in Southeast Asia, particularly in Aceh-Indonesia and Pattani-Thailand. The significance of this research lies in the fact that these two regions share similar characteristics. Among them are socio-cultural and religio-political situations as conflict-affected areas with the dynamics of national discourse, and fluctuate views on national integration with the state. Islamic educational institutions in these two regions have contributed significantly in the formation of the nation-state. *Dayah* in Aceh and *Pondok* in Pattani not only serve as the centres of Islamic studies and character building for the community, but also function as the stage for social, cultural and political movements. Thus, *Dayah* and *Pondok* became the institutions to shape Islamic extremist as well as the agent to strengthen political identity. This article attempts to explain the genealogy of Islamic education and the metamorphosis of national discourse in these two regions. In addition, this article will also reveal the role of local actors in ethno-religious discourses and movements, and the response of the state and its apparatus in efforts to maintain national unity and statehood.

Keywords: Assimilation, dayah, ethno-religious nationalism, integration, islamic education

## Introduction

Studies on the formation of national identity in the Southeast Asian Region have various models. In general, the formation of nationalism discourse went through a long process of political struggle, especially in the 20th century AD. Various historical backgrounds in the region have presented different forms and characteristics of national identity in each country. Even the formation of national identity is still on the making until now. The process of forming and maintaining nationalism sometimes coincides with various conflicts that pose the threat of national disintegration. Because of the criteria for binding a community group to become “a nation” are not always running smooth, but full of debate, and even rebellion.

Nationalism, as discussed by Anderson (2001), Wirosarjono (1998), Suryo (2003), Latif (2013), Elson (2009), Pitsuwan (1982), Chong (2009), Kahin (1995) and Kellas (1998) shows the complicated dynamics of a nation to reach an agreement on its national identity. However, nationalism in the context of a modern state is very significant in changing the destiny of a nation.

Indonesia and Thailand are two countries in Southeast Asia which share similar socio-cultural and religio-political situations as conflict-affected areas with the dynamics of national discourse, and fluctuative views on national integration with the state. In Barington's view, Indonesian nationalism is more of a pure model of civic nationalism, which is not based on ethno-culture but is more of a collective desire to respond to Dutch colonialism. However, Indonesian nationalism does not escape the problem of national disintegration based on ethnic and religious movements, as happened in Aceh. Meanwhile, Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia that has never been colonized by Western countries (Pitsuwan, 1982). However, the formation of Thai nationalism is not easy, because it is faced with the problem of multiculturalism. Namely how the Thai government embraces the population in the southern region of Thailand, which is inhabited by the majority of Malay-Muslims to unite with a Thai-Buddhist identity.

In this context, Islamic educational institutions in these two regions have contributed significantly in the formation of nationalism and the nation-state. *Dayah* in Aceh (Lukens-Bull, 2010; Azra, 2017; and Fitriah, 2017), and *Pondok* in Pattani (Hasan, 1999; Ockey, 2021; Rahmah, 2020; Talib, 2004) not only serve as the centers of Islamic studies and character building for the community, but also function as the stage for social, cultural and political movements. Therefore, this research is important to examine more deeply about the relationship between religion, ethnicity and the state in the ebb and flow of nationalism and the nation state here.

### **Negotiation of Islamic Education and Strengthening Nation-Building**

The *Dayah* Islamic education institution is inseparable from the dynamics of conflict between Aceh and Jakarta. The government is considered to penetrate the regional authority through a centralized exercise of power. During the Soekarno and Suharto regimes, cultural homogenization was applied in the nation-building process. Both have put pressure on local Acehese culture and identity. After the Special Autonomy, *dayah* later became the growth hub of religious and national discourse through the "Shariatization

Movement," that enforces the adoption of Islamic law in various walks of life in Aceh. However, Mukhlisuddin made a noteworthy point that "Islamic law is a powerful tool to influence the socio-cultural situation of society at all levels" (Interview, 14 October 2019). Nonetheless, Danial asserted, the current problem is triggered by *dayah* against non-*dayah* people, which becomes increasingly complicated and heightened by the presence of newcomers hiding under the shadow of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) who are of different Islamic genealogy from that of the *dayah* (Interview on 13 October 2019). This is a forefront challenge faced by *dayah* in terms of ideological struggle.

