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Dealing with Dangerous "Peace":  
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# Article Review: Ramadon Panjor's Dealing with Dangerous "Peace": Politics of Words in Pa(t)tani "Armed Conflict"

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The problem of the three Southernmost provinces has been with us for so long, as long as the modern Siamese nation-state in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Bangkok formally coerced all outlying dependencies or tribunal states in the North, Northeast, and South to become Siamese provinces, depriving them of their traditional autonomy and rule. While the North and Northeast rebelled against Bangkok direct rule hastily as the Sultanate South, the former eventually succumbed to the dominating power of Bangkok, leaving the Deep South alone in their continued resistance against the direct rule by Bangkok. The recent outburst of violence was the dramatic gun robbing of an army garrison in Narathiwat on January 4, 2004 by a group of Muslim militants, followed by

a shocking massacre of 37 militant Muslims who, after the attacks of police stations, took refuge in the Kru Se mosque in April 2004. That year ended by another horrible incident when the protest demonstration by local villagers in front of Takbai police station turned violent after the armed forces used decisive measures to round them up and transported them in trucks to an army detention in Songkhla in which eighty-six Muslims found dead due to the suffocation of breathing. From then on, a series of violent attacks and retaliations by both the separatists and security forces occurred on a daily basis inflicting the loss of lives and injuries of the innocent people in the area on top of the armed people. Given the level of atrocity and publicity of the conflict in the South, one would assume that the public should have gained a better idea of what were the root causes of the conflict and reasonable solutions to eradicate the chronic problem plaguing the country. In fact, as this paper and many other studies of the issue contest, most people in and outside of the region have little or no knowledge and understanding of the continued violence and insurgent movements.

Moreover, the latest development of the lethal violence is its spillover into non-state space and being; many innocent bystanders of all ages, gender, and religions now are becoming victims of the violence by both sides of the forces. Finally, there emerged the first attempt of peace dialogue by the government in 2013 with the help and facilitation of the Malaysian government. The peace dialogue, as shown in most of the countries' internal wars or conflicts, is the last and meaningful resort to end such conflicts, now is being testing the water in the Malay Muslim South. Various Thai governments in the past with little or no success haphazardly tried it

until the Yingluck government. Ramadon's paper on the politics of words brilliantly traces and analyzes the discursive development of words used by both sides of the conflict.

Normally, the subjects of discussion on the Deep South focus more on conventional topics of politics, economic, and culture, which narrate the stories based upon the structures of institutions and their resulting practices. In this paper, the author chooses to do otherwise. He focuses on the words, which both the government and the 'liberation movement' used to express their ideas and beliefs about the ongoing conflict. The contour of these contesting words in the realm of existing violent conflict demonstrates to us that "when Thai leaders or the Patani Liberation leaders suggested what 'words' to use or not to use, to call, name or explain a certain phenomenon, the initiative did not only to 'tell' something but it wanted to 'hide' other things as well."

So what are the vexing and problematic words that have plagued both sides? On the Thai government's handling of the restive South, the primary task of the security offices was to define who the opposition was. It's imperative from the paper that the major words employed by the government to define the Muslim resistance groups and people are familiar in the old practices by Siamese state when it discovered the minorities within the Thai sovereign territory in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The effective means by which Siamese absolutist state discovered to merge its territoriality kingdom was the direct control of the vassal states under the direct rule and control of Bangkok government. Those minorities, which resisted and rebelled against the Thai colonization, became 'the others within.' They were the people whose culture and material progress were backward and

uncivilized, which gave the Thai state a legitimacy and moral claims to use power to change and modernize them. One of the legacies of the successes of the centralization and modernization of the modern Thai nation-state is the uncontested feeling of superiority of the Thai race over the other minorities within the kingdom.

My first reaction to the paper's main contention is what the truth/reality is underlying the words used by both sides in calling the other and referring to themselves. Ramadon successfully elaborates the origins and development of the words used by the Thai governments in designating the Malay Muslim resistance/rebellion in various stages and development of the country. Under Sarit's regime, (1958-63) the Malay oppositions were 'kabuan kan bang yak dindan' [Separatist Movement] whose aim was to secede from Thailand and to form a separate sovereign state under the ambitious Malay Muslim leaders. While the word was more political and ideological, in the Thamom government, it became more localized by calling them 'kabuan kan jon kakanrai' [Bandit-Terrorist Movement] which implied the criminal aspect and law-breaking of the group and people. This tone of local criminal acts continued into the elected government under Chuan Leekpai in 1994. The significant change came in 2007, after the 2006 Coup, which put Gen Surayud at the helm of the government whose mission was to reconcile the political division between the yellow and red shirts political movements. The next important political agenda was to find the way to bring peace and normalcy back to the Deep South. Under the government's new policy on national security, the tone of the violent past in the South became one of sympathetic. Thus Southern bandits and terrorists were 'People with Different Views

from the State' (PDVS), signifying the conciliatory tone of the government towards the former enemy. From 2009 onwards, the government adopted many political approaches to the containment and eventually termination of the violence in the area. Accordingly, the Malay Muslim resistances now have three different names to compile with the changing policies and guidelines in the region. First, they were 'the Perpetrators of Violence,' second, 'the Misguided Person/Group', and third, was the 'People with Different Views from the State.' The use of these words reminds one of the political environments during the Cold War when the government labelled those who were critical and opposed the government policies as communists which deprived them of basic rights and citizenship in the country. The author rightly concludes that without a common practice of political democracy, the use of political names is dangerous to the process of peace dialogue.

