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The Representation of Thai Muslims in the Three Southern Border Provinces on YouTube

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Abstract

This research examines the representation of Thai Muslims in three southern border provinces of Thailand on YouTube. This interdisciplinary research project aims to shed light on the complexity of the representation of Thai Muslims in a visually-saturated public realm. Audio-visual data depicting Thai Muslims in mainstream media and on YouTube as well as data from interviews conducted during my fieldwork were analysed.

The findings revealed that Thai Muslims are portrayed in Thai mainstream audio-visual media as “others”, a people who may be deemed *inferior* to Thai people in a number of ways. Muslim characters, for example, with their Islamic visual references such as the skullcap and the *hijab* are depicted as docile, backward and “good Muslims” who must be “developed” or “saved” from “bad Muslims” by Buddhist Thais. In this light, Muslims are merely objectified, something to be looked at.

However, the results also illustrate that through emerging online visual spaces and online participatory culture, the mainstream notion of a “good Muslim” appears to be contested. This research finds that a discontinuity of image production and consumption (e.g. from television to YouTube/from analog to digital/from mass-produced to self-produced media) paves the ways for *remediating* existing mainstream audio-visual genres into a newer media space. Unlike “good Muslims” found in Thai mainstream visual media whose religious markers are conflated with backwardness, the findings suggest that “good Muslims” in self-produced *halal media* are portrayed as pious Muslims who embrace Islamic way of life. It is Islamic principles, not “Thainess”, that constitutes a “good Muslim”. It could be argued that the practice of remediation and active participation on online visual spaces enable Thai Muslims to “speak back” to the dominant ideology of “Thainess” and to *re-define* what it means to be a “good Muslim” in a modern Thai society.

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Introductory Chapter

In November 2016, *Muslimlimited*, along with another 14 YouTube channels in Thailand, were announced as selected participants in the YouTube NextUp programme – a special training programme run by the Google Corporation aiming to boost video production skills among non-corporate, yet successful YouTube channels. After being informed about the programme, *Muslimlimited* updated a status on its Facebook page claiming, with pride, that it is the only YouTube channel from the so-called *sam changwat chidden pack tai* (trans. three southern border provinces of Thailand)¹ in the programmed. This group of students was selected on the basis of their creativity in creating audio-visual content and their success in attracting YouTube audiences²; but what makes this success story more intriguing is the region where they are from.

The growth of self-produced media among Thai Muslims in the “three southern border provinces”

The three southern border provinces have been subject to a period of prolonged violence. Since 2004, separatists have intensified their operations by targeting not only Thai government officials but also both Buddhist and Muslim civilians. Many Islamic schools in the area were accused of being places for recruiting and training separatists and some Islamic teachers were arrested. It is therefore telling when a video production club embedded in an Islamic private school from the far-flung violence-stricken district of *Banjo*³ in Narathiwat province has the ambition to produce their own media on YouTube and eventually gain recognition from a transnational corporation. This incident has raised a question regarding self-representation in a new media platform and Muslim minorities: what is at stake when

¹ The region is populated mainly by Malay-speaking Muslims in the southern provinces of Patani, Yala and Narathiwat. This southern region shares borders with Malaysia.

² *Ma-air My Friend* (มะแอเพื่อนฉัน), a Malay-language comedy series about friendships among Muslim pupils epitomises *Muslimlimited*'s popularity among a Malay-speaking YouTube audience with more than one hundred thousand view counts for this video alone. This view count figure may seem to be meagre when compared to other YouTube videos related to Muslims such as a *Pak Tai Ban Rao* ปักดำบ้านเรา (trans. the south is our home) a music video with more than 1 million view count.

³ Each district in the three southern borders is designated a colour to suggest varying degrees of violence. *Bojoh* is designated as a red zone which means this district contains the highest degrees of violence.

Thai Muslims, equipped with visual production technology and connected to the internet, construct their identity through self-representation on a public platform such as YouTube?

Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces are usually portrayed by the Thai mainstream media using stories revolving around daily killings allegedly done by Muslim separatists, and the arrests of Islamic teachers. However, there have recently been a growing amount of self-produced audio-visual content made by Muslims in the southern provinces, especially youths. *Muslimited*, along with other emerging media-savvy Muslim youths in the region, has produced video content in popular forms e.g. television series and short films and uploaded them onto YouTube. What makes this phenomenon even more striking is that Islamic principles become part and parcel of their content production. The founder of *Muslimited* clearly states that they have to “think out of the box” but not, literally, “outside Islamic principles”. Therefore, the popular media forms such as music videos and social media, which come with the flood of globalisation, now become intertwined with the rise of Islamisation. However, this phenomenon is not unique to Thailand.

This resonates with a growing body of research on the generational aspect of popular culture among Muslim youths which provides an insight into the negotiation between Muslim popular culture and their piety. Nilan and Feixa (2016) argue that devout youths in Indonesia appropriate Western modernity by a “filtering and selection” approach. Similarly, Muslims in Australia and Singapore “marry Islamic piety to their encounters with diverse forms of popular culture” (Nasir, 2016, p.2) while Herding (2013) coined the term “inventing Muslim cool” arguing that Muslims in Western Europe develop their own Islamic youth culture when encountering Western popular culture.

Juxtaposing this global phenomenon of “popular culture *versus* Islamic piety” in the context of Muslims in Thailand, one of the characteristics of their self-representation on YouTube is found in the preliminary results shows that Muslim youths appear to produce audio-visual content with a *playful* manner, yet still adhere to the idea of permissibility and

impermissibility within Islam – *halal* (to be allowed) and *haram* (to be forbidden). Unlike before, piety appears, to borrow Nasir (2016)’s term, “married” to popular cultural practices among Thai Muslims⁴. These Muslim youths tend to absorb popular forms of audio-visual media to be a part of their everyday practices, while their practice is infused and accommodated with Islam. Fun-to-watch comedy series such as *Ma-air My Friend* in *Muslimited* channel now appear side-by-side with old-fashioned videos showing an *ulama* (Islamic teachers) giving sermons. However, these two forms of media share the same goal – to propagate Islam. It should also be noted that this self-representation is in sharp contrast to the global representation of Islam and portrayal by the local Thai press of the region itself as violent in the past twelve years of the ongoing conflict.

Thus, the success story of local YouTube channels attest to the possibility of the new media challenging existing tropes of Muslims in three southern border provinces of Thailand. However, as noted above, this emerging audio-visual practice among Thai Muslims is also intersected with socio-political, cultural, economic and religious contexts that could enable and limit discourse and discursive practices among them. New media scholars (Lindgren, 2013; Nakamura, 2008, 2011) have warned that researchers should avoid the pitfalls of a celebratory discourse of new media studies, arguing that a participatory culture such as YouTube can liberate people from existing structural constraints. Rather, nuances of new media practices, power struggles and representation among the minorities should be taken into account. However, in order to delve into this emerging representational practice, fresh theoretical and methodological insights are needed. This interdisciplinary research project which draws on strands of theories from new media studies, cultural studies, visual culture and Thai studies, therefore, aims to capture the complexity of the work of representation of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces on YouTube.

⁴ During fieldwork in 2015, I found a growing trend of Muslim media professionals in Bangkok who used to work for media corporations but gave up their old jobs in order to work for Muslim media. Some interviewees in White Channel (discussed at length in chapter Five), a Muslim-run satellite and YouTube channel, did television commercials and music videos and applied the production skills they gained from previous work to the channel.

The questions this research poses are as follows:

1. In what way do Thai Muslims construct their identity on YouTube?
2. In what way does a participatory and a networked culture bring about certain types of media practices?
3. How are Islamic piety and popular media practices negotiated among Muslims?
4. How is this YouTube space related to other spaces?
5. What does it mean for Thai Muslims to represent themselves in the public space for a larger audience in the Thai nation-state?

Before proceeding to the next section which will provide brief historical background and theoretical frameworks employed to answer these research questions, I would like to discuss another question which is equally important and has to be taken into account: a positionality of the researcher. These discussions on the positionality also entail definitions of key terms that will be employed throughout this research.

Positionality of a researcher: academic works as “political stories”

This research is part of a cultural studies tradition which is characterised by “its openness, theoretical versatility, its reflexive even self-conscious mood, and especially, the importance of critique” (Johnson, 1986, p.38). As a result, besides answering the research questions noted above, this research also aims to question the role of a researcher in constructing knowledge about the Other. A “self-reflexive” is thus taken on board while a researcher and academic works are treated as “not outside” but inside the representational system itself.

Chaiwat (1992) examines academic works on Thai Muslims in Pattani and its people during 1980-89 and argues that these academic works can be conceptualised as political stories;

These are stories of in the sense that ultimately heroes and villains can be identified. In the process of depicting the good and the bad, the possibility in changing or maintaining social order tends to follow. Thus the classical notion of politics emerges (Chaiwat, 1992, pp.32-33)

In this light, the scholarly works on the Thai Muslims, just like other stories, are caught up with a binary of “good” and “bad” and are thus intrinsically political. Similarly, in the case of this research, it is also inevitably a political writing in a sense that it attempts to construct knowledge about Muslim minorities by portraying them. As a Buddhist Thai from Bangkok doing research on Muslims in the three southern border provinces in London and writing in English, my positionality as a writer of a “political story” of Muslims Others becomes evident. With this caveat in mind, my portrayal of Muslims (through a process of thinking and writing) in this research which can potentially reproduce the stereotypes of Muslims has to be taken into account. But what are methods that can possibly be employed to unpack existing binaries and tropes or to intervene, instead of reinforcing, a social hierarchy?

Critiques of feminism, anthropology and ethnography offer vital tools to scrutinise politics of writing about the Other. Rather than embracing objectivity, these works take subjectivity into account and try to unsettle taken-for-granted social beliefs. The works of gender studies scholars (hooks, 2001; Komter, 1991; Moore, 1994), who privilege the intersectionality of class, race and gender provide insights on how writing from a particular point of view can fall into a pitfall of excluding Others. hook (2001) for examples, argues that writings of American feminists to fight with paternalism reflect the point of view of “White middle-class Americans” who speak for “all women”. As a result, hooks explains, “White women who dominate feminist discourse, who for the most part make and articulate feminist theory, have little or no understanding of White supremacy as politic of psychological impact of class, of their political status within racist, sexist, capitalist state” (p.34). Consequently, while a gender inequality is questioned, racist stereotypes are left uncrutinisised in these works. This intersectionality perspective is thus pertinent to this research since it informs the researcher that besides seeing Muslims as religious minorities, other aspects of identity

including race, class, gender and etc. have to be taken on board.

Furthermore, since this research examines the representation of the Other, a relationship between a researcher's Self (a middle-class Buddhist Thai researcher from Bangkok), and Thai Muslim Others is another important aspect of positionality. By looking at audio-visual texts made by Muslims, interviewing and observing Thai Muslims during my fieldwork and analyzing the data in order to construct a knowledge about the Muslims, my background inevitably affects the way I perceive, analyse and portray Thai Muslims in my writing. Informed by critique of anthropological writing (Abu-Lughod, 1991; Fabien, 2002; Pratt, 1986), I perceive my academic writing itself as part of the "will to knowledge" about the Other. I am thus made aware that

The very gap between the professional and authoritative discourse of generalization and the languages of everyday life (our own and others') establishes a fundamental separation between the anthropologist and the people written about that facilitates the construction of anthropological objects as simultaneously different and inferior (Abu-Lughod, 1991, p.474)

To unsettle a hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the Other that might occur during a writing process, politics of language and translation need to be considered. Words and expressions which are widely used by Thais and Thai Muslims have to be problematise, as Pratt (1986) suggests that a researcher "liberates" him/herself from reinforcing stereotypes of the Other "not by doing away with tropes (which is not possible) but by appropriating and inventing new ones (which is)"(p.50). To apply this method to the research, I will discuss about two crucial terms that will be employed throughout this research, namely "Thai Muslims" and "the three southern border provinces".

Muslim communities are unequally distributed throughout Thailand and their religious and cultural beliefs are far from monolithic. Out of a total population of 66 million people, Muslims make up approximately 5 million and are the second largest religious group in the country (Gilquin, 2005). More than 75% of Muslims in Thailand live in the south and are highly concentrated in the four southernmost provinces including Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and Sutun

which share borders with Malaysia. It should be noted here that while Muslims are religious minorities in Thailand which is known as a Buddhist country, Muslim populations are the majority in the four southern provinces. Officially, Thai Muslims are called *kon thai muslim* (trans. *kon* = persons, *thai muslim* = Thai Muslims) or *kon thai itsalam* (trans. *kon* = persons, *thai itslam* = Thai Islam) in Thai language. While *kon thai muslim* in other provinces speak Thai, Muslims in Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat still use Malay Pattani language (a dialect of Malay language) in their everyday life. As a result, in their Malay dialect, these Muslims refer to themselves as *ore nayu* (trans. Malayu person)/*ore isle* (trans. a person who adhere to Islam) while they call Buddhist Thais *ore siye* (trans. Siamese/Thai person, suggesting “Thainess” and Buddhism) (see also Chapter One).

As this research examines audio-visual texts produced by Muslims in Thailand, I employ the term “Thai Muslims” throughout this research to refer to Thai citizens who are Muslims. However, as noted earlier, this term does not subscribe to an idea that Thai Muslims are homogeneous. On the contrary, with this caveat in mind, I use this term to refer to Muslims in Thailand from various socio-economic, education, cultural, geographical background whose representational practices operate with ideological struggles within the Thai state. If I want to refer specifically to Muslims from the region of old *Patani* kingdom in the south, I use the phrase “Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces”.

In this research, “the three southern border provinces” is used to referred to Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat; provinces in the south of Thailand sharing borders with Malaysia. This kind of geographical reference, however, is also significant when it comes to a representation of the violence-ridden region of a Thai nation-state populated by Malay-speaking Muslims. Consequently, the term which is used to refer to this region needs to be problematised. Bonura (2008) argues that the widely-used terms such as *sam changwat chaidan pak tai* (three southern border provinces) which are originated from official document, are employed

as an empirical fact about the area of the violence and the people of the region to totalise the conflict. In respect to national politics, it creates a partition of a “special area” in order to say that “violence at the edge of nation-state may appear as a logical outcome premised simply on this representation of cultural/national difference, rather than being grounded in complex political or historical relationships” (p.385). Therefore, by designating this region as *changwat chaidæn* (trans. border provinces), this geographical discourse connotes the otherness of this predominantly Muslim region and forecloses other historical and political aspects.⁵ Since the beginning of the conflict in 2004, *sam changwat chaidæn pak tai* is extensively adopted in the press and everyday language as a “catchphrase” to refer to the region. In English, however, the terms “the Deep South”, “the southernmost provinces” and “the troubled south” are widely employed by both the press and academia. Similar to the term “Thai Muslims”, “the three southern border provinces” is considered as a discourse and I am thus aware that these terms are political, contested and rooted in various different political and historical aspects.