Along with the shifting trend of Islam, there has also been a gradual conversion in the role of *Teungku*. The crucial role of *Teungku* as socio-political actors have now been replaced by political parties, while the position to control religious discourse have been claimed by the academics. It is also clearly observable that ulema have been playing an unexplainable role in the politics in Aceh because their political choices do not certainly reflect the political choices of their people. The Acehnese are fanatical to the ulema in the field of religion per se, but not necessarily so in the political and economic fields (Interview with Danial, 13 October 2019).

In similar context, the *pondok* in Pattani is deemed as a central instrument to assimilate and integrate the Malay-Muslim minority into the Thai nation-state. Its position and role are highly dependent on Bangkok's political dynamics towards Southern Thailand. The government's policy to reform the Islamic education system has sparked controversies since it is seen to generate polarization in the *pondok* community. As Talib (2004) conveyed, the government considers a "one size fits all" policy as the only possible policy to deal with various problems in the *pondok*. This policy further alienates the Malay-Muslim community from the native community and provides a legitimate ground to strengthen its identity. In addition, the policy has led to the polarization in Islamic educational institutions, which has put a split between those affiliated to the government and those opted to remain independent.

Helmiati (2018) articulated that only a few Islamic educational institutions decided to remain unaffiliated to the government, such as Ma'had Darul Maarif in Muang and Sasana Samakki in Nongchik. Their decision to stay independent is driven by the urgency to maintain the understanding of Syafi'iyah fiqh, which has long been studied and practiced by Muslims in

Southern Thailand. Their determination of being an independent institution is also triggered by the necessary to maintain and preserve the language and attributes of Malay culture as part of Islamic education.

The hegemonic power of the Islamic education reform has forced many students of *pondok* to continue their Islamic studies abroad, especially in the Middle East and in some Southeast Asian countries. Many Middle Eastern alumni are suspected to have dispersed the trans-national Islamic ideology in Southern Thailand with the inclination of fundamentalist and exclusive Islamic discourses and movements (Talib, 2004). After returning from abroad, they start to gain their distinctive roles in the community by mainly taking part in *pondok* and mosques activities. In contrast to students graduated from Southeast Asian universities generally prefer their community involvement through Tadika (a type of Al-Quran Education institution for kids). As stated by Hasan Sama Ae, a final year student at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University (UIN), the Islamic discourses inflamed by Middle Eastern alumni whom are closer to Arabization and the jihad movement, which reinforces Islamic militancy and strengthens the basis of the Malay national movement. While the graduates from Southeast Asian disseminate the Islamic discourse through dialogue with local culture and involve themselves in community empowerment (Interview on 30 September 2019).

However, currently, there has been a considerable attempt of the Middle Eastern alumni to strongly take part in the community, which has generated inevitable problems. According to Yusuf, (Yusuf, 2007) the complexity lies in the effort of those who utilize fundamentalist Islamic discourse and exclusive behaviour as the ethos of a movement that aims to collaborate with the ethnic Malay national movement. This condition also resulted in the involvement of some ulema in triggering the Southern Thailand crisis. Hence, the government often label some *Ustadz* and *Thok Guru* as separatist actors. Although currently they are unrelated with militancy activities, it is undeniable that some Muslim clerics may have a former involvement in violent movements. It is disconcerting, somehow, since many *ustadz* do not involve in peace movement in Southern Thailand. Pitsuwan (1982) even criticized the *Chularajamontri* institution, which contains some knowledgeable and moderate Islamic scholars, for being merely used by the Thai government to provide advice to the king regarding Islam and tend to misrepresent the religious figures of Pattani Muslims and its surroundings.

## The Contribution of *Dayah*-Pondok in Strengthening Nationalism

Islamic education in Aceh has made an important contribution to the rise of the Indonesian nation. The significant contribution of *dayah* to the well-maintained growth and development of nationalism is undeniable. Ishak pronounced Acehness nationalism is mainly colored by three elements, namely Indonesianness, Acehness and Islam (Ishak, 2013). These three elements have been an integrated part in the *dayah* education system.