On the other side of the conflicting parties, the Malay Muslim Liberation Movements (a generic term covering all the movements) also demonstrated interesting ideas and concepts when referring to the Thai state and themselves. The word 'Thai' was never used, instead the common and popular word is 'Siam' [si-yaε], which is the common usage of every Malay Muslim in the South. Probably, those who feel comfortably to use Thai are those who have studied in Thai public schools for a certain time or working in the bureaucracy. The adjective that characterizes the Thai state is 'Penjajah' or 'colonist' who is clearly reflected the hostile historical consciousness of the militant Malay Muslims towards the history between Siam and Patani. From this historical standpoint, the representatives of the BRN who had negotiated with the Thai representative also referred to

the Muslim fighters as 'Perjuangan Patani' or 'Patani Fighters' while the government and the media derogatorily called them as 'bandit' or 'terrorists'. Here we can see the parallel political ideologies and beliefs between the Muslim Liberation Movements and the Thai state.

Nevertheless, the most important word that Ramadon appropriately emphasizes is the use of the word 'Hak Pertuanan' that means 'Rights of Ownership'. It first appeared in banners hanging along the roads in the three Muslim provinces (Narathiwat, Patani, and Yala) plus four districts of Songkhla, total of 119 banners, following the announcement of the first meeting for the peace dialogue between the Thai government's and the BRN's representatives in April 2013. It is clearly a sign of political message to both sides. The banners read "Kedamaian takkan lahir Selama PERTUANAN Tidak di akui" [peace is untenable as long as the rights of ownership not recognized]. It was not sufficiently clear whether the banners support the peace dialogue or against. The keyword, however, is obviously, 'Pertuanan', as a reminder to both peace negotiators.

Let us look at the etymology of the word. Pertuanan comes from *pertuan*, an old Malay word for head (as in chief/leader), which is today rarely used, it sounds too medieval. Thus, the title of the Head of State in Malaysia is Yang Di Pertuan Agung, which just means Highest Head or Highest Leader. Pertuanan became a modern word developed when the Malays use more and more abstract nouns in the Western way. The traditional meaning is about social position and highest status. It also refers to government, giver of orders. The modern meaning is sovereignty. In olden times there were almost no boundaries for royal realms, because they did not have the labor or the intellectual equipment needed to create stable boundaries - they

were always expanding areas after a victory and then losing when they were defeated. What the colonialists of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries did was to create surveyed boundaries, following Western map-making; and sovereignty had to be recognized by other sovereigns, usually by formal treaties. Coming up was international law, making sovereignty also something legal, in the eyes of the rest of the world and as well as of the ruler's subjects. By bringing up 'pertuanan', the Malay Muslim 'liberators' were seriously contemplating on the essential issue of the nature of the state and rights of citizens.

The last point, which the paper discusses, is about the words, 'Santipap' and 'Santisuk' whose meanings are straightforward with little ambiguities. Santipap is peace and Santisuk is peace with happiness. So what is the problem with these two words? It occurred when the coup-leader-turn-Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha replaced 'Santipap' with 'Santisuk'. The rational for this was simple: by continued using 'peace' in official documents implied the armed conflict going on inside the country, making the situation an international conflict, which, in turn, open a possibility for an international intervention. Here is the statement that the Prime Minister explained, "[D]o not use the term peace (*santipap*) because we have not been fighting. It is the matter of violation of the law and law enforcement. Fighting, like in foreign countries, is fought by using forces to besiege cities. That is a ... peace (*santipap*) dialogue (namely) using external force to suppress and to stop violence. I do not want to go that far. I do not want foreigners to take a part (Thairath Online 2015)." The political sensitivity, of course, stem from the role of peace dialogue between the government and the separatists who managed to use the modern terminology to serve

their political goals. With increasing pressures and criticisms from international human rights regimes, particularly after the 2014 Coup, the government was aware of the exposed internal conflict and problems to the outside world. It therefore tried to decrease the nature and consequences of conflicts and its implications to a non-political issue that could be resolved by domestic laws and government securities.

The interesting point about the word 'Hak Pertuanan' or 'sovereignty' is the development and transformation of the ideas of the Malay resistance to Thai rule from the early twentieth to the twenty-first centuries. In the first historical moment (1902) the leader of the movement was the Sultan himself, the goal was to keep his semi-tribunal power over the Patani sultanate. The meaning and practice of 'pertuanan' were traditional and reflected the unequal relations between the two parties. The second moment was in the 1940s, the political system had changed into a democratic regime and the Malay Muslims were Thai citizens. The plea made by Patani People's Movement for social justice and rights of the Malay in the region. Though they had not used the word 'pertuanan' in their requests to the government, the idea and concept of self-rule and determination was present in their actions. The third moment dating from the 1960s to the present saw the formation and development of the concreted idea of '*sovereignty*' as a legitimate political power of the ruler and the ruled. This is a long road travelled by the Malay separatists and the Thai state whose future and sustainable peace hang on the knowledge and wisdom, not only of the leaders of the two fighting parties, but more so of the people and communities in the Deep South and Thailand.