Therefore, I chose to use the phrase “Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces” to refer specifically to Malay-speaking Muslims from Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat which share borders with Malaysia. I use this phrase rather than “Malay Muslims in the Deep South of Thailand”, which can be found in English language academic writings (including my previous research) and press, because of the two reasons.

Firstly, this brings closer “the languages of everyday life” (Abu-Lughod, 1991, p.474) among Thais and Thai Muslims themselves when they refer to Muslims from the region as *thai muslim* (or *itsalam*) *sam changwat chaidæn pak tai* [trans. Thai Muslims (or Islam – in Thai language this terms is also used to refer to Muslims as well) in the three southern border provinces of Thailand]. Since my research is in written in English, I am fully aware that everyday language pertaining to Thai Muslims is paramount to my cultural analyses of YouTube videos. As a result, rather than ignoring these Thai terms when writing my research in

⁵ It should be noted that border provinces in other regions of Thailand are not labeled as *changwat chaidæn*.

English, I take them into account. By “appropriating and inventing” (Pratt, 1986, p.50) these terms for my research, prevailing tropes (in Thai) about the Muslims and their region will enable the researcher to engage more critically with data and to unsettle taken-for-granted ideological works reflected in everyday practices.

Secondly, by labelling these Muslims as “Malay” appears to suggest that their identity is definite: they are “Malay” and “not Thai”. As the subsequent chapter will illustrate, their identity is more fluid depending on who they encounter with. Fixing them with an adjective “Malay” in this research may risks further “otherizing” them as “not Thai” and “essentialising” their identity as fixed. As a result, to problematise a discourse of “Malayness” in the term Malay Muslims (see also Chapter One), I chose to use the term “Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces” instead to suggest that they are “in-between” “Thainess”, “Malayness”, Islam, globalization and other possible ideological forces that intersect with their daily life. It should also be noted that, in Thai language, the word *malay* is used to denote Malaysia as well. Hence, Buddhist Thais employ the word *khaek malay* (แขกมาเลย์) to refer to Muslims in Malaysia.

Since these research questions seek to shed light on the self-representation of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces in a new media platform, this project needs a historical background on the representation of Thai Muslims on more traditional domains such official documents, the press and films. This brief historical background (it will be discussed at length in Chapter One) includes two periods when knowledge about Thai Muslims were needed and were thus produced in order to serve the changing political landscape: the formation of the Siamese nation-state in the early 20th century and the new height of violence in the three southern border provinces in 2004.

Representing Thai Muslims in the south of Thailand: the construction of knowledge of Muslim Others

The 20th century has seen the Bangkok elites consolidating their power. In order to present themselves as more civilised and to legitimise their rule, the elites began travelling to remote parts of Siam in order to obtain knowledge about their subjects. Several projects in documenting ethnic minorities were spearheaded in order to construct knowledge about the Others who reside within the newly-demarcated territory. Never before had Bangkok elites travelled to far flung areas to *observe* and *record* the characteristics and ways of life of its subjects (Thongchai, 2000b). This can be argued that this internal colonisation project was aimed at constructing “a system of truth” (Said, 1978, p.204) about subjects within Siamese territories. Therefore, during this period, *visualising* Others to construct knowledge began to take shape.

After the abolition of absolute monarchy in 1932, the creation and identity of a Thai nation-state became particularly important. Literature and films were used as a tool to uphold and promote national identity and at the same time reproduce stereotypes of the Other, including Muslims in the south (Pichet, 2008). Nevertheless, a more recent change in terms of politics and security in the three southern border provinces resulted from the major violence in 2004 and deserves attention since it entailed both official and media discourses on the conflict and Muslims themselves.

On 28 April 2004, when the first major violence in the southernmost provinces erupted, the region, which had long been considered “troubled”, became the centre of attention for the Thai media. On that day, according to military sources, a group of 30 Muslim militants (most of whom were leading figures of a Muslim militant group in southern Thailand) planned an attack on a military security base near Krue Ze mosque, Pattani province. It is even reported that their operation had begun two days earlier. At 4am on 28 April 2004, clashes between military officers and the insurgents began after the insurgents had already raided a military checkpoint near Krue Ze mosque. Thirty-two insurgents fled into the mosque where

approximately 3,000 Muslim worshippers were gathered, making it difficult for military officers to infiltrate the area. The Military encircled the mosque in an attempt to negotiate with the insurgents over a period of eight hours but the clash eventually resulted in the deaths of all 32 insurgents inside the mosque with 30 military officers also wounded and three found dead (*lang kor moon sam changwat chaidan pak tai* [trans. Source of information for southern border provinces, 2013]). Since then, the violence continued with a series of attacks by Muslim militants and the arrest and detention of alleged perpetrators, and the representation of Thai Muslims in the region as “violent” persists.

Along with a mist over violence and uncertainty in the southern region in 2004, “knowledge” of the three southern border provinces and Thai Muslims was being re-constructed via representation in mainstream media. In 2004 alone, news about conflicts in the so-called “Deep South” appeared on the front pages of two major Thai language newspapers – *Thai Rath* (trans. Thai state) and *Matichon* (trans. Public opinion) everyday (Treepon, 2004). The four major themes of news discourse about Thai Muslims in the conflict-stricken region included: military operations are needed in order to get rid of “southern bandits”; Islamic schools are incubating separatists; Muslim teens are being brainwashed; and the government has to separate “bad Muslims” from “good Muslims” (Treepon, 2004). The study of the representation of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces in 2004 suggests that the mainstream media represent “bad Muslims” as a threat to Thai nationhood while “good Muslims” have to be separated and saved by Thai officials. This thus helps to uphold the ideology of “Thainess” and preserve the status quo of the Bangkok elites.

The history of the representation of Thai Muslims in different media discussed above – official documents, literature, films and the press, offers us an insight into how knowledge of the Muslim minorities has been *constructed* and *re-constructed* via representation in response to changing socio-political contexts e.g. to legitimise an elite’s rule during the construction of a nation-state in the early 20th century, to uphold the

implementation of the Bangkok government's policies in the mid 20th century, and to legitimise military operations from 2004 onwards. This also offers us a sense of how Thai Muslim's YouTube videos and channels such as *Muslimited* (currently more than 10,000 videos about Muslims in the three southern border provinces uploaded onto YouTube) are located within the media space of Thailand.

The above discussion of the representation of Muslims in the Thai media suggests that to answer research questions regarding the representation of Thais Muslim on a different space such as YouTube, this research requires theoretical tools to analyse the data. In order to grasp this phenomenon as much as possible, three strands of theory are employed throughout this multi-disciplinary research.

Postcolonial studies, visual culture and new media studies: theoretical frameworks for analysing the representation of Thai Muslims on YouTube

In theoretical terms, this thesis is informed by an intersection of postcolonial studies, visual culture and new media studies. It aims to examine how YouTube is used by Muslim video producers in order to construct their identity amidst the ongoing anxieties and tensions between Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces and the Thai state.

Theoretical frameworks employed in previous research on the southern conflicts range from positivist to critical paradigms (Bajunid, 2005; Dorairajoo, 2004; Harish, 2006; Yusuf, 2006 among others) and yet mainly focus on the tensions among the Buddhists and Muslims, Islam, and Thai nationhood and largely foreclose a postcolonial condition that has shaped Thailand since the late 19th century.

Postcolonial scholars in Thai studies (Anderson, 1983; Harrison, 2010; Jackson, 2010; Loos, 2006; Reynolds, 2002, 2006; Thongchai, 1994, 2000a, 2000b among others) argue that the construction of "Thainess" is not "unique", but is to a large extent, characterised as an ongoing negotiation between Bangkok elites and external forces (e.g. the West) during the colonial period. In this light, the Other is, thus, of paramount

importance to analyses of “Thainess” and its repercussions. Rather than perceiving “Thainess” as a static and monolithic discourse, these scholars attest to its multiplicities and contradictions. Having said that, postcolonial studies has rarely been used in critical frameworks to examine the contemporary issue of the southern conflicts, since Thailand is, as is widely held, the only country in South East Asia that was not formally colonised like neighbouring countries (Burma, Malaysia, Laos and Cambodia). As a result, this research seeks to redress an absence of postcolonial dimensions in a study of representation in Thailand. Apart from postcolonial studies, visual culture will also inform the theoretical frameworks of this research in that YouTube is predominantly visual.

Visual culture scholars (Evans & Hall, 1999; Mirzoeff, 1999) contend that Western metaphysics, by privileging text over the visual, has been influential on Western academia and, thus, has laid the epistemological foundation for an analysis of a society working within the terms of the signification system (influenced by linguistics). Consequently, visual practices are largely overlooked by scholars even though “human experience is now more visual and visualised than ever before from the satellite picture to medical images of the internal organs of the human body” (Mirzoeff, 1999, p.1). This argument also rings true in the previous studies of the representation of Others in Siam/Thailand (Harrison, 2009; Pichet, 2008; Thongchai, 2000a; 2000b). While these works offer a crucial point of departure for this research project, they pay attention mostly to written texts such as official documents, short stories and novels. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by embracing theories in visual culture to examine representations of Thai Muslims in YouTube videos and acknowledging that “the differences between language and the visual remain significant and require further attention” (Evans & Hall, 1999; p.7). However, in contrast to the representation of Thai Muslims in the mainstream media, noted in the very beginning of this chapter, YouTube is part of a seismic change in the media landscape. Never before did ordinary people film and upload their videos or even create channels on which audiences can comment on each video. New concepts providing methods

for an analysis of the so-called new media are thus needed.

In recent years, the body of literature on “new media” has also grown because of the increasing penetration of the internet, both in developed and developing countries. However, “new media” studies (Bruns, 2008; Castells, 2007; Deuze, 2012; Jenkins, 2006; Papacharissi, 2011) and YouTube studies in particular (Burgess, 2008; Christensen, 2008; Lange, 2008; Lindgren, 2011; Papadopoulos, 2009) are predominantly conducted by scholars from the West and within Western contexts. These works explore the potential of new media in transforming and/or challenging existing social structures and stereotypes. However, other such scholars (Nakamura 2002, 2008; Wall 2009) are skeptical about such a universal claim and call for perspectives on “new media” to be applied to ethnic minorities and non-Western contexts.

With regard to media studies in a Thai context, there is a lack of research focusing on ethnic minorities within Thailand even though more than 10,000 YouTube videos relating to Thai Muslims in the southernmost provinces exist online. YouTube is therefore a valuable platform that provides rich data for an analysis of the visual representation of Thai Muslims in the southernmost provinces. It provides a new space for mediating tropes about the Muslim community by both Buddhist Thais and Muslims themselves, even though it has been largely overlooked by scholars of “new media” thus far.

Data collection

This study analyses the representation of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces on YouTube where the data collected includes videos made by Thai Muslims in the region uploaded from 2004 onwards. The year 2004 is selected since it marked a new heightening of the on-going violence in the region. Since then, incidents (especially battles between military forces and Muslim militants that brought about casualties) erupting in the region attracted a great deal of media coverage and therefore, the so-

called “Deep South” has been coloured with violence. This timeframe and the extensive media coverage of the violence are especially important when it comes to an analysis of videos made by Thai Muslims on YouTube which is considered as “relational” to other spaces.

I chose to include YouTube channels and videos made by both Muslims from other parts of Thailand and Muslims in the three southern border provinces because I want to compare self-representation among different groups of Muslims in different locales. This may shed light on the hierarchical relationship among Muslims in the southern border provinces and Muslims from other regions, especially Bangkok. As noted earlier, since this research treats YouTube as a space relational to other spaces, other representation spaces which are cinema and television are taken into account. As a result, mainstream cinema and music videos which represent Thai Muslims are first examined before delving further into YouTube videos themselves.

Besides textual analyses, I also interviewed Muslim YouTube video producers in Bangkok and the three southern provinces of Thailand during my fieldwork between June-August 2015.

Sampling

I utilised YouTube’s search function to collect videos about Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces using search terms such as “มุสลิม (Muslims)”, “นราธิวาส (Narathiwat)” “ยะลา (Yala)” and “ปัตตานี (Pattani)”. There were 3,710 videos under the search results for “Muslims + Pattani”; 3,550 videos in the results for “Muslims + Yala”; and 2,990 for “Muslim + Narathiwat” making a data resource composed of more than 10,250 videos (although other videos relating to Thai Muslims can be found using other search terms).

I also used the “related video” function on YouTube, appearing on the right-hand side of the screen, as a snowball sampling method to search for other related videos. Since there is such a large amount of videos in the search results, I narrowed it down to two main

categories, which are:

- 1) YouTube channels created by Thai Muslims
- 2) YouTube videos related to Thai Muslims.

For both categories, I also chose to include videos made by Muslims in Bangkok and in the three southern border provinces and Muslims in Bangkok in order to compare and give a fuller picture of self-representations among Muslims in Thailand. For the second category, videos were narrowed down into five sub-categories as follows;

1. Music-related videos made by non-Muslims to represent Thai Muslims: several popular music videos were uploaded on YouTube and have attracted 100,000 view counts. These videos are chosen in order to shed light on how Muslims are portrayed in the Thai popular media.
2. Music-related videos made by Muslims: this genre of videos attracts the largest number of audience shown in the view count feature of YouTube (the number of views reaches more than 100,000 for some videos). These videos can be categorised into four subgroups:

2.1 *nasheed video* or NV: these videos are an alternative to popular music videos. Since music (with musical instruments) is considered *haram* in Islam, some video producers create NV instead for a *halal* way of entertainment.

2.2 “home-made” video made by Muslim pupils in the three southern border provinces: these home-made montage videos with, most of the time, embedded Thai pop music, are popular among Muslim pupils in the region. With a less complicated technique in producing video, this genre sheds light on how ordinary people take part in producing their own videos and thus self-representation.

2.3 music videos about school activities made by Muslims in the three southern border provinces – even though there has been a movement to ban music in the Muslim media, we can find many videos made by Muslims in the region using music as background. By including this genre, it offers an insight into an analysis on how Muslim students negotiate with the Islamisation movement.

3. Short films: recently, more and more short films are being produced by the younger generations of Muslim students, both from the three southern border provinces and other provinces including Bangkok. The duration of these films ranges from 10 to 20 minutes and some videos have attracted more than 10,000 view counts. This genre sheds light on the visual representation of Muslim youth and their self-representation as Muslim minorities in the Thai state. It is also interesting to note that these films are in the Thai language which demonstrates that the younger generations of Muslims from the region are negotiating their identity through short films.
4. Documentaries made by school pupils: Due to a growing amount of funding being distributed from government institutions such as the Ministry of Culture and the Internal Security Operation Command (the Ministry of Defense) to Islamic schools to create peace, media production camps have been organized, giving rise to groups of young video producers in the region. Most of the documentary videos (mostly appearing on their YouTube channels) circulated on YouTube are the result of projects noted above. These videos, telling stories about the local lifestyle, also provide data for analysis.
5. Videos showing Islamic teachers performing sermons: This type of video is prevalent on YouTube which suggests that Islamic scholars and organisations see YouTube as an opportunity to propagate their Islamic principles. This aspect of self-representation can be explored further as to how they use the YouTube space to promote Islam.