The integration of national education into the *dayah* education system in Aceh is an important moment as well as an arena that allows the transformation of national values, citizenship, and nationalism. According to Fitriah (2017), the integration of Islamic education curriculum with the secular curriculum does not necessarily contribute to the 'Islamization' of the education system in Aceh. The Islamic education curriculum in public schools was strengthened along with the modernization of the *dayah* curriculum. This attempt has, therefore, resulted in a greater convergence of educational development.

In terms of higher education, the Aceh government laid the foundation for education development by establishing the Aceh Welfare Fund Foundation (YDKA) in 1958. One of YDKA's main objectives was to build a Student City (KOPELMA) in Banda Aceh and establish a State Islamic Institute of Ar-Raniry and Syah Kuala University. The two higher education institutions have proven to produce many leading figures in various fields, at the local, national, and international levels.

Therefore, *dayah* and its alumni have been taking a considerable part in the socio-cultural dynamics and political structure of contemporary Acehness society. According to Mukhlisuddin, “*Dayah* is the only institution to have a cultural and structural in Aceh from the village to the province levels. It never binds people (as mass organizations do), but can maintain the public loyalty to pay a high respect to the institution” (Interview on 14 October 2019). The network of *dayah* alumni is spread across various sectors with various positions that can be classified into 4 circles. First, some *dayah*'s alumni have been serving as civil society movement activists. Second, they work in the government offices, such as Keucik (village heads) and regents (Bireun, Aceh Selatan and Aceh Besar).

The *dayah* alumni also hold the important position at the local government bodies such as the Advisory Team of Wali Nanggroe Agency and the member of Aceh Ulema Council (MPU). Third, countless *dayah* alumni work as State Civil Apparatus. Forth, some *dayah* alumni are employed in higher education institutions, as lecturers or employees.

Mukhlisuddin (Interview on 14 October 2019) mentioned several significant impacts of the the *dayah*'s domination in Aceh. The existence of the *dayah* for the enforcement of Islamic sharia and for strengthening the *dayah* network is getting stronger and the policies set by the government certainly benefit the *dayah*. There has been more open access for the *dayah* to receive a state budget and a stronger network of ulema and *dayah* alumni. These have further led to the strengthening social, educational and political movements among the ulema and *dayah* alumni. It is at this point that the *dayah* and alumni can really contribute in the national development, especially in strengthening the sense of nationalism.

The modernization of Islamic education in Southern Thailand, has led to the integration of politics and culture that raises awareness of nationalism. Although initially there was resistance, some of the leading figures in *pondok* have gradually started to accept the modernization and became nationalists. The use of Thai language in daily communication and in the learning process at the *pondok* is an indicator of the increasingly integrated Malay-Islamic society and Thai nationalism. According to Lukens-Bull (2010), the change in status from a *pondok* to a madrasa or private Islamic school with a secular curriculum helped to gradually sow the Malay-Muslim community's sense of nationalism towards Thailand. However, his research focused on *Pondok Bantan* in Nakhon si Tammarat, thus it does not necessarily summarize the condition of all *pondoks*. In addition, Abdulrazak Panaemalae said:

*“The provision of financial assistance from the government has gradually affected the independent of the pondok in developing their education. In general, most pondok in Nakhon opted to accept this educational nationalization program, while some pondok in Pattani accepted the program but still continuing to teach Malay as the language of instruction. Nonetheless, many others might decide to refuse (the program)” (Interview on 21 August 2019).*

Meanwhile, Pitsuwan (1982) mentioned four programs that helped in shaping the moderate view on the relationship between Islam and the state in Southern Thailand. *First*, the government financial assistance to Islamic

educational institutions has positively contributed in the education sustainability of Malay-Muslim citizens with nationalist views. In general, quite a number of Islamic educational institutions are affiliated with the government since they enforce a "secular" national curriculum. Only a few of them chose to remain independent that can freely set the implementation of Islamic education in the *pondok*. For example, the Ma'had Attarkiah Islamiyah in Bang-Nak, Narathiwat, received financial assistance from the Thai Ministry of Education (Ka-do, 2017).

*Second*, the provision of access for Malay-Muslim students to higher education through government's education funding assistance. Graduates of madrasas or Islamic schools, compete in student admission exam in some local universities in Thailand. The Thai Ministry of Home Affairs have set a quota for Malay-Muslim students who are admitted as students at state universities without having to go through a selection process (Pitsuwan, 1982). *Third*, the recruitment of civil servants from the Malay-Muslim community. The provision of access to adequate higher education has allowed the Malay Muslim generation to take part in the government bureaucracy in Southern Thailand. However, it is difficult to be part of the bureaucracy, since they have to adapt to a Buddhist-oriented bureaucratic system. For Thai-Buddhists, entering the bureaucracy means being a "servant of the king" (*rab rajakarn*), which becomes the utmost life goals among many of them. The Malay Muslim community who are employed as bureaucrats may feel reluctance to fully serve the king, because they have to deal with people's reproaches (Pitsuwan, 1982).

*Fourth*, building a harmonious relationship between the government and the ulema. The *Chularajamontri* (Ulema Association) is considered to have a strategic role in carrying out a religious approach with the Malay-Muslim community. This institution consists of several Islamic Religious Councils and the Mosque Committee in the Province to carry out Islamic functions, particularly in resolving religious conflicts and issuing religious fatwas. However, this institution, which was established by the Thai government in 1945 based on the Patronage Law initially received a negative response from Southern Thai religious leaders. They reasoned that the institution did not represent the ulema from Patani Raya.

Given this less harmonious incident, Pitsuwan, (1982) criticized the continuity of the *Chularajamontri* institution. According to him, the fact that the majority of Muslims in Thailand are in the south, it would be more reasonable to appoint a Muslim from the south as the member of *Chularajamontri*. In



addition, most of scholars who raised by the *pondok* and have the Islamic knowledge capacity as well as leadership charisma are from the Southern Thailand. The weak legitimacy of *Chularajamontri* in the past can easily be reformed by opening up the recruitment for moderate clerics with Thai national views.

### *Resistance, Negotiation and Peace*

In Aceh, peace negotiations between the government and Gerakan Aceh Merdeka or GAM (Free Aceh Movement) were held several times, including facilitated by the Henry Dunant Center in May 2000. These negotiations resulted in a humanitarian pause. In fact, the deal only lasted a few weeks and aggression resumed. The government then issued Law no. 18 of 2001 concerning Special Autonomy for Aceh. This law authorizes local governments to formulate new regulations (*qanun*) and to participate in managing natural resources. Along with this autonomy, the Aceh government derives 70% of the net revenues from its natural gas, which has long been a source of displeasure of regional elites against the government (Farid, 2004: 6). The province is given broad authority to establish sharia courts, implement sharia laws, and has its own sharia enforcement mechanisms (Fitriah, 2017: 61).

Nevertheless, Special Autonomy which is seen as a strategy to accommodate Aceh integration into the Indonesian nation-state, has not been able to heal the long wounds suffered by the Acehnese and to improve the welfare of the Acehnese. The regional government and the Aceh Regional House of Representatives could not play their role in implementing the Special Autonomy Law effectively (Farid, 2004: 5) This disconcerting situation is partly inflicted by corrupt practices in the use of special autonomy funds by government officials and members of the legislature. Ironically, these corruptors were mostly GAM leaders.

In 2002 Negotiations were again held in Geneva, and it resulted in the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA). The implementation of this agreement was faced with the earthquake and tsunami in Aceh, which had a systemic impact on all aspects of life. The disaster at the end of 2004 became a turning point in efforts to bring about peace in Aceh. According to Sujatmiko, the disaster has spawned personal transformation as well as social reconciliation. Sujatmiko said:

*“The people of Aceh more reflective, contemplative, religious, and humanistic... and experience social changes from negative peace in the absence of war to positive peace, mainly through reconciliation and rebuilding” (Sujatmiko, 2012: 108).*

In 15 August 2005, Helsinki agreement signed. This peace agreement is considered successful. Because apart from internal factors, namely personal transformation and social reconciliation, there have also been changes in regional and global contexts. In the regional context, ASEAN countries and Japan clearly support Indonesia's territorial integrity. Meanwhile, globally, after the 9/11 events in the United States, every armed movement can be considered as a terrorist (Sujatmiko, 2012: 107). Thus, there is no reason for GAM and the Indonesian government not to sign this agreement.