It is crucial to note that these are the genres of videos relating to Thai Muslims I have

found so far on YouTube and all of them are acknowledged as *only* part of the visual field.

However, these genres were strategically narrowed down for an in-depth analysis. The criteria for selecting videos include critical case sampling (debates of Islamic principles), view counts (which indicates the popularity of the videos), comments (which indicate participations that are a crucial aspect of the new media) and the mode of production and circulation such as amateur/student videos (to investigate, to what extent, YouTube paves the way for the newer ways for Thai Muslims to represent themselves vis-à-vis being represented in the mainstream and corporate media). After YouTube channels were selected and analysed for preliminary results, I made research visits to the three southern border provinces and Bangkok to interview video producers based on the YouTube channels I had found earlier. I first contacted them by Facebook Messenger and Email and then managed to meet for interviews in Bangkok, Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat.

Data Analysis

After data from these particular genres were selected, I created a coding sheet that consists of three main categories for analysis. These categories include the titles and descriptions of the videos, descriptions of the uploaders of the videos, and the type of video production (e.g. professional production, amateur, official government production, religious etc.). The second section of the coding sheet analyse visuals and audio. This section will be guided by Fiske (1987), who provides a method for investigating moving pictures using “television codes”. The codes include the following: social codes (e.g. appearances, dress, make-up); technical codes (e.g. camera, lighting, editing); and representational codes (e.g. coherence and ideology).

Each video was coded with descriptions of people, objects and places. The types of shots employed (e.g. long shots and close-up shots) and video narrations will also be analysed. Coding the videos was done categorically, looking at dialogue, music, sound

effects and songs. The last section of the coding sheet was used to analyze the comments for the videos.

After the selected videos had been coded, the dataset, coupled with interviews collected from Bangkok and the three southern border provinces were analyzed by using a qualitative content analysis method that seeks to investigate and interpret the meanings of texts by referring to the historical and cultural contexts discussed earlier. This includes discussions on “Thainess” and Thai Muslim identity formation in the Patani Kingdom. Homi Bhabha’s discussion of “colonial stereotypes” and other theoretical discussions on visual culture and Nakamura’s digital race will also be employed in analysing the visual representations of Thai Muslims on YouTube. My methodology is also informed by scholars of race and ethnicity (Anitas & Yuval-Davis, 1992; Gilroy, 2000; Hesse, 2011), who argue that researchers must be cautious in using the Western concept of “race”. Lastly, my work and research is influenced by scholars of anthropology (Pratt, 1986; Fabian, 2002), who argue that researchers must be aware of their roles in reproducing stereotypes and narratives of the Other.

Since the construction of identities (of both Thais and Muslims) is necessary to consider in order to examine the visual representation of Thai Muslims from the three southern provinces on YouTube, the following chapter provides historical discussions on the construction of Siam/“Thainess” since the beginning of the 19th century. A historical background of the construction of these national and cultural identities is important in further analysing the representation of Thai Muslims in Thailand in mainstream discourse, as well as in “new media” forums.

Chapter One

Historical Background

As discussed briefly in the introductory chapter, historical aspects regarding the formation of the Thai state and the invention of “Thainess” as an ideology to preserve the status quo by Bangkok elites, including a construction of “Malayness” among Muslims minorities, are crucial to understand the work of the representation of Thai Muslims in the three southern provinces on YouTube. This is because it provides a *context* in which *text*, in this case YouTube videos, can be situated for further analyses in the following chapters.

Therefore, this chapter begins with some historical background on the formation of the Thai state as a response to the colonialism beginning in the late 19th century. It examines the ‘civilising’ project exercised by Bangkok elites in order to put them on an equal footing with the West, while legitimising its domination over other Thais and ethnic groups, including Malay-speaking Muslims in the south. This section is followed by a review of the literature on the construction of a Muslim identity as minorities in the newly demarcated state, including ongoing conflicts.

The formation of the newly demarcated Thai state

In his influential work *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson notes how the new “imagined community” helped to “set the state for the modern nation” (Anderson 1983, p.46). This section examines the history of Thai nation-building and the construction of its own “imagined community”, including Thailand’s transition from a pre-modern kingdom to a modern nation-state (and how these processes affected Muslim communities in the three southern border provinces).

The pre-modern Siamese kingdom

Thongchai (1994) examines a history of the “geo-body” of the Thai nation and asserts that among South East Asian pre-modern polities (before the colonial era), the relationship between political powers was hierarchical and without any defined territorial divisions (Thongchai, 1994). Before its official transition into becoming “Thailand” in 1939, Siam was defined by boundaries demarcated more than a century ago in the 1890s and 1900s (Baker & Pasuk, 2002). At the time, the drawing of territorial boundaries between different kingdoms was a new geographical concept introduced by British and French colonialists. Modern geographical methods and the production of the “nation-state” (through the formation of territorial borders) thus not only established rigid boundaries between Thailand and neighbouring countries, but also prevented smaller chiefdoms to establish themselves autonomously as they had done for hundreds of years (Thongchai, 1994). They also helped to facilitate the imposition of “Thainess”, or a national Thai identity, among the region’s subjects in this new demarcated nation.

The Thai nation-state and “Thainess” (kwam-pen- thai)

During the late 19th century, an expansion of colonial powers not only brought about the formation of nation-states with demarcated boundaries in South East Asia, but also introduced the modern concepts (and hierarchical systems) of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’. Within this period, the ruling elites of Siam had selectively and strategically employed the Western colonial system of racial categorisation and combined it with an indigenous social hierarchy. This not only asserted its autonomy as a civilisation to encroaching Western colonial powers, but was also a way to repress other subordinate groups in the newly created nation-state.

The civilians who resided within this newly formed political entity were ethnically diverse and had varied histories (Baker & Pasuk, 2002). However, in order for the new nation-state to maintain its sovereignty, these diverse and varied groups had to be categorised and

defined (Connors, 2003). Chai-anan (2002) argues that since ethnic differences were already defined in the pre-modern kingdoms of Siam, there was no need for the monarchy to create a new state identity within this bureaucratic regime (the state considered to be conjoined with the monarchy). As long as different racial groups did not pose a direct threat to the monarchy, racial and ethnic differences were not considered an issue.

However, after the abolition of the absolute monarchy in 1932, military regimes began extensive policies in imposing “Thainess” as a state identity that included elements of both Bangkok culture and Buddhism. Chai-anan (2002) argues that during the 1940s to 1960s, the military’s “state identity” building projects utilised mass media (especially literature) in order to spur nationalist sentiments, thus promoting a Thai-centric “ethnic chauvinism”. Connors (2003) discusses how “Thainess” was mainly imposed by the Bangkok elites and was bolstered to generate unity. Thus, those who were not “Thai enough” had to be assimilated into a national culture imposed by the ruling elites. Consequently, several other traditions became marginalised and relegated as being “folk” or “sub” cultures (Connors, 2003, p. 59). What, then, is a state apparatus used to impose “Thainess” among its subjects?

Reynolds (2006) examines institutions e.g. the National Identity Board, that were employed to ensure “Thainess” among citizens since the first cultural mandate in 1939. Strikingly, he argues that “Thainess” (a discourse intertwined with *chat Thai* or “Thai nation”) is actually fragmented and refers to non-monolithic identities. Reynolds states that the term *chat* in fact:

...contains traces of all these others that do not conform to the Thai-Buddhist-monarchical-territorial construct enshrined by the National Boards schema. In any case, *chat* is not monolithic, self-evident entity that springs forth prefabricated to serve the cause of national unity and harmony. There would not be such a lively, well-funded, publicly patronized discourse about Thai identity if it were so self-evident

(Reynolds, 2006, p.264)

Consequently, government-funded institutions are employed to construct “Thainess” in order to maintain an identity of the Thai nation. However, Reynolds (2006) further argues that in “all discourses of nationhood there is a tension between ethnicity and territory” (p.15). The formation of “Thai nationhood” was therefore not the smooth process that the elites hoped for, considering the different ethnic groups it was trying to assimilate under one national identity. Rather, it created tension between the groups who *became* minorities in the process of the Thai state formation itself. Thongchai (1994) asserts that the Thai geo-body is “not necessarily equal to Thai nationhood” and thus minority groups that resided within Thai geographical borders were still marginalised within their own “Thai *cultural* maps” (p.174). It was these internal conflicts that resulted from systems of differentiation (and later, Thai assimilation) that contributed to the on-going tension in southern Thailand.

The discussions above suggest that since the 19th century the West has been an influential force (in the form of colonialism and capitalism) in the creation of the systems of differentiation and territorial geography that lead to the implementation of the Thai nation-state and “Thainess”. However, Thongchai (2010) argues that Thai scholars must still go beyond the binary opposition of the West and the Orient. He writes: “westernisation, globalisation, indeed any process of transculturation is not possible without an agency that translates, interprets, adapts, modifies and selects the elements of one culture to make them suitable for another” (Thongchai, 2010, p.148). This research therefore acknowledges the non-existence of pure “Thainess”, “Western-ness” and even “Muslim-ness” as identities.

While a national identity of “Thainess” was being created, the identity of the Muslim “other” also emerged. The next sections will explore the overlapping processes of “othering” amongst minority groups within the Thai state as well as the response of Muslims in the

southern border region towards the discourses of “Thainess” and *siwilai*⁶. Che Man (1990) states that responses to national integration policies created “a spectrum of responses from the Muslim community – ranging from the ‘accommodationist’ to the ‘liberationist’/‘separatist’” (p.256). Thus, even the views and responses of Muslims are far from monolithic, signifying a truly diverse Thai nation-state and highlighting how “Thainess” itself is imaginary.

The place of Islam in Thai society

Muslim communities are unequally distributed all over Thailand and their religious and cultural beliefs are far from monolithic. Out of a total population of 66 million people, Muslims make up approximately 5 million of the Thai population and are the second largest religious group in the country (Gilquin, 2005). More than 75% of Muslims in Thailand live in the south and are highly concentrated in the four southernmost provinces that include Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and Satun. These provinces share borders with Malaysia, and Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat previously belonged to the *Patani* kingdom which flourished during the 18th century. While Muslim inhabitants from the old *Patani* kingdom speak Malay, Satun, which also shares borders with Malaysia, is mostly populated by Thai-speaking Muslims called “*sam sam*”⁷ (Kobkua, 2000, 2013). Moreover, Muslims in Thailand differ in their origins: some migrated to Thailand hundreds of years ago, while others have resided in areas annexed into the Thai nation-state. As a result, “the Muslim minority in Thailand is neither homogeneous in its origins nor in its daily religious observances” (Gilquin, 2005, p.26). Out of approximately

⁶ The concept of civilisation (transliterated to Thai as *siwilai*) was both a new terminology and a cultural project that was ambitiously used to equate Siam with the West and to preserve its hierarchical relationships with smaller kingdoms and chiefdoms. The adoption of the term *siwilai* in the Thai cultural project thus suggests that the elites had embraced modern temporal (progressiveness) and spatial (geography) consciousness in order to strengthen its domination over these smaller districts (Thongchai, 2000b).

⁷ *Sam sam* is a group of Thai-speaking Muslims in the Thai provinces of Satun, Trang, Krabi and Songkhla and in Kedah in Malaysia. There has been some debate about the origin of this racial group who differentiate themselves from Malay-speaking Muslims in the same area by the language they use - a Thai dialect. In Satun, there are both Malay-speaking and Thai-speaking Muslims. From outside appearances, one cannot distinguish *Sam Sam* from Malay-speaking Muslims but can do so when they speak. Kobkua (2000) argues that from historical documents, it is possible that *Sam Sam* is a shorter term of the word “Siam Islam” used to address people who are indigenous and Siamese (Thai-speaking) to the areas.

3,000 Islamic mosques situated throughout Thailand, 2,441 are located in the south (Gilquin, 2005). However, even though they make up the majority of the Muslim population in Thailand, Muslims in the three southern border provinces are the most marginalised and “othered” group in the state. The next three sections will explore three cultural and political elements: the term *khaek*; the *hijab* conflict; and the representation of Muslims in Thai literature, employed by various institutions in order to exclude Thai Muslims in general and Muslims in the three southern border provinces in particular, from “Thainess”.

Khaek as the Others within the nation-state

Since Buddhism embodies “Thainess”, Gilquin (2005) argues, those who are Muslim or who adhere to Islam appear as “foreign” to Buddhist Thais (even though Buddhism itself was also ‘imported’ from outside influences). During the formation of the Thai state, Muslims were officially given the term “Thai Islam” or “Thai Muslim”. In colloquial Thai, they are also referred to as *khaek* (แขก) which means “guest” and is a term used to identify outsiders of the Thai cultural sphere. Gowing (1975) asserts that at least a century ago, the Siamese began to use this term to refer to “dark skinned foreign visitors or immigrants and, in that connotation, has been popularly applied to Indians and Malays residing in Thailand” (p.32). Thus, if both Buddhists and Muslims were present together at a village, the Buddhists would be referred to as “Thai”, while the Muslims would be called *khaek* (Gilquin, 2005). However, this term also evolved over time.

Reid’s (2013) historiographic study criticises the direct translation of *khaek* found in an ancient (pre-Islamic period) Thai chronicle to “Malay”, and refers to ethnic Malays even though *khaek* is used to refer to Muslims only in the modern Thai period. *Khaek* is therefore a problematic term, since Malay-speaking Muslims in the Thai state are not just “guests” in their own provinces. White and Chavivun (1983) also discuss the negative connotations of *khaek* and how this term contributes to the marginalisation and “othering” of Thai Muslims:

The category *khaek* is associated with various kinds of undesirable characteristics, including aspects of appearance (dark skin, oily or dirty hair, overdressed), religion (very religious, and avoidance of pork and dogs) and behaviour (ethnocentric, unfriendly, selfish, lazy, untrustworthy, poor, and lusty [among males]). It is also believed that Muslims possess knowledge of magic and sorcery. An important basis for the negative image of Muslims held by Thais is their belief that Muslims reject Thai culture through their lack of ability in the Thai language and their perceived disloyalty to the Thai nation (White and Chavivun, 1983, p.13)

Khaek is thus a pejorative term used by Buddhist Thais to refer to Muslims. In terms of self-identification, Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces, calling themselves, in their Malay dialect, "*ore nayu* (*ore* = person and *nayu* = *Malayu*)", distinguish themselves from other Malaysians by referring to them as "*ore male* (*ore* = person and *male* = *Malaysia*)". Interestingly, however, they do not make distinctions between "*ore nayu*" and "*ore isle*" (*isle* = *Islam*) when they refer to themselves. This is because, as White and Chavivun (1983) argue, they view Islam as being fundamental and equivalent to Malay identity, while Buddhist Thais are called "*ore siye* (*siye* = Siam/Thailand)". (However, some of the more educated Muslims identify identity as "*ore siye*" to foreigners as a way to pronounce that they are from Thailand). By the same token, Nilsen (2012) finds that ethnic identifications are also closely tied to references to Islam. For example, Muslims call themselves "*ore nayu*" where "*nayu*" is "*Malayu*" in Malaysian dialect, and where both terms are directly associated with Islam. The use of terms therefore highlights how the contrast between the two groups is actually religion (Islam versus Buddhist).

Muslims in the *Patani* region also used the term *jawi*⁸ for self-identification when *Patani* was first annexed to Siam. Inhabitants of pre-colonial Malaysia (as well as Muslims from the Indo-Malayu region) called themselves *jawi*, sharing this identity with *Patani* Muslims. *Jawi* is therefore a "semantic field" that extends beyond physical locations (Le Roux, 1998, p.237). After the independence of Malaysia and Indonesia in 1960s, other Malay sultanates evolved in

⁸ In Mecca, the word *Jawi* means Muslims who came from Malaysia and Indonesia and in writing, *Jawi* is modified Arabic script for Malay language (Le Roux, 1998).

terms of national, cultural and social aspects while *Patani* became a part of Thailand and still represents traditional Malay culture.

Le Roux (1998) problematises how the Muslim minority in the 20th century used the term *jawi* to refer to *Patani* Muslims, since *jawi* signifies Malay cultural roots (different from Thai) even though the *Patani* Muslims are still inhabitants living on Thai soil:

The inhabitants of Patani, in the past Malay (in the political sense), are now inhabitants of Thailand by territorial absorption; they are not yet Thai because of their remaining Malay (in the cultural sense); they are Muslims and, finally, they are Austronesians by language (their language is part of the Malayo-Polynesian group whereas Siamese belongs to the Thai-Kadai group). They belong to all of these worlds without fusing with any single one (Le Roux, 1998, p.232)

This suggests that the Muslim minorities, who lived in an “in-between” space (between “Thainess” “Malayness” “Muslimness”), strategically and politically employed the term *jawi* to negotiate with encroaching “Thainess” imposed by Siam at that time. Similarly, Nilsen (2012) posits that the way Muslims in the three southern border provinces use more than one term to identify themselves reflects their own “multiple identities”, since their identities are influenced by Islam, pre-colonial Malay culture, “Thainess” (as imposed by the Bangkok government) and Muslim revivalism (p.130).

Thus, while the Thai state tried to establish a hierarchy among ethnic groups within their own physical and cultural boundaries (with “Thainess” as the dominant ideology), Muslims in the three southern border provinces connected and identified with Islam “Malayness”, and aligned themselves with these larger concepts that transgress boundaries. These Muslims also strategically differentiate themselves from Buddhist Thais, albeit with less power. This attests to the fact that since the colonial period, Thai Muslims in these provinces have been in a state of being “in-between” socio-cultural and political forces and thus their multiple identities are a result of a constant negotiation with these forces. The following section offers a review of how the Thai state created Muslim “others” within the framework of the Buddhist nation-state and Muslim ethnic minorities.

The Thai (secular) state and Muslim religious Others: a case study of hijab conflict

A nation-state is formed under the concept of the separation between state and religion, thus, a nation-state is administered in the “secular” form. However, some scholars argue that secularism itself is not neutral (Assad, 1999; Chatterjee, 2006). Assad (1996) contends that a Western secular state and “democratic governance” is still informed by Christian societal values. Therefore, social movements that correspond to Christian concepts (e.g. abortion law and gay marriage) are to be perceived as “political” and thus compatible with the secular nation-state, while the political movements of other groups (such as Islamism in Arab states) are perceived as “religious”. Assad succinctly argues: “If the secularisation thesis no longer carries the conviction it once did, this is because the categories of ‘politics’ and ‘religion’ turn out to implicate each other more profoundly than we thought, a discovery that has accompanied our growing understanding of the power of the modern nation-state. The concept of the secular cannot prosper without the idea of religion” (p.200).

Chatterjee (2006) provides an example of Assad’s statement through the case of the French state disallowing Muslims girls to wear *hijabs* to their schools:

In either case, the demands raise complex questions of the neutrality of the state in matters of religion and equal treatment of all citizens...This, of course, only begs the further question of how the supposedly neutral and religiously unmarked school uniform was agreed upon in the first place and whether this is not in fact a practice, now conventionalized as secular, that emerged out of the secularization of specifically Christian culture. (Chatterjee, 2006, p.61)

These nuanced arguments against total secularism in Western nation-states also help us to question secularism in the Thai secular nation-state. All Thai citizens have the right for their religions to be protected by the constitution (regardless of their religious background). However, similar to the French context, Thai government establishments and schools sparked a national debate by also prohibiting the *hijabs* in the 1980s.

Chaiwat (2005) traces the history of the *hijab* conflict in Thailand. In 1986, two Muslim teachers in Nonthaburi province (north of Bangkok) were fired because they wore *hijabs* to work; in Yala, government officials were transferred to Bangkok for wearing *hijabs* and for refusing to not wear them. In 1987, students in Yala Teachers Training College were not admitted to their class or their examinations because they wore *hijabs*. In 1988, Muslim students protested at the college requesting that they be allowed to wear *hijabs*, with Buddhist Thais also supporting the act. The wearing of *hijabs* was eventually allowed in contemporary Thailand, but Chaiwat states that by focusing on “the act” (the law), Buddhist Thai protesters and Muslims did not go to the “principle” (of both Buddhism and Islam) to reclaim their legitimacy. Chaiwat (2005) explains that Buddhism and the *sangha* (the order of monks) have been employed by the ruling elites in order to maintain the social order of sectarian life, and yet Buddhist principles of tolerance were not being applied, as seen in these cases of discrimination against Muslims and against the *hijab*. This *hijab* conflict in Thailand therefore resonates quite well with Assad’s attempt to unpack Western secularism which, arguably, is not neutral but hinges on Christianity. By the same token, the formation of a Thai “secular” nation-state (which was a response to colonialism) is a process that revolves around the monarchy and modern institutions, including Buddhism. Ishii (1994) states that it was not until 1932 (after Thailand had changed from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy) that the Thai monarch supported and recognised all religions, including Islam. However, the system of the *sangha*⁹ which was established in the previous period of King Rama IV’s reign (1804-1868) in order to centralise Buddhism and the monarchy was also applied to Islam in Thailand after 1932. This process also included the introduction of an administrative system with a monarch at the top of the hierarchy. This included, in hierarchical order, *Chularatchamontri*¹⁰, national

⁹ The Buddhist monastic order, including monks, nuns and novices.

¹⁰ The *Chularatchamontri* or Shikhul-Islam is a Muslim spiritual leader who is appointed by the king. *Chularatchamontri* is the head of Islamic organizations, ranging from national to local levels, in Thailand. Ishii (1994) argues that The *Chularatchamontri* is modelled after the *sangha* or The Buddhist monastic order. This reformation of Islamic institutions has resulted in tensions between Thai Muslims and Thai state since Islam is considered a non-monastic religion.

council for Muslims, provincial council for Muslims and councils for mosques (Ishii, 1994). This attests to the Bangkok elites' adoption of knowledge, e.g. a modern administration system, originating in the West, to the newly formed nation-state in order to preserve the status quo and in this case, through a reformation and centralization of Islamic institutions. As noted earlier, all religions are recognised by the Thai state, but it is yet again hierarchical.

Recent ethnographic studies (Horstmann, 2007; Wanni, 2010) find that headscarves and skullcaps are more widely used among younger generations of Muslims in Thailand because of the stricter *imam* (the prayer leader in a mosque) and the missionary-type of the Muslim movement from South Asia. In terms of appearances, this helps distinguish Buddhist and Muslim adherents within the same village. The change in dress and appearance of younger Muslims suggests their awareness of religion (Horstmann, 2007) and also raises the important issue of the *ummah*¹¹. Assad (1996) argues that, "the Islamic *ummah* presupposes individuals who are self-governing but not autonomous" (p.197). As a result, the theological concept of Islamic *ummah* gives universal access to human beings who want to follow "a model of virtuous conduct (*sunna*)" (Assad 1996, p.197). Therefore, the case studies above suggest that, besides race and ethnicities in the case of *khaek* and *ore nayu*, "Muslim appearances" – *hijabs*, beards and skullcaps - have been a site of contestation by both the Thai state and Muslim minorities and this process has evolved over time.

The representation of "Others" in Thai literature

After examining major discursive practices employed by the Thai state in order to maintain the division between Thai Buddhists and Thai Muslims (through the concept of "Thainess" and processes of "othering") in the sectors of education, cultural projects, religion, laws, and even in linguistic terms of identification, I now turn to Thai literature to examine the representation of the Muslim "others". These images of "others", constructed by

¹¹ The whole community of Muslims bound together by ties of religion.

Siam/Thailand, can be traced back to the concept of *siwilai* and travel writings such as short stories, Siamese official documents during the reformation of Shariah law in the 19th century, and Thai literature and short stories in the late 20th and the early 21st centuries.

The documentation of the “other” in Siam was initiated by the Bangkok elite during the colonial period. As previously discussed, their ethnographic projects were conducted during their travels, and mostly described the “*chao pa*” (forest, wild people) and “*chao ban-nok*” (villagers outside Bangkok). Thongchai (2000a) specifically describes ethnographic accounts of the *ngo pa* (*ngo* = an ethnic group, *pa* = forest), which were authored by King Chulalongkorn (also called Rama V; r. 1868-1910) (although it is ambiguous whether the King created his own plot or adopted it from local stories). The story, written in the form of a poem, contains ethnographic elements in that its introduction includes physical descriptions of the *ngo pa*’s hair and eyes as well as descriptions of their food and customs (Thongchai, 2000a).

Being *siwilai* was also reflected in the description of “others” in documents written during the modernisation project of the *Shariah* law in Patani as well. Loos (2006) states that in order to compete with their British counterparts in claiming a legitimate rule over the old Patani kingdom, Siamese elites sent officials to supervise the reformation process of the Islamic law, which were “key characteristics of a colonial state’s rationale for rule” (p.81). In their account of *Chao Phraya Yomarat*, Muslims in Patani were described as backward foreigners (or *khaek malayu* meaning Malayu guests, suggesting that they are not Thai) and their villages were referred to as “*muang pa-pa* or semi-barbaric states” (Loos, 2006, p.81). In these writings, the Muslims were described as the abused subjects of local elites (rajas in the sultanate system) while the colonisers were portrayed as the heroes who “saved” them.

The concept of *siwilai* was further reproduced in the late Victorian period through Thai novellas that adapted Western plots such as Britain’s *Sherlock Holmes* stories. Harrison (2009)

examines the short stories authored by the Crown Prince of Siam (Vajiravudh; later became Rama VI, r. 1910-1925) in the late 19th century and argues that his adaptation of crime stories suggests Siam's ambivalent stance towards *farang* (Westerners in the Thai language) and the "other" within the territory. These short stories adopted plots and characters from Western novels but were altered to fit within Siamese social configurations during that period. The stories reflect the ruling elite's perceived threats and the social hierarchy at that moment where *farang* and locals who were associated with them were portrayed as threats to the nation. The detective genre also reflected Western values of rationality through scientific investigation and, in contrast to the West, the *chao ban-nok* were portrayed as uncivilised or backwards (their belief in ghosts, for example, being seen as irrational and unscientific).

The literature of the Bangkok elites and middle class authors (after the abolition of the absolute monarchy in 1932) illustrates how colonialism in the 19th century played a crucial role in influencing the Bangkok elites' awareness of its own territories, thus helping to create a system of categorisation of their subjects. Pichet (2008) examines Thai literature between 1937 and 2008 and explores how the representation of Muslims or the Muslim region of the south evolved over time. His textual analyses of Thai adventure novels and short stories look at how these narratives were influenced by Western descriptions of the Orient. These stories, written from the point of view of the Bangkok elites and for a growing middle class audience, also portrayed these regions as backwards, barbaric and exotic, similar to how the West portrayed the East. This was also done to propagate ideas of "Thainess" through literature.

Thai novels written between 1937 and 1947 portray Muslims in the southernmost provinces as mysterious, superstitious, in peril and undeveloped. Pichet argues that these representations reflected the power relations between Bangkok and the rural areas, in which Thais from Bangkok were legitimised as being civilised and more developed. Literature written between 1947 and 1977 displayed the Bangkok Thai's legitimising roles of surveillance and in

supervising the cultural project of “Thainess”. This went hand-in-hand with the government’s rigid policies in promoting “Thainess” and suppressing dissidents of the Thai state. In the later period (1978-1988), texts written by teachers-cum-writers illustrate the burden of teaching the Thai language to Muslim students in an attempt to integrate them into “Thainess”. In these writings, subjects who were portrayed as uneducated under the Thai formal education system were also perceived as threats to peace and the cause of poverty. When violence in the three southern border provinces erupted, these novels exacerbated negative images of Muslims, describing them as impoverished culprits of the turbulence since they denied the formal education provided by the Thai state. The texts thus promoted the Thai responsibility to educate and save uneducated Muslims.

Thus far, we have seen Muslims being represented in official documents and literature that reflect how a discourse of racial categories was constructed and reproduced. But how then were Thai Muslims in the three southern provinces creating their own identities during this period? The next sections of this chapter explore the Thai Muslim identity construction in various cultural strands. Similar to “Thainess”, Muslim identities in the southernmost provinces of Thailand were influenced and shaped by external forces, especially through encounters with the Buddhist Thai state in the north. As Siam adjusted its own identity during the colonial period as a response to the powerful West, the Patani kingdom also formed its identity among the Muslim population, who form the majority in the southern provinces and share the same religion and language with Malaysia and the South East Asian archipelago. To illustrate this complicated identity formation, the next section provides a historical background of Muslim identities in Thailand by looking at the notions of “Patani-ness”, “Malayness”, and the identities of Muslims and Muslim militants.

Construction of the “Patani kingdom” and “Patani-ness”

After the adoption of the word *Patani* (ปัตตานี – which refers to the old *Patani* kingdom) as an alternative to the Thai official term *Pattani* (ปัตตานี – the name of a province in modern Thailand that used to be part of the *Patani* kingdom) by Muslim separatist/militant groups and *Patani* nationalist scholars in the 1940s, the term is now widely used among Muslim activists, scholars and students, especially on social media forums such as Facebook and YouTube. This section looks at how this term became popularised, and how it was defined and re-defined by Muslims in the region themselves.