In December 2005, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono met and convened with several GAM leaders in Banda Aceh. Then in 2006, a meeting was also held by Vice President Jusuf Kalla with the Prime Minister of GAM, Malik Machmud, in Finland. In April 2006, Machmud visited Jakarta to hold a further meeting with Kalla. At a different time, Kalla visited Banda Aceh again and was received by the governor and had a chance to talk with the local ulema with the aim of building good relations with the Islamic religious community. This meeting represents a public response that deems GAM as a somewhat secular movement (Sujatmiko, 2012: 105). In addition, the government also issued Law No. 11/2006, which essentially outlines the Special Autonomy Law, which explicitly mentions the Sharia Police.

The issuance of this law was subsequently entailed by the social reintegration under the coordination of the Aceh Reintegration Agency (BRA). BRA was formed in February 2006 consisting of representatives from civil society organizations, GAM, military, bureaucracy, NGOs, and universities. There was no particular obstacle to impede the implementation of this social reintegration in line with the relatively smooth implementation of the Helsinki MoU. In fact, this agreement has reached the fourth and final stage under the supervision of the Aceh Monitoring Mission, which comprised the European Union and ASEAN countries. This agreement implies that the Indonesian government shall withdraw all its non-organic military and police forces from Aceh, and requires GAM to hand over all weapons (Sujatmiko, 2012: 108).

The reintegration process was also carried out in a political context with the establishment of the Aceh Transitional Committee (KPA). KPA is deemed as the transformation of GAM and became the embryo of the Aceh Party. This party has brought Irwandi Yusuf, who is also a GAM leader, to become the governor of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam in 2007.

Quite the reverse, Alkaf said that the peace agreements in Aceh principally was not the real peace. Instead, it is more of a compensation without any discussion about the desired national identity, since it even created a cluster of local identity. He argues that the holistic application of Islamic law is deemed more as a way to save Aceh, but it functions like opium (Interview with Teungku Muhammad Alkaf, 25 October, 2019). In fact, political independence is no longer part of the public discourse in Aceh, but there has been a debatable in various implementation of Islamic Sharia at the district level.

Meanwhile, in Southern Thailand, political negotiations between the government and the insurgence movement are fully loaded with tensions and hopes. Out of the numerous series of negotiations, the government remains adamant with their position that puts the Southern Thailand under its control, while, the insurgence movements keep on demanding two things: full autonomy and independence. Without the attempt to ease tensions, the same old ongoing conflicts will always recur as a consequence of the absence of agreement by both parties. This is as expressed by Panaemalae:

*“In fact, these conflicts can only be subsided and even resolved if the government is willing to open a dialogue and reduce its accommodative attitude towards Islam and the Malays. If these two factors are accommodated in the political policy in Pattani, I think, the conflicts will subside. However, the separatist groups of the Pattani Malay community also need to lower their demands. A struggle to demanding for full independence is no longer relevant” (Interview on 24 October 2019).*

The government has made some serious efforts to reduce the conflicts in Southern Thailand using various strategies. Nilsen (2012) mentioned the two main strategies of the government, namely meeting with the group to reach a peace agreement and military action to respond to violence by the group. In the late 1980s, Thai military officials made some visits to various cities in the Middle East to meet with insurgence movement leaders. The warring parties considered 1990s as the moment of "pause before the storm," which only lasted until the end of the 20th century.