In the 20th century, when Siam (and later Thailand) tried to exert more power over the south through the use of modern technologies acquired from the West, Malay-speaking Muslims resisted in various ways. They refused to adopt “Thainess” (including the Thai language and education system) by establishing militant groups to rebel against the government. The “glorious past” of the *Patani* kingdom, which was an independent sultanate maritime state, appears to have been the central discourse behind their movements. Jory (2007) argues that while the “*Patani* kingdom” as a prosperous port polity of the Malay peninsula has passed, it remains a discourse that has been employed by Malay nationalist scholars and the separatist movement, which claims that the “*Patani* nation” was colonised into the “Thai nation”. Jory (2007) further argues that *Patani* nationalist discourse became hybridised with elements of Islam due to the post 9/11 global Islamic revival. It is therefore worth looking at *Patani* literature and historiography in order to gain more insight into the evolution of the term “Patani”.

The past decade has seen a growing body of research that re-examines and re-interprets ancient archives (e.g. the Malay language chronicle *Hikayat* and Thai chronicles or *tamnan*) with the intent to further understand worldviews of Muslims and the *Patani* kingdom in different periods. These works argue against the idea of essentialising the “*Patani* Kingdom”

as a Malay Muslim state which is widely reproduced by Patani nationalist writers and separatist/militia groups. Reid (2013) argues that instead of perceiving Patani as a kingdom merely populated by Malay-speaking Muslims, chronicles in the 17th century portray it as a model of a plural society where different ethnic groups interacted. Walker (2013), who studied 19th century historical texts that included constructions of the Patani identity such as “*Hikayat Patani*” or “the narrative of *Patani*”, also explores the diverse elements in Patani culture. He writes that “the *Patanian* nation formed and evolved over centuries as a group defined by space – a homeland – and by an Islamo-Malay culture that dissolved Arabic elements from the Middle East, the Malay language and Malay customs, and Indic slivers into a new blend” (Walker, 2013, p.185). Like several other cultures then, Patani culture did not remain static.

The *Hikayat Patani* also influenced Ibrahim Sukri ‘s influential work, *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani* (or “History of the Malay Kingdom of *Patani*”), which was written in *Jawi* script in 1958 (later translated into Thai in 1988). Walker (2013) states that in Sukri’s work, *Patani* was portrayed as an “Islamic kingdom” which was destabilised by Siam, the Buddhist kingdom to the north: “In Patanian nationalist historiography, the past is constantly being selected from and restructured by new generations and groups in order to sharpen and feed the nation. Not all Siamese and Patanians have hated each other at all points of their history when two peoples were forming” (Walker, 2013, p.185).

Walker further notes that the discovery of the *Lankasuga* kingdom during the 6th and 7th centuries, before they converted to Islam, shows how Patanians shared Pali-Sanskrit (languages originating in India) words with Siamese words. However, Patani nationalist scholars later began to align themselves more with the Middle East and the Malay world.

Historical texts are not neutral and are products of specific time periods, written by individuals with certain biases and agendas. Recent historical writings of Patani by nationalist

scholars in the 1950s homogenised (or essentialised) the ethnic/racial group as a way to legitimise the separatist movement and as a way to differentiate themselves from the Thais. They primarily portrayed *Patani* as an Islamic state populated by Malays, and intentionally downplayed interactions with other ethnic groups both inside and outside the kingdom. The next section provides a historical background and analysis of the term *Malay*.

Construction of "Malayness"

In this research, the concept of "*the Malay word*" is also examined since it has been widely used among scholars without an awareness of its origins or how it has evolved over time. Milner (2011) argues that the evolution of the word "Malay" or "Malayu" should be taken into consideration since the term has been previously used as a "people grouping concept". Instead of a term with fixed meanings, Malay's meanings reveal discontinuity as it was invented and (re-invented) throughout history.

Milner (2011) argues that the use of the term *bangsa Malayu* to refer to the "Malay race" is part of the modern system of racial categorisation, which was imposed on pre-colonial mentalities. Milner uses the term "a veil of Malayness" instead, since "Malay" has been used without awareness of its historical and political context. More importantly, it is imprecise to apply modern concepts of race in translations of the word "*bangsa*" in Malay (*bangsa* now means "race" in Malay).

Milner also suggests that in historical writings from the 1500s, including local chronicles and accounts of Western travelers, the term "Malay" appears to have been used to refer to an entire civilisation rather than a group of people. This means that any individual would have been able to become part of the Malay world. Belonging to the Malay during the *Jahor-Maleka* period did not require connections through kinship and was even available to the people of Java (now an Island of Indonesia). According to Milner (2011), even the *Hikayat Patani* did not use the word "Malay" to identify people living in *Patani* (p.19).

During the 1940s, Malaysian nationalism played a crucial role in reforming the concept of *bangsa Malay*, in that it was no longer possible for anyone to become Malay. Later in the 1970s, the ruling elites initiated a project to connect Islam with a Malay identity. As Milner (2011) discusses, since *bangsa Malayu* referred to a sense of “civilisation”, it also paved the way for a top down redefinition (thus narrowing down) of “Malayness” in Malaysia. For example, in the 1940s, nationalism played a crucial role in reshaping the concept of *bangsa Malayu* and in the 1970s, Malay ruling elites initiated a project to tie Islam with Malay as well.

In the Thai context, Davidsakd & Jirawat (2008) argue that the term “Malay” (มาเลย์) should be used cautiously since it has been applied broadly in the construction of *Patani* both by Thai and Patanian scholars (for example, it is used under the framework of multiculturalism among scholars of Thailand). The text, *Keraajan* (or “the state of having a raja”) is an analysis of “Malayness” before the colonial period. It portrays “Malayness” as having more than one facet of identity formation since inhabitants of the *Patani* kingdom were varied, and also reveals how the term was used flexibly and in contradictory ways. This predated the modern concepts of “race” or *bangsa*, where “Malay” later became fixed to one homogenous group with its own particular characteristics.

Since the 1940s, the Thai state attempted to impose the “Thai Islam” or “Thai Muslim” identity onto Muslims from the southern provinces. Only recently has the official stance on minorities changed from an approach of homogenisation to one of acceptance and recognition of the Muslim community. However, prior to this, the word “Malay” did not exist in official Thai discourse, the state perceiving its citizens only as “Thai”.

The Middle East and Islam in Patani: The construction of a “Muslim Self” in the Thai state

The Middle East also played a pivotal role in the construction of Muslim identity in *Patani*, especially through the Islamic teachings of Arab educators, the *Hajjs* and Islamic schools. These are the results of the strong *ulama* networks in the Middle East and in the

Malay Peninsula in the 18th and 19th centuries. However, the influence of the Middle East on Islam in the Malay Archipelago can also be seen as a site of contestation among different practices of Islam; Orthodox Islam, the Buddhist-Hindu-based Malay culture, *Sufism*¹² and more recently, of Islamic irredentism called *Wahabbism*¹³.

Arza (2013) argues that even though the development of the Islamic world cannot be separated from the Arab world, South East Asia is usually regarded as the “least Arabised parts of the Islamic world” (p.87). During the 17th and 18th century, the centres of Islam were Medina and Mecca. In the Malay and Indonesian regions, the networks of “*ulama*” (“Islamic teachers”) influenced practices of Islam leading to Islamic scholars from *Patani* playing a vital role in the Islamisation process of the region. One of the most prominent *ulama* from *Patani* was Dawud Al Fontani who was born in *Patani* and had an Islamic educational background. After travelling to *Haramayn* (Mecca and Medina in modern Saudi Arabia), Al Fontani taught Islam to students from South East Asia. By the end of the 18th century, Al Fontani’s influence in Islamic education had extended from *Patani* to other Malay and Indonesian regions. Arza writes: “He is one of the best examples of scholars who were successful in their attempts to reconcile the legal and mystical aspects of Islam” (p.103). Al Fontani’s writings were later translated to Malay and influenced commercial law, religious observances, divorce law etc.

Hayimasae (2013) states that by the 19th century the relationship between Islam and the Malay-speaking Muslim identity became more intense. *Ulama* from Patani taught in

¹² Oxford Islamic Studies Online defines *Sufism* as “the internalization and intensification of Islamic faith and practice. Sufis strive to constantly be aware of God’s presence, stressing contemplation over action, spiritual development over legalism, and cultivation of the soul over social interaction.” Unlike Islamic theology and jurisprudence which depend on reasoning, Sufism relies on “emotion and imagination in the divine-human relationship”. (<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/print/opr/t236/e0759>) In the context of Southeast Asia, *Sufism* is rooted in Muslim culture for centuries. Arza (2013) argues that since an adoption of Islam, there has been a tension between Orthodox Islam and *Sufism* and there were efforts among *ulama* (Islamic teachers) in the region to reconcile between the two practices of Islam.

¹³ Oxford Dictionary describes *Wahabbi* as “A member of a strictly orthodox Sunni Muslim sect founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–92). It advocates a return to the early Islam of the Koran and Sunna, rejecting later innovations; the sect is still the predominant religious force in Saudi Arabia (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/wahhabi>)” *Wahabbi* teachings stresses on *tawhid* (absolute monotheism) as opposed to *shirk* (association of anyone or anything with God) call for a return to the Koran and Sunna (example of the Prophet) for interpretation (<http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0091.xml>).

Haramayn and also provided services for people who wanted to come to the region for the *Hajj*, even establishing a printing press and their own “*kitab jawi* (Malay-language Islamic texts using Arabic alphabets, *kitab* means book and *jawi* means Arabic alphabets for writing the Malay language (Joll, 2013))”, which were used in both *Haramayn* and South East Asia.

With the increasing number of pilgrims during the first half of the 20th century, the voluntary service of the *Hajjs* even became a profession of choice for many Muslims. Horstmann (2008) states that after the 1970s more Muslims in Thailand were able to afford to go to the *Hajj*, making the religious practice more popular among the Muslims who were now alienated with the Malay cosmology of Islam, or local way of Islam. More than ever before, younger Muslims were attending the *Hajj*, thus representing a large population of the *ummah* system and the global Muslim community. However, this global *ummah* is far from monolithic. Rather, encounters between Thai Muslims and Muslim elsewhere have resulted different movements in Islam in Thailand. From *Tablinghi Jema’at*, a missionary type of movement to *Wahabbiyyah*, a strictly orthodox Muslim sect, an assertion of Islam into Thai Muslim identity became more intense.

Horstmann (2007) examines the influence of “*Tablinghi Jema’at*” in a village in Tha Sala district in Nakhorn Si Thammarat, in the upper southern region of Thailand. In the past, outsiders might have been able to distinguish between Thai Buddhist and Thai Muslims in the village. However, after the introduction and success of *Tablighi Jama’at* (which is a missionary style Islamic practice originating in South Asia 40 years ago), Thai Muslim women in the district of Tha Sala wear dark coloured Arab style *burkas* (covering their entire bodies) while the Muslim men wear sarongs, skullcaps and have beards.

After 1925, there emerged the teaching of teaching *wahabbiyyah*, which focuses on the purity of belief and faith in God, and whose religious practices are based strictly on the Koran and the *Sunnah* (the way of the Prophet Muhammad) (Hayimasae, p.126). McCargo

(2009) notes how this led to the establishment of two separate Islamic schools in the southern provinces: the new school and the old. However, the distinctions between the schools remain blurred. The old school is influenced by Malay cosmological practices such as using holy water to sprinkle on new cars, respecting the tombs of the passing *raja*, and women wearing loose scarves; while the new school is more aligned with the teachings of the *Koran* and the Middle East and includes more rigid practices of Islam. While the old school of Islam dominated Muslims' religious practices and beliefs in the southernmost provinces, Haji Sulong, an influential Islamic figure in Patani, spearheaded the new sets of practices in the 1920s. Umar Tayib (who was educated in Egypt) is considered a prominent figure of the second wave of the Islamic new school. Formal Islamic institutions predominantly adhered with the reformist school, including the Yala Islamic College, which was established by the influential Lutfi Chapakia (who was educated in Saudi Arabia). The new school is now referred to as *Wahabbi*, and is popular among educated middle-class Muslims.

These discussions exemplify how, even amongst Muslims themselves, there exist different strands of Islamic beliefs that continue to change over time.

Malay, Patani and Muslims: identities of militant and separatist groups

Some scholars (Jory, 2007; Wattana, 2006; Yusuf, 2006), who have examined the identities of separatists and militants in the early 21st century, assert that these identities are complex and intangible and were shaped by specific political, cultural and economic contexts. Some studies further argue that both internal (such as the government's "Thainess" projects) and external (such as the influence of Arab "Islamisation" in Malaysia) factors had an impact on the construction of Muslim identities in Thailand. Jory (2007) argues that the Thai government's assimilation effort was one of many factors that influenced Muslim identities in the south. Other external phenomena, including Malaysian nationalism and the "war on Islam" after 9/11, contributed to the construction of a Muslim identity. Jory (2007) states that in

Siamese official documents from the 19th century describing Muslims, their “cultural identity” was directly connected to “Islam” whereas “Malay” was rarely used to describe people residing in the Patani Kingdom. However, Malaysian nationalism influenced their separatist movements in the 1930s and “Malay” thus became conflated with “Patani” as a way to separate the region from the Thai nation-state. In the last decade of the 20th century, the “Islamic revival” in Malaysia also played an important role in politicising Islam among Muslims in the three southern border provinces.

These studies on Muslim identity in the south reveal that identity itself is not monolithic. While the Thai state has been trying to assimilate Malay-speaking Muslims into its culture, the responses among the Muslims to both internal and external forces are multiple but are always marked as being *not* Thai (which also connotes Buddhism): they can choose to be “Malay” (*not* Thai), “Islam” (*not* Buddhist), or from the “Patani kingdom” (and not the Thai kingdom).

The various historical accounts and research on the construction of a Thai nation-state and the resistance of the Muslim minorities noted above have laid a solid background for this study. However, since Thailand is known as the only country in South East Asia that managed to avoid colonialism, postcolonial study appears to be incompatible when it comes to an analysis of Thai culture. Thongchai (2014) contents that Thai studies, especially in Thailand, “is not the knowledge of the Otherness, either of Orientalism or the Other of the Cold War. It is the study of the Self - the Thai-self (p.2).” The following section will shift the basis of analysing “Thainess” from the Self alone to the Other and I then further apply this method to an analysis of the visual representation of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces on YouTube.

Thai studies scholars (Anderson, 1983; Harrison, 2010; Jackson, 2010; Loos, 2006; Reynolds, 2002, 2006; Thongchai, 1994, 2000a, 2000b among others) contend that the

construction of “Thainess” since the late 19th century relies on the encounter with an Other, the West, and this resulted in internal colonisation where an imported culture from the West intermingled with the indigenous culture in order to preserve and further consolidate the power of the Bangkok elites.

Why do we need Postcolonial studies in a “never colonised Thailand”?

Since Thailand is the only country in South East Asia that has never been formally colonised, the lens of postcolonial studies has rarely been employed in analysing Thai culture and identities. However, there is a growing body of research that attempts to undermine the notion of the “uniqueness” of Thailand as a non-colonised nation. As previously discussed, “Thainess” has been constructed by elites in different periods – from the Monarchy in the colonial era to the authoritarian regimes in the nation-building era. However, some Thai Studies scholars (Harrison, 2010; Jackson, 2010; Thongchai, 2010) are sceptical about the “absolute power” of the West and of Thai elites in shaping Thai identities. They argue that new scholarship on Thailand should go beyond the discourse of a “unique” Thai culture, claiming that the Siam/Thailand identity is a formation of “multiple semicolonial hybridities” (Jackson, 2010, p.197). Jackson (2010) further argues on the differences between postcolonial contexts:

Postcolonial analysis is a richly complex field, reflecting the fact imperialism took different forms in different societies and has left widely varying postcolonial residues. While united by a concern with the ambiguous effects of racialized power imbalances in former colonial settings, each regional variety of postcolonial analysis has its own focuses that emerge from the distinctive forms of imperial power in those locations. (Jackson, 2010, p.188)

Harrison (2010) argues that contemporary “Thainess” is a result of interactions with the West, but the results of these encounters produce various effects (“multiplicity”). This cultural borrowing is not static but ambivalent and ambiguous. Harrison also undermines dichotomies between East/West or coloniser/colonised by showing that “Thainess” is actually a fusion of preexisting and Western cultures. She further argues that these dichotomies prevail in traditional Thai cultural studies that explain encounters between Siam/Thailand and the

West using binary terms. However, “simple binaries collapse and fall short of functioning as an effective framework to illuminate the multiple meanings at play” (p.35). Furthermore, the Thai elite’s selection of certain Western cultural elements can be seen as a form of resistance against the West by giving themselves legitimacy over others within the region. Also, the Thai middle class could have strategically adopted Western culture as a way to resist “internal colonialism” (Harrison 2010, p.20). We should keep in mind that Western culture did not replace Siamese culture, but influenced it in complex ways, creating a culture of “multiple semicolonial hybridities” (Jackson 2010, p.197). Both “Thainess” and Muslim identities in the south therefore do not exist in a vacuum, but are “hybrid” cultures influenced by the colonial era. The following section provides concrete examples of how knowledge imported from the West by the elites was translated and transformed in order to consolidate their power.

Siwilai: excluding the “Others within”

Thongchai (2000b) states that during the 19th century, the Bangkok elites were anxious about their own dominance over the region when Western colonisers began to exert their power over other South East Asian territories. As a result, the concept of civilisation (transliterated to Thai as *siwilai*) was both a new terminology and a cultural project that was ambitiously used to equate Siam with the West and to preserve its hierarchical relationships with smaller kingdoms and chiefdoms. The adoption of the term *siwilai* in the Thai cultural project thus suggests that the elites had embraced modern temporal (progressiveness) and spatial (geography) consciousness in order to strengthen their domination over these smaller districts (Thongchai, 2000b). Temporally, *siwilai* suggests a move away from the Buddhist-Brahmanism pre-modern belief system that views time as a *cycle* of repetition, compared to a linear model that displays progress. This temporal consciousness was therefore influential in promoting ideas about modernisation; Siam could now attempt to ‘catch up’ with the West by using a linear interpretation of time; it could now trace and keep track of its own progression

towards modernity. Spatially, Bangkok was marked as the centre of *siwilai*, thus “othering” those who were located outside its boundaries and considered to be “uncivilised” or not civilised enough.

These processes of “othering” can also be read in ethnographic travelogues produced by Siamese officials who explored the geographical “margins” of the state. Thongchai (2000a) states that while ethnographic methods were used by Western colonial powers to differentiate ethnic groups and races and to legitimise their own superiority, the Thai monarchy employed the same methods in their travel writings (or travelogues) and portrayed their subjects as “others” in order to legitimise themselves as a civilised entity (p.14). Thongchai further notes that these writings usually described the “*chao pa*” (forest, wild people) and “*chao ban-nok*” (villagers outside Bangkok). This construction of “others” was done in terms of hybridity in which old indigenous beliefs were mixed with newly imported western concepts, finally resulting in an original system of ruling.

Applying a postcolonial framework to her research, Loos (2006) argues that during the extensive colonial period (late 19th century and the wake of 20th century) the Siamese adopted their own expansionist views and methods that colonisers employed to control areas such as British Malaya. This included a reformation of the Islamic law (*Sharia* Law) as a way for the Siamese monarchy to “showcase” to the British that it was on a par with the colonial civilisation and thus, to also legitimise their dominant rule. This reformation project included the Bangkok elite’s appointment of local *Imams*. However, Loos (2006) argues that while the Bangkok elites were attempting to redesign the jurisdiction system in a way to appear more civilised, they were also trying to consolidate their power. Loos (2006) states that these legal reformation projects shared similar narratives with those of the Siamese hero who saves Siam from external colonial powers but only does so in a way that preserves existing hierarchies.

Literature from the Thai studies scholars noted above suggests that the formation of a Thai nation-state went hand in hand with *siwilai* projects undertaken by Bangkok elites in order to construct knowledge on, and the categorisation of, its subjects beginning in the early 19th century. The Bangkok regime, therefore, gained legitimacy in controlling its *less-civilised* or *not-civilised* subjects, including minorities. The postcolonial perspective thus became more viable for engaging critically with the representation of Muslim minorities residing in the southernmost part of Thailand on YouTube since it provides a tool for unsettling taken-for-granted concepts of race, ethnicity and nation including terms used among Buddhists Thai and Muslims to refer to each other and among themselves e.g. *Thai*, *khaek*, *bangsa Malayu*, Islam, Patani, *ore nayu* and *ore siye*.

The aforementioned sections also suggest that these terms have evolved over time depending on changing political contexts, and I would argue that the colonial period has affected largely a *redefinition* and *reinvention* of these terms. The Thai term *khaek* changed its meaning from darker-skinned foreign visitors (when Siamese began to use this term a century ago) to specifically Muslims in its contemporary usage (Gowing, 1975). The term Malayu, which before the colonial period was used to denote “Malayu civilization” and included people from different ethnic backgrounds who adopted the Malayu way of life, is now narrowed down to only Malay-speaking people. The term Patani was invented by scholars, activists and separatists (as against the official version Pattani) as a call for autonomy from Thailand.

These terms have been used by the Thai state, Muslim minorities in the three southern border provinces, Buddhist Thais, insurgents, activists and scholars to achieve their political goals. As a result, applying *internal colonialism* to a construction of race and ethnicity, especially among Muslim minorities, sheds light on how the various identities of the Muslim minorities were constructed by various groups in response to, and rejection of, “Thainess” and thus not self-contained but relational. This gives legitimacy to the application of postcolonial

theories to the study of Thailand and its Muslim minorities in the three southern border provinces. Thailand may have escaped formal colonisation but, ineluctably, colonial and postcolonial conditions have been a part and parcel of Siamese/Thai nationhood. The beginning of the next chapter further explores strands of theories in postcolonialism and examines to what extent these “Western” origin concepts are compatible with Thailand.

Chapter Two

Theoretical frameworks

As noted at the end of the previous chapter, even though Siam/Thailand has never been directly colonised, the expansion of colonial powers in the late 19th and early 20th century had driven Bangkok elites to re-organise existing power relations with their subordinates, including the Malay sultanate kingdom of Patani in the south. This colonial condition has laid the foundations for a construction of “Thainess” through an exertion of power via *internal colonialism* (Anderson, 1983, Harrison, 2010; Jackson, 2010; Loos, 2006; Reynolds, 2002, 2006; Thongchai, 1994, 2000a, 2000b). The beginning of this chapter, therefore aims to introduce the foundational concepts of postcolonialism that comprise a crucial element of the theoretical framework employed to examine the representation of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces on YouTube.

By doing so, this research also seeks to challenge a long-held belief that postcolonial studies is not applicable when conducting research on Thailand which “has never been colonised” (as discussed at length in the previous chapter). Furthermore, in order to engage with these postcolonial concepts critically, the first section is followed by a discussion on how we might put these theories into dialogue with Thai studies on colonialism in order to provide a fresh insight into an analysis of the representation in a particular area. This chapter also attempts to introduce concepts in semiotics, new media studies, visual culture and psychoanalysis that will inform a framework for an analysis of the representation of Thai Muslims on YouTube.

Postcolonialism: gazing at the Other and a construction of the Self

Perceiving a construction of “Thainess” as a project instigated by the colonialism, this research perceives Thai Muslims as a colonial subject and treats visual representation of the Muslims, as

a repercussion of this colonial condition. Consequently, in order to examine the representation of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces whose identity construction is a result of an encounter with Buddhist Thai colonizer, postcolonial theories are viable for further analysis. However, being aware of the fact that “imperialism took different forms in different societies and has left widely varying postcolonial residues” (Jackson, 2010, p.188), this research employs these theories as a point of departure while being critical with them in terms of application to the Thai context.

Postcolonial scholars (Bhabha, 1983; Said, 1978,1981; Chakrabarty, 2000) assert that colonialism has endured even after the colonial period, in that from Africa and the Middle East to Asia, traces of colonialism can still be seen. Having said that, colonial conditions and socio-cultural experiences in different countries have brought about a diverse postcolonial society and shaped complex relationships between European colonisers and their counterparts. Rather than perceiving Europe and the colonised as a binary opposition, two static and mutually exclusive entities, some postcolonial scholars shift attention to “a process” of knowledge construction shaped by the colonial condition and deconstruction of the binary notion of European colonisers *versus* the colonised.

Chakrabarty (2000) argues in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* that Europe is usually perceived not only as a geographical area but also a centre of intellectuals influencing the very idea of modernity. In terms of history (the knowledge originated in Europe itself), Europe is placed in a privileged position from where modernity and capitalism originated, expanded and infiltrated into other places. Thus, the Others are reduced to being merely the receiving end. Using this European mode of progression as a narrative, Chakrabarty argues that countries outside Europe that have not caught up with this progress are perceived as “lacking” and less developed.

To unsettle this European modernity discourse, Chakrabarty (2000) contends that the project of *Provincializing Europe* aims to decentralise Europe itself as an “original” site of

modernity, arguing that a transition to capitalism in countries outside Europe is rather a case of *translation*. Concepts emanating from European modernity such as rights and democracy, which are considered “universal”, are actually adopted and adapted in countries outside Europe. Consequently, to examine the repercussions of colonialism in a modern society, we need to unpack the binary opposition between Europe and countries outside Europe. To extend this postcolonial notion to Siam/Thailand *internal colonialism*, the notion of “Thainess” itself has to be decentralized. This resonates with Thongchai’s argument that Thai scholars must still go beyond the binary opposition of the West and the Orient. He writes: “westernisation, globalisation, indeed any process of transculturation is not possible without an agency that translates, interprets, adapts, modifies and selects the elements of one culture to make them suitable for another” (Thongchai, 2010, p.148). It is thus pivotal to employ this postcolonial approach to shed light on how an agency of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces “translates, interprets, adapts, modifies and selects” the elements of “Thainess” and possibly “Western-ness” and globalization to their visual representation. In order to unpack the representation of Thai Muslims, it is crucial to see a construction of Thai Muslim identity as *a process* within a postcolonial condition. This thus leaves us with the question of how power relationships between the coloniser and the colonised have taken shape and how it has operated through the colonial period and later on.

In his chapter *The other question: stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism*, Bhabha (1983) questions the use of the term “stereotype” as a function of representing and excluding the Other during the formation of colonialism. However, Bhabha points out that the concept of stereotype imposed upon the colonised which is considered a *fixed* representational practice needs further examination. Bhabha especially puts his finger on Edward Said’s argument on his monumental concept *Orientalism* and argues that it is useful as a starting point but not sufficient to examine the postcolonial condition.

In his influential work, Said (1978) argues that the construction of the Orient as knowledge and “a system of truth” (p.204) by the West or the Occident, is driven by imbalanced power relations between the two. Besides controlling the Orient by force, the West also constructed knowledge of the Orient through cultural artefacts e.g. novels and paintings, to control colonial subjects ideologically. Said posits that:

The Orient that appears in Orientalism, then, is a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later Western empire. (Said, 1978, pp.202-203)

For Said, the Orient is constructed by the West as a site of knowledge in order to culturally control its colonies. Nonetheless, Bhabha (1983) argues that even though the Orientalism is a good starting point for thinking about the construction of the West *vis-à-vis* the Other, by being entangled with the binary oppositions of West/The Orient, the oppressor/the oppressed and the coloniser and the colonized - Said’s argument is too simplistic to capture the work of stereotypes prevailing during the colonial time and later period. He contends that rather than seeing stereotypes as something *fixed*, we should see it as *a process* of subject formation and we should, therefore, unpack this process. As Bhabha (1983) argues:

my reading of colonial discourse suggests that the point of intervention should shift from the ready recognition of images as positive and negative, to an understanding of the process of subjectification made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse. (Bhabha, 1983, p.95)

Developing his argument on stereotypical discourse, Bhabha (1983) applies two psychoanalytical concepts, Freud’s *fetishism* and Lacan’s *Imaginary*, to analyse the process of stereotypes and how they are not static but constantly reproduced over time. The *gaze* of the Other and a *fixing* of their stereotypes driven by the pleasure of looking or *scopic drive*, thus play a crucial role in constructing the Self of the coloniser and the Other of the

colonised. This is also pertinent to this research, which examines visual representation of the Other.

Contrary to Orientalism's perception of the West as a stable and superior entity, Bhabha recognises the colonial self as unstable and, at times, contradictory within itself. Bhabha posits that during the formation of colonialism, there was both a sense of domination and anxiety in the West (Huddart, 2006). An advance in technology and economic systems in the West was in terms of the material instruments used to control the Other, resulting in a sense of the superiority of the West over its colonies. However, simultaneously and unconsciously, like a baby in Lacan's *Imaginary* stage, there is a perceived "lack" in the coloniser itself. While the coloniser is mastering the colonised through a civilisation project in order to create an empire where the colonised has to submit to Western ideologies, the coloniser itself is anxious (not as stable as it may appear) since it is in the process of the disavowal of the *lack* of its own existence - an existence which hinges on an appearance of the other.

Thus far, psychoanalysis and postcolonial theories have informed us about a *process* of identity formation that is not static but imbued with disturbing and contradictory characters. Bhabha's formation of a colonial Self, which is developed from Lacanian Imaginary phase, depends on image of the Other. Therefore, a construction of a colonial Self is intrinsically *visual*. Through the gaze of the object of stereotypes, a colonial discourse "demands an articulation form of difference" (p.96) and in the case of the West, it is a concept of race based on skin colour. This formulation of colonial subjectivity is thus especially pertinent to this research which seeks to examine the representation of Thai Muslims who are called *khaek* in colloquial Thai and this word connotes, as noted in Chapter One, dark skin visitors. However, another question emerging from the preceding section regarding this research is how this

unsettling identity formation plays a role in media representation, especially, and pertinently, of Islam and Muslims.