During Thaksin's leadership, the peaceful condition in Southern Thailand was again disturbed. Thaksin started to reapply the military approach policy towards Southern Thailand. According to Nilsen (2012), the Southern Thailand conflict re-emerged with the attack on the military headquarters in Naratiwat in 2004. This insurgency gave rise to the political, social and economic turmoil in Thailand. The Thai government seemed to resolve this conflict by resorting to military approach. The political unrest, somehow, forced Thaksin government to start a communication with them by asking for help from Malaysia and the OIC as the facilitators of the peace agreement. Nevertheless, Thaksin responded the various results of the peace agreement unenthusiastically and therefore the Langkai agreement was deemed ineffective.

The downfall of Surayud and the appointment of new Prime Minister, Samak Sundaravej (September-December 2008) and Somchai Wongsawat (Jan-Sept 2009) opened a new page for negotiation. The government strongly urge to reduce this conflict by involving Indonesia as a facilitator of the peace agreement. Jusuf Kalla was appointed by the Indonesian government to succeed the peace agreement in September 2009. However, the political crisis that hit Thailand in those years led to the cancellation of the planned meeting between the two parties. The new Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva opted to use Surayud's approach in dealing with the Southern Thailand conflict, and it further generated public antipathy and inflicted a new conflict (Nilsen, 2012).

During the Yingluck Shinawatra (first female Prime Minister in 2011), her political promises during the campaign to give the Southern Thailand a policy of autonomy. But in aftermath of the election victory, it appears that Yingluck and Pheu's party broke their campaign promise. Because Yingluck's victory was not accompanied by the victory of her party's seat from the Southern Thailand region. Yingluck's involves her political colleague in the Phei Thai Party, Thawee Sodsong. Sodsong took the cultural path by proposing the idea of using Malay in communication and other Malay cultures in daily interactions. However, Sodsong's peace diplomacy did not receive any support from the military and other factions in parliament.

On April 11, 2017, the Barisan Revolusi Nasional or BRN (National Revolutionary Front) spokesman, Abdul Karim Khalid, revealed that his group ready to start negotiating with the government. In response to BRN's, Ahmad Noor, Vice Rector of Fatoni University in Pattani, said that BRN was considered important in the negotiation process to bring about peace in Southern

Thailand. It is because BRN is one of the movements with a military wing. According to Abdulsuko Dina, an expert on Thai politics, the Pattani resistance groups require an inclusive perspective, by opening up their mind to understand the positions and missions of their respective struggles. Muhammad Aladi Dengni, Chair of the Civil Society Assembly for Peace (CAP) which is based in Southern Thailand and oversees 27 NGOs, view that the government decided to negotiate with BRN because the group was considered as the strongest in Southern Thailand. However, Aladi saw that the people of Pattani generally do not know to what extend the peace negotiation process between BRN and the government going on, because both parties never opened the state of peace negotiation process to public.

In addition, Aladi said that peace talks between factions in Southern Thailand and the government had been going on since 1991, particularly between the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO) and the Thai military. Negotiations continued from 1993 to 2013 with various groups taking place from Geneva, Cairo, Damascus, Langkawi, Kuala Lumpur, and Bogor. Nevertheless, it could not really bring about peace to Southern Thailand. This condition is partly because the peace talks are always designed by the military-led government, not the civilian government.

Negotiations led by a new civilian government took place in 2013. Thailand signed the first peace talks with the BRN under Yingluck Shinawatra. However, negotiations between the two sides stalled in 2014 due to the military coup led by Prayuth Chan-ocha against Shinawatra's government. Another factor was the lack of sincerity of the Thai government and the resistance group. The government often started a negotiation merely to investigate the strength of the resistance group and the main leader of the group (Jitpiromsri, 2019; and Due-Reh & Paksi, 2021).

### *Ethno-religious Nationalism of Aceh and Pattani*

According to Alkaf (interview on 25 October 2019), Aceh is indeed renowned for its ethno-nationalism, especially due to its historical, political, and regional autonomy factors. However, Mukhlisuddin (interview on 14 October 2019) has different view that the notion of ethno-nationalism in Aceh is currently obsolete and seems to be failed. The current attempt was focused on building a new form of ethno-nationalism with the application of Islamic law. Ichwan referred to this new form as soft religio-ethno-nationalism. In contrast to hard religio-ethno-nationalism which demands the establishment

of an Islamic state (Darul Islam /Indonesian Islamic Army or DI/TII movement), soft religio-ethno-nationalism only demands the application of Islamic sharia at the local level (Ichwan et al., 2020: 110).

This research finds three factors that influence the emergence of ethno-religious nationalism in Aceh. *First*, the emergence of solidarity between Aceh and Islam. This solidarity is resulted from several factors, namely the pressure of colonialism, discontent with Soekarno's policy, the experience of the prolonged conflict in Aceh, and violence against civilians by the Indonesian National Army (TNI) and GAM, as well as Special Autonomy which has yet to fulfil the Acehnese sense of justice. *Second*, the Islamic education (*dayah*), which turns into an active movement. In colonial era, *Dayahs* become centers of education and movements against colonialism. After independence, *dayah* became part of the movement to defend independence. Since the late 1950s, *dayah* has become part of the dynamics of the conflict between Aceh and Jakarta. As for post-reform, the *dayah* increasingly played its significant role as the center of religious discourse and nationalism. *Third*, the imagination of a sovereign nation that is continuously developed among the Acehnese. At first, this movement longed for nationalism that concerns on the application of Islamic sharia in Aceh, then it shifted to the desire for an Islamic State along with the DI/TII movement. After failing, the idea was replaced by GAM, which principally aimed to build an Islamic state through a strategy of fighting for the independence for the Acehnese people from Jakarta. After the reformation, the demands were transformed into the urge to apply Islamic Shari'a and to restore the human dignity of the Acehnese.

In contrast to Aceh, the struggle for ethno-nationalism in Southern Thailand was supported by ethnic Malay-Muslim movements, which significantly influenced the conflict that lasted more than a century (Searle, 2002). Theoretically, this created two different perspectives. The government envisage these conflicts are more of an insurgence against the government, while the Malay-Muslim community consider these conflicts as a strategy of resistance, defence and struggle which they consider of been colonized by Thailand.

*The first* perspective emerged based on the Anglo-Siamese agreement which divided the territories of the former Patani Kingdom into the rule of the Kingdom of Siam (Thai) in 1909 (Keyes, 2003). The government deemed the conflicts as subversive, and hence the movement was often referred to as separatist ((von Feigenblatt, 2009), 2009). Even since Thaksin Sinawatra came

to power in 2001-2006, the ongoing conflicts had been labelled as terrorist movements ((K Che Man, 1990; Lubis, 2002; and Rahimmula, 2003). Otherwise, *the second* perspective places conflict as a structure of political struggle. The Malay-Muslim communities in Southern Thailand view these conflicts as a defence and struggle strategies for their cultural identity as part of their personal identity (Yusuf, 2007). Pragmatically, they have three strategies in utilizing the structure of political opportunities, namely rejecting and resisting various government policies and efforts that aims to eliminate Malay cultural identity and Islam, making agreements with the government, and carrying out resistance armed insurgence in many significant places. Any policies related to Southern Thailand, be in the form of integration or assimilation and their derivative policies, are seen as a form of intervention and domination of the major Thai over the Malay-Muslim minority (Interview with Suhardi, 20 August 2019). The government enforcement of the hegemonic policy in the name of the state, while in practice such policy is inseparable from efforts to interfere in religious affairs and ethnic Malay traditions in Pattani and its surroundings (Pitsuwan, 1982).

In education sector, the government has used Islamic education institutions as effective media for the implementation of the integration policy. The change in the curriculum from traditional Islamic to secular, and various financial assistance programs are seen as the nationalization program of government in terms of education (Interview with Abdulroheem Mad-adam, 21 August 2019). The modernization of Islamic education in this era has resulted in the polarization of Islamic educational institutions into the group following the national curriculum and those being independent. Some *pondok* have tried to remain independent by consistently implementing the *pesantren* curriculum without receiving any financial assistance from the government, while other *pondok* have transformed into madrasas or Islamic schools and receive government assistance (Madmarn, 1999). The polarization of Islamic education institutions has a direct impact on the Islamic education in Southern Thailand. The former function of Islamic educational institutions as the primary centre for maintaining Malay culture has been shifted into the new function as the media, objects and targets for Thai nationalization.