When it comes to applying postcolonial studies to media representation, the way in which postcolonial subjects, especially Muslims, are represented in the media needs further investigation. Therefore, it is worth going back to Said's concept of *Orientalism* for further discussion on how colonial stereotypes are reproduced via discursive practices in the media when portraying Muslims and Islam. Said (1978) argues the construction of the Orient as knowledge and "a system of truth" (p.204) occurs in the West. Consequently, "the Orient" is a myth that was constructed by the West to create "us" and "the Other". Said (1978) argues that Orientalism is not just an idea, but "knowledge" that helps legitimise their invasion of non-Western countries, especially by the British and French, during the colonial era. In order for the West to position itself as superior, Said notes that, "The orient is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" (p.40). Knowledge of the Orient was, thus, employed as a reason to dominate the rest of the world such as the Middle East, Africa and Indochina; because "they" are culturally inferior, "we" need to take over and civilise them.

Said (1978) further argues that there are two levels of *Orientalism*; manifest and latent. While *manifest orientalism* can be found in literary styles shared by both pro- and anti-imperialist authors in the West in articulating differences between the Orient and the Occident, *latent orientalism* is what Said refers to as, "an almost unconscious (and certainly an untouchable) positivity" (p.206) that helps perpetuate the differences. One succinct example is the consensus on the "latent inferiority" (p.209) of Islam among Islam experts in the late nineteenth century that is then translated into a portrayal of Islam in the news media of the late 20th century (from the Gulf war to 9/11), equating Islam with terrorism (Said, 1997). Using Said's *Orientalism* as a point of departure, the following section

explores how *latent orientalism* has an impact upon media coverage on Islam. It spells out how the Western media apply stereotypes when it comes to the narrative of Islam and Muslims, especially the 9/11 event. It also shows that stereotypes have played an important role in representing the Muslim Other, yet they are not fixed. The following section reviews of literature on the function of *latent orientalism* in representation of Muslims from different parts of the world. These findings can be used to compare and contrast with representation of Thai Muslims in the subsequent chapters.

The representation of Islam and Muslims in the media

Said (1978, 1997) argues that perceptions of Islam and Muslims have mainly been negative (especially in the Western media). Even though Muslims around the world are diverse, the media tends to reduce them to a monolithic “Islam” that is often equated with ‘fundamentalist’ or ‘terrorist’ motives, regardless of where they reside. His ideas are echoed in other studies on the representation of Muslims in the Western media (Baderoon, 2002; Karim, 2003; McMaster, 2003; Ross, 2003; Shaheen, 2003; Shumsky, 2004). For instance, Hussain (2009) examines how North American television portrays Muslims in a negative light except in the genre of comedy. Shaw (2012) argues that newspaper coverage of the London 7/7 attack portrayed Muslims in “hateful and fearful ways” (Shaw, p.518). With regard to portrayals of Muslim women and the veil, Amin-Khan (2012) argues that the Western media’s portrayal of the *niqab* debate (especially in the UK and France) portrays the veil as a signifier of Muslim women’s inferiority compared to “more liberated” Western women.

However, in recent years, some studies have emerged to suggest changes in the representation of Islam in the media. Sulaiman-Hill et al. (2011) examine the coverage of refugees in Australia and New Zealand after 9/11, and finds that Muslims were depicted in a positive light due to strong support from human rights groups. Similarly, Rane and Ewart

(2012) discuss how Australian television news did not associate Muslims and Islam with 9/11 in their coverage of the event's tenth anniversary. On the contrary, the stories focused on the reconciliation process between the West and Islam.

However, some studies also suggest that while the representation of Islam and Muslims has changed and become more positive, previous stereotypes of Muslims are still being reproduced but just in a new form of representation. Morey and Yaqin (2011) examine the representation of Muslims in film, stating that in the 1990s and 2000s Muslims were usually associated with *hijabs*, beards, terrorism and ritual prayer. While more positive representations portray Muslims in modern outfits, they are still depicted as the "enemy within" who 'steal' professional jobs (such as medical doctors) from local citizens. Thus, while more positive images are employed to depict Muslims as people who are more like "us," Morey and Yaqin (2011) argue that they are still portrayed with stereotypes and as *threats* to Western society. Similarly, Alsultany (2012) argues that the representation of Muslims has changed since 9/11. No longer are they demonised as 'barbaric' to legitimise the US invasion of the Iraqi war, or dichotomised as being either "good" or "bad" Arabs, they are more portrayed in a "sympathetic" way. Examples of these "sympathetic" images are of oppressed Muslim women or Americanised Muslims. Nonetheless, these depictions still reinforce "Americanness" by identifying which types of Muslims are acceptable in the West (Alsultany, 2012).

In the case of Thailand, although conflicts and violence in the south have been tense and are ongoing, research on its media coverage is scarce. Treepon (2006) has analysed front page stories about the conflicts in the south in daily newspapers, arguing that the portrayal of Muslims was limited to discourses of law and order (e.g. violence being committed by "southern bandits"; references to "good" and "bad" Muslims). However, the historical contexts of violence by the state and the failures of the Thai government's policies are rarely covered. Therefore, Thai coverage reproduces national ideologies about "Thainess" by suppressing alternative ways of viewing the conflicts.

So far, findings the previous research on the representation of Muslims in Thailand and elsewhere suggest that *latent orientalism* has shaped a discourse of Muslims in the media as “the others” whose their religious references e.g. *hijabs* and beards, are conflated with violence, terrorism and inferiority. However, this *latent orientalism* is not static either. Besides Muslims being portrayed with fearful images, in some contexts, including Thailand, “good Muslims” are constructed as a role model for Muslim population. “Good Muslims” are portrayed as Muslim whose behaviors are “acceptable” and are saved from “bad Muslims” This is a discourse which functions to the mainstream culture/ideology while othering Muslims. As noted earlier and also in the previous chapter that a category of Thai Muslims is a product of colonialism. The next section will shed light on a colonial condition which has resulted in a construction of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces. By doing so, it also aims to bring postcolonial theories and Thai studies into dialogue.

Postcoloniality and its application in the Thai context

The postcolonial concepts and representation of Muslims in the media noted above leave us with a strong argument for the vitality of postcolonialism to analyse representations of Thai Muslim in the three southern border provinces of Thailand. However, a psychic economy as proposed by Bhabha becomes problematic when considering similarities and differences between Western *colonialism* and Siam/Thailand’s *internal colonialism* argued by Thai studies scholars, as noted in Chapter One (Anderson, 1983; Harrison, 2010; Jackson 2010; Loos, 2006; Reynolds, 2002, 2006; Thongchai, 1994, 2000a, 2000b). To further discuss the viability of postcolonialism in the Thai context, I shall purposefully put Tamara Loos’ argument on *contested colonialism* into a dialogue with postcolonial theories in order to shed light on the extent to which postcolonial concepts are applicable to Thailand’s *internal colonialism* and also to locate the Thai Muslim minorities within this postcolonial framework.

Examining official documents regarding Malay-speaking Muslims in the early 20th century, Loos (2010) argues, against the backdrop of the discourse of “uniqueness of uncolonised Siam” prevalent in the Thai conservative ethos, that the Bangkok elites were learning from the colonial powers during the late 19th century how to exert power over smaller chiefdoms or kingdoms, including law enforcement. Loos (2010) offers the example of the reformation of Islamic law in Patani kingdom, positing that it was a “showcase” of the Siamese elites under their expansionist project; they were showing off that they could “protect” rural people from the threat of local *rayas* or sultans as other colonial powers did with their subjects. However, it should be also noted here that during that period (the beginning of the 20th century) in the midst of the process of becoming a modern state, Buddhism was also centralised and the monarch became an embodiment of the Siamese kingdom. This affected the way the Bangkok elites “modernised” Muslims in the south. This *contested colonialism* occurred when Siam was under colonial threat *and* beginning its own projects of colonialism.

As Loos succinctly states:

I situate Siam at the crossroads of colonized countries and sovereign, imperial power, sharing some of the traits of both but reducible to neither. All cultural appropriations of modernity are unique to that culture, in which case Siam’s distinctiveness refers to its own cultural and historical specificity rather than a radical and incomparable uniqueness that has so far characterized Siam historiography. (Loos, 2010, p.21)

Therefore, in this light, rather than being simply *a colonizer* like other Western counterparts, Siam was in, to use Loos (2010)’ term, “a purgatory of in-betweens” (p.80); as both a colonized (by Western knowledge) and a colonizer (of smaller kingdoms/chiefdoms, including *Patani*). Loos further posits that legal reforms were usually seen as an act of the Siamese hero who saved the country from the colonial powers. However, this sort of conservative ethos overlooks the fact that the Siamese who spearheaded the legal reforms were Bangkok elites and did so in order to preserve the existing hierarchy and to achieve

their expansionist projects. As she argues, rather than mastering the colonised, as the West did, Siamese elites in Bangkok, which was situated at the “crossroads of colonised countries” (2006, p.21) and Western colonial powers, selectively applied certain tools of colonialism and exerted power over its subordinates to maintain its power and, simultaneously ambitiously putting itself on an equal footing with the West.

In trying to “contest” and “to be on an equal footing with the West,” Siam/Thailand, therefore, has undoubtedly gone through a colonial period but with different conditions. Encountering with Siam/Thailand appears to be two-folded and simultaneous; the Other from the outside (the West) and the Other within (less “civilised” Thais and minorities). As a result, Bhabha’s concept of stereotypes, coupled with a psychoanalytical approach, could be a vital point of departure but should be used with a caveat in mind. *Contested colonialism* which entails “a purgatory of in-betweens” (Loos, 2010, p.80) and other socio-cultural contexts that may have laid the foundation of “Thainess” have to be taken into account in order to examine a construction of *Thainess Self* vis-à-vis *Thai Muslim Self* through visual representations in a new media space such as YouTube.

As noted in the previous sections that image, the gaze, an interplay between the Self and the Other and the colonial condition of Siam are pivotal tools in investigating the representation of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces on YouTube. However, since the representation of Thai Muslims on YouTube is central to this research, theories in new media and visual studies are also needed in order to enrich theoretical frameworks for analysis in the subsequent chapters. These strands of theories especially pertain to this research since YouTube is a visual-saturated media space which operates within new media environment. This new media space enables Thai Muslims to use audio-visual texts to represent themselves in public and moreover, functions of online media pave ways for new practices e.g. participatory culture, media convergence and networked relationships.

However, prior to a discussion of new media and visual theories, I shall first turn to a section on the historical and political-economy aspects of the Thai broadcast media and the internet. This research treats YouTube as a space relational to other mediated spaces. In order to understand a phenomenon of self-produced videos made Thai Muslims in the south, it is crucial to understand how mainstream visual media function in Thailand first. By providing this context, I will shed light on a configuration of the Thai audio-visual space and to what extent Thai elites have controlled this public visual realm in order to preserve the status quo. This may also provide fresh insight into the use of YouTube among Thai Muslims which can be considered a relational visual space.

The Thai broadcast media as a regime of images

Historically speaking, Thai public visual spaces are characterized by a separation between public and private spaces. While mainstream public visual spaces are highly controlled by elites in order to protect their interests, emerging spaces appear to be a site of ideological struggle employed by several actors in different periods. Jackson (2004) argues that a colonial experience of Siam has led to a bifurcation of both public and private realms. While Bangkok elites during the late 19th and early 20th century mobilised resources to craft their public image showing that they were on an equal footing with the West, the private sphere was less controlled. This controlled public life or Thai “regime of images” had been employed by elites to control their subordinates as well. In the regime of images, smooth calm public appearance has to be restored in order to maintain a social hierarchy. If the broadcast media is one public space, it is worth investigating further to what extent the elites have controlled this public visual medium in order to juxtapose and compare it with a new public space as YouTube, which is the subject of this research.

While the degree of freedom in the Thai print media has been volatile¹⁴, Thailand's broadcast media has been extensively controlled by elites since radio, and later television, were introduced to the country in the early 20th century. However, far from being exclusively controlled by the government, regulating broadcast media is multi-faceted. It is argued that the Thai broadcast media is characterised by a "dual system" (Ubonrat, 1994) where government authorities exclusively own frequencies, while a few hands of business groups, who have been granted concessions, produce media content. This sort of media regulation offers a safe harbour for government authorities to preserve the status quo and for corporations to protect their interests for decades. The following section offers a historical perspective of the Thai broadcast media starting from an introduction to the Telecommunication Act in 1995 and the struggle in implementing Article 44 written in the 1997 Constitution to allocate frequencies to different sectors.

The development of the broadcast media in Thailand revolves around competing powers within the elites that have pertained since the 1950s. After the inception of radio in 1930 and later that of television in 1955, the Telecommunication Act was enacted the same year which made the Thai state as the sole owner of television and TV channels (Ubonrat, 1994). The Telecommunication Act enacted in 1995 enabled government agencies to own all the frequencies, and the military regime used them as an "instrument for political legitimisation" (Ubonrat, 1994, p.106). For example, Field Marshal Phiboon (the prime minister, 1938-44, 1948-57) disseminated cultural modernisation songs, plays and entertainment programmes as part of his cultural mandates, through Channel 5, the military-owned channel in the later period, Field Marshal Sarit (the prime minister, 1959-63)

¹⁴ Thitinan (1997) argues that through its history, the Thai press has functioned as both "servant" and "watchdog." After the first newspaper was established in 1844, the Thai press worked as a servant under the absolute monarchy and then the military regime. However, throughout the 1980s, and especially during the 1988-90 economic boom, the print media had become more independent and developed into a public watchdog. Along with their growing monetary resources, the press also benefited from a democratising political field. After the May 1992 uprising, newspapers became an educator for the public by providing debates on society and democratisation by prominent intellectuals (Thitinan, 1997). The Thai public sphere was starting to grow. However, Thitinan (1997) notes the role of a watchdog press can be two-fold, depending on who that dog is serving. This issue comes into question because of the press's changing ownership patterns. There is the business part of the press that is no longer solely media-related. Some newspapers have gained profits from real estate and property development (Thitinan, 1997).

established Channel 7 to compete with his predecessor. Hence, “the hegemony of military dictatorship during 1958-1973 was at once the principal power within the media system” (Ubonrat, 1994, p.106).

Nonetheless, since the early 1960s, these media outlets have been operated mostly by privileged franchises (businesses) with close ties to the government and this has led to the commercialisation of the state media in the later stages. This system has also brought about “a privileged patronage relationship with government” (Chalisa, 2013, p.119) and “a strong degree of self-censorship among those granted concessions by the state, and those working directly for state-run media” (Brooten and Supinya, 2009, pp.103-104). Nowadays, the broadcast media are still owned by three major state organizations: the Public Relations Department (PRD), the Mass Communication Organisation of Thailand (MCOT) and the Ministry of Defense.