The Thai government has also imposed an injustice treatment to the Malay-Muslim community in economic sector. The Southern Thailand was granted with a wealthy natural resource of oil production, a well-developed fishing industry, and other economic resources. Ironically, this abundant

natural resource wealth cannot meet the welfare of the population in the Pattani area and its surroundings since they have to live below the poverty line (Interview with Haji Syukur, 23 August 2019). This disconcerting condition is resulted from government's restriction to economic resources and the domination of the Thai Buddhists. This long-standing condition has limited the residents of Pattani and its surroundings to access to economic prosperity and employment opportunities (Rahimmula, 2003). This discriminatory strategy is perpetuated by the government since it has failed to accommodate diverse identities.

Since the king of Phibul Songkram came to power, this discriminatory policy has colored the ever-worsening relations between Bangkok and Pattani. The ultra-chauvinistic concept that the king developed has subordinated Malay-Muslim culture. This unequal position has led to an adverse impact on the Malay-Muslim community of Pattani, particularly in using Malay as the language of communication, accessing job opportunities, education, etc. Thailand's ultra nationalist policies developed by the subsequent rulers also failed to resolve the injustice problems (von Feigenblatt, 2010). The military approach by building military camps along the road to Pattani and its surroundings resulted in a prolonged conflict. Such militaristic strategy cannot prevent the Malay-Muslim community from struggling for the need to respect and equal treatment. The Malay-Muslim community relentlessly struggle to demand the government to take heed on the distinctive color of Malay culture and its unique attributes, as well as the Islamic religion that this community embraces as a different socio-political identity (Liow, 2006).

## Conclusion

The following points are concluded from the discourse of the nation-building and movement in Aceh-Indonesia and Pattani-Thailand:

*First*, Islamic educational institutions in Aceh (*dayah*) and Pattani (*pondok*) have significant contribution to the formation of the nation-state, since both are not only centers of Islamic studies and community character building, but also the stage for social, cultural and political movements.

*Second*, educational institutions have experienced some shifts and changes in terms of function in line with political fluctuations between the government, both Jakarta and Bangkok, and local communities in Aceh and Pattani. The political education policy in the two countries is oriented towards



strengthening their respective national education. This policy has an impact on the institutionalization process of Islamic education institutions, as experienced by *dayah* and *pondok*, which transform their function from Community-Based to Government-based institutions.

*Third*, *dayah* and *pondok* form Islamic extremist and strengthen ethnic political identity that gave rise to the ethno-religious-nationalism movement. *Dayah* and *Teungku* became the center and actor of resistance as well as negotiators against the State in the context of Aceh, while *Pondok* and *Thok Guru* also perform the same function. The only difference lies on the fact that Aceh has received special autonomy from the government, while Pattani has not received any special autonomy to this day.

*Fourth*, although peace in Aceh has been lasted to this day and is projected to remain forever, there is an urgent need to further strengthen the national development in the community. On the other hand, Pattani still needs further struggle to achieve peace agreement with the government. Thus, to ensure the process of national development achieving its goal, the Malay-Muslim community in Pattani and the government need to find a common goal to reach a consensus and agreement for a stable peace in the future.

*Fifth*, the government in the two regions have begun to allow a room for the minority community to express their cultural and religious identities. This condition makes it possible to optimize the mobilization of cultural and political resources, both in Aceh and Pattani, to strengthen local and national identities. In this case, *dayah* and *pondok* have and will continue to play their roles in reinforcing Islamic religious education, cultural identity, and nationalism altogether.

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#### Interviews

- Interview with Mukhlisuddin, 14 October 2019.
- Interview with Danial, 13 October 2019.
- Interview with Hasan Sama Ae, 30 September 2019.
- Interview with Abdulrazak Panaemalae, 21 August 2019.
- Interview with Teungku Muhammad Alkaf, 25 October, 2019.
- Interview with Suhardi, 20 August 2019.
- Interview with Abdulroheem Mad-adam, 21 August 2019.
- Interview with Haji Syukur, 23 August 2019.

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