As these historical accounts suggest, ordinary people and civil sectors, being perceived as the receiving ends of the tightly controlled media, were restricted from participating in the communication environment. However, during the May 1992 crisis¹⁵, all television and radio stations were taken over by the military and thus people turned to print media (Ubonrat, 1994). This political upheaval incited a movement for media reform.

Brooten and Supinya (2009) argue that “the main reform promoted by scholars and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) during the post-1992 period has been the advancement of people’s communication rights and related policy developments” (p.104).

The constitution draft assembly of the 1997 Constitution “re-conceptualised telecommunications frequencies as national resources, to be used for national and local

¹⁵ This incident (also known as the Black May) refers to an uprising in May 1992 against General Suchinda Kraprayoon. In 1991, General Suchinda was a leader of National Peace Keeping Council (NPKC) who staged a coup d’état against a democratically-elected government and set up an interim government. However, after calling for a general election in 1992, coalition parties which formed the government appointed General Suchinda as the Prime Minister even though he did not run for the election. This led to a mass protest in Bangkok and a military crackdown. During the incident, press censorship was heavily deployed by the government. Some newspapers were shut down due to its coverage of the incident.

public interest on the basis of fair and free competition” (Brooten and Supinya, 2009, p.104).

This brought about a discourse of media and freedom of expression. However, an unstable political environment also brought about the 2006 coup and the abolition of the 1997 Constitution, and the new 2007 constitution was drafted by the coup-appointed Military. With the political instability in Thailand in the past few decades, the allocation of frequency has still not taken place. While the Thai broadcast media is still constrained by vested interests, the Internet appears to be a breath of fresh air for both the civil sector and for activists.

At the turn of the 21st century, there was a proliferation of Internet access in Thailand due to the government policies¹⁶ of the Thaksin Shinawatra administration (2001-2006), which was mainly employed as a tool to boost the Thai economy and which resulted in higher penetration of the internet. Now I shall turn to a brief history of Internet regulation in Thailand. In this section, I shall discuss how dissent groups use non-mainstream outlets such as the Internet and satellite television for their political movements during the May 2010 political crisis.

Usage of the Internet and its infrastructure in Thailand proliferated during the Thaksin era when it was used as a tool to boost the Thai economy but was not used for social welfare (Chalisa, 2013). However, the use of the Internet in civil sectors and opposition groups and activists were the inadvertent result of the policies. Chalisa (2013) argues:

This created a paradoxical situation in which policies encouraged expanded access to information technologies, even while restrictive regulations were enacted to protect the government’s interests and to support its ability to control the systems. These restrictions were justified on the basis of national security. (Chalisa, 2013, p.12)

¹⁶ It is reported that in 2015, the number of internet users in Thailand was 38,015,725 out of a population of 68 million (National Electronics and Computer Technology Center)

The argument noted above is supported by the fact that The Computer Crime Act of 2007 had been implemented after the September 2006 military coup. This law incurred criticism because it was endorsed by the military-appointed National Legislative Assembly. It gave power to the police to sabotage websites as well as Internet users posting messages deemed threatening to “national security”. Thus far, we have seen the broadcast media and newer media platforms such as the Internet in Thailand being a target of control and suppression by the government in order to maintain the “regime of images” in the public sphere. Nonetheless, social media such as YouTube and non-traditional media platforms such as satellite television, which are less regulated by the government, appear to be sites of a power struggle among political opponents in the 21st century Thai political sphere.

Studies (Pravit and Jiranan, 2010; Wall and Treepon, 2013) on how protesters used online social media and satellite television that was not controlled by the government during the crises between 2006-2010 shed light on the role of emerging electronic media in the political movements of the two camps: the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD or the Red Shirts) and the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD or the Yellow Shirts). Wall and Treepon (2012) examined how blogs were used during the uprising of Red Shirt protesters against the Democrat-led government in May 2010. They argue that while the broadcast media were practicing self-censorship to survive, protesters turned to blogs to voice their dissent.

The results also suggest that, in contrast to standard journalistic practices of objectivity and impartiality, bloggers intentionally offer a partisan point of view against the government and in some blog posts yielded comment that appeared inflammatory rather than a civic-minded discussion. In their later work examining YouTube channels during the crisis in May 2010¹⁷, Wall and Treepon (2013) argued that when the mainstream media was

¹⁷ This political turbulence consists of a series of protests who were organized by the Red Shirts. They demanded Abhisit Vejjajiva, the prime minister at that time to dissolve the parliament.

suppressed by the government, YouTube was used as a space for providing different political points of views as “visual evidence” that non-professional footage did not appear in the mainstream broadcast media. Some channels uploaded videos of speeches by protest leaders that appeared to instigate inflammatory actions. However, there were traces of professional input in some channels as well as they re-mediated what was broadcast on television in Thailand and international news outlets.

Examining the use of non-mainstream media during several crises, Pravit and Jiranan (2010) argue that the use of non-mainstream outlets such as cable TV and community radio of protesters, from both the PAD and the UDD, did not occur in a vacuum but stemmed from a changing media ecology in Thailand. Since the mainstream media has lost their legitimacy as a space for all Thai people (from all backgrounds), “vigilante media” emerged in this context. Characteristics of the vigilante media include 1) being one-sided and inflammatory; 2) not being open to other ideas; and 3) having the main goal to topple the government. These media such as ASTV (cable TV) of the Yellow Shirts and DTV (cable TV) of the Red Shirts were extensively used to mobilise people to protest against the government.

Historical accounts of online mobilization among opponents and disenfranchised groups suggest that even though the broadcast media has been strictly controlled, online and social media, more or less, appear to be under the government’s radar and the number of users is increasing. As a result, the “regimes of images” are at times disturbed by these new communication technologies and changing Thai political landscape. However, these accounts also suggest that after the post-2000 internet boom in Thailand, elites (mainly the military) have made an effort in restoring the “regime of images” within the online public sphere by an implementation of law e.g. The computer Crime Act in order to monitor and control information which can potentially disturb the social order. A more recent research on Thai politics and the internet suggest that cyber security became even more intense after the coup in 2016. Pinkaew (2016) argues “mass surveillance, surveillance by the masses, and

normalization of surveillance" (p.195) which were employed by the military has turned online social media into "an absolute digital panopticon" (p.195). She posits that this cyber panopticon has exacerbated an already volatile Thai democratic process.

The discussion on a government-corporate control of Thai broadcast media, an interplay between surveillance and control of the internet by elites and an effort by civilians/marginalized groups to employ the internet space to democratize Thai political sphere is pertinent to this research. It provides a crucial context where a large number of YouTube videos made by Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces emerged from. As noted in Chapter One, Thai Muslims in the region are represented by the mainstream media as the inferior others within who are prone to extremism and separatism acts. Consequently, besides being suspected as Muslim others who can disturb "national security", their online audio-visual practices on YouTube now operate within an intense "cyber security" operation. Within this online media environment, internet practices are closely monitored by the state and an act of disturbing the "regime of images" has to be suppressed. However, the emergent of YouTube videos made by the Muslim minorities becomes even more complicated when practices in self-produced online visual media practices are somewhat different from the "traditional" media. Participatory culture, a blurring line between user and producers, networked online relationship including user-led media content can potentially challenge mainstream tropes of Thai Muslims. To further explore how these new media practices affect practices of media representation and identity construction, the following section discusses scholarship on "new media" and identity formation, which is crucial in this research's exploration of YouTube representations of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces.

Understanding new media: space and textuality

The body of knowledge on “new media” studies has been growing due to its ability to attract a large number of Internet users since the late 20th century. Simultaneously, this phenomenon has also brought about vibrant discussions and debate on theoretical and methodological frameworks that can generate fresh insight into novel communication practices. As a result, it is challenging for scholars who are studying new media in the 21st century to offer a conceptual framework for examining media representations of the newer, more decentralised, visually saturated, participatory, user-generated, media environment. Employing merely a single discipline to gauge the visual practices appears to be insufficient. Rather, interdisciplinary approaches should be taken into consideration.

New media and identity

New media scholars (Poster, 2001; Bruns, 2008; Castells, 2007; Deuze, 2012; Jenkins, 2006; Papacharissi, 2011) have celebrated emerging forms of online technologies e.g. participatory culture, media convergence, self-produced media etc. in bringing about a “new” subjectivity. It is believed that the new forms of communication could potentially disturb pre-existing power relations and their possibility in bringing about changes in media production and consumption.

Poster (2001) argues that the “constitutive character of the Internet” (p.3) can create “new types of subjects” (p.3). With an emphasis on media users, Jenkins (2006) posits that a shifting towards “convergence culture” and participatory culture brings about “collective power” in media audiences to change a society. Similarly, Castells (2007) contends that power relations have shifted because of the networked society, and “mass self-communication” (p.259) is the new relationship between the mass media and networked media.

More recent works on new media still focus on how it has affected social life. Bruns (2008) coins the term “produsage”, arguing that with affordances of the new media, user-led content production in Web 2.0 “can nonetheless outpace the speed of product development in the conventional, industrial model” (p. 1). Consequently, media users became media producers themselves. Papacharissi (2011) argues that with the affordance of social networking sites (SNSs) users adjust and present themselves to multiple audiences and she terms it “the networked self”. Deuze (2012) similarly argues in his concept of “media life” that our life is exposed to the media (and thus we become the media ourselves) more than we did in the past and that this is inevitable. Consequently, now there is no world outside the media.

YouTube as an unruly space?

Vernallis (2013) found that music video, post cinema and YouTube clips are interrelated and influence each other, and coined the term “unruly media” to describe YouTube. Even though Vernallis’s work is not directly related to the representation of Muslims, the concept of “unruly media” deserves attention as a point of departure to locate YouTube as a relational unruly space, as against the broadcast media in Thailand that has been extensively controlled by the government and capitalists. First of all, I shall turn to the literature review of YouTube in various contexts.

The popularity of YouTube, beginning in the early 21st century, has also attracted media scholars and this brings about a debate on whether or not YouTube can be a forum for underprivileged and oppressed voices to be heard. Some scholars (Burgess, 2008; Christensen, 2008; Lange, 2008; Lindgren, 2011; Papadopoulos, 2009) argue that YouTube’s participatory culture paves ways for new meaning and diversification of content, while some (Antony and Thomas, 2010; Wall, 2009; Zoonen, Vis & Mihelj, 2011) argue that stereotypes and myths are still to be found on YouTube.

Papadopoulos (2009) examined amateur videos posted by coalition soldiers in Iraq. The findings suggested that the video content that was produced by the soldiers provided alternative perspectives to war reporting in general. Usually, mainstream media news narratives are believed by many scholars to uphold the authority of the military discourse. However, the soldier-produced videos challenged the long-standing portrayal of war, and these videos can become “alternative news networks” (p.27). Similarly, Christensen (2008) examined YouTube videos on the war in Iraq uploaded by US military officials and dissenters of the war. Using “propaganda” as a framework, he argued that the nature of propaganda has changed in the Internet age. While propaganda, such as during World War II, was operated under the tight grip of the administration in traditional and “old” media such as TV and radio, cyberspace paves the way for propaganda messages and counter-discourse and alternative voices to be disseminated side-by-side. “But, in the war over public opinion, video-sharing sites such as *YouTube* and *Google Video* have, it appears, begun to restructure the balance of story-telling power” (p.173). Lindgren (2011) examined discussion threads about the four events of shootings in schools and, using moral panic theory as a framework, the author helped define the reality of the events, unlike narratives in traditional media.

Wall (2009) focused on examining content in Africa on YouTube. The finding suggested that instead of seeing YouTube as a platform for connecting and making people understand each other more, YouTube content rather reproduces inequalities between the West and the Other. In the case of Africa, on YouTube, they are still portrayed by stereotypes and the producers of the content are still dominated by the West. Furthermore, the author argues that they are suspicious of whether YouTube is a platform of serious content (political content?) for Africans.

Besides the content, the comments on the videos were the focus of the following studies. Scholars suggest that the interactivity provided by YouTube can create both

meaningful discussions and inflammatory actions. Zoonen, Vis & Mihelj (2011) examined posts and comments (reaction) on Fitna video, an anti-Islam video made by a Dutch politician, and this issue was hotly debated on the web 2.0. The purpose was to see if the function of the video-sharing site could create dialogue among users. The results from network analysis suggest that most of the posters reacted to the video but did not interact with each other.

Antony and Thomas (2010) examined responses to the Oscar Grant shooting videos that were posted on YouTube. The results showed that comments were bifurcated, both positive and negative, regarding the citizen journalists who shot the videos. Both rational and inflammatory responses were found, as were derogatory words and racial slurs. As a result, the responses were fractured, not corresponding with the Habermasian public sphere, which sees the public as rational. As a result, they argue that the conceptualisation of the public sphere in new media content has to be adjusted. It should be noted that these studies are mostly done in the West, while YouTube studies on other regions of the world are still rare. There are thousands of YouTube videos regarding Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces but research on the representation of the Muslims on YouTube is largely absent.

These insights into new media, including YouTube, reflect emerging media phenomena and constitute points of departure for this study. Nonetheless, they tend to either, 1) point out that “new media” are bringing “something new” to a society, or 2) argue that social structures and power still play a role in shaping the way human beings use “new media”. However, some scholars argue that research in new media has to avoid the pitfall of a dichotomy between a utopian (agency in media users) and a dystopian (social structure overarching media practices) perspective of “new media”. Rather, researchers should attempt to find a “third way” of conceptualising new media that does not fall into this binary opposition, as Gauntlet (2013) succinctly notes:

Of course, that means it's not just a study of how humans respond to their technological environment, because those technical systems were themselves responses and innovations, made by humans, to previously existing aspects of technology and culture. (Gauntlet, 2013, p.xi)

Consequently, new media cannot be perceived as a single and monolithic entity, but is in a constant flux and full of uncertainties. Hence, I would propose that three more concepts of new media studies need to be taken into account when analysing the representation of Thai Muslims on YouTube. There are scholars who offer fresh insights into the terrain of new media studies that are usually overlooked, including Lindgren (2013)'s "disruptive space", Nakamura (2002; 2008)'s "cybertypes" and Chouliaraki (2012)'s "self-mediated publicness".

Lindgren (2013) contends that the new media space should be conceived as "disruptive spaces" where Internet protocol, discourse and power relations are intertwined. Extending his argument from the concept of "noise" practiced by sub-cultural groups in pre-internet periods, he argues that to examine a disruptive space as "new noise" on the Internet, scholars need fresher theoretical frameworks that are able to capture the new media environment. He begins by examining historical aspects of Internet protocol, arguing that it has been designed to be decentralised but simultaneously, controlled. As a result, a crucial question of Internet studies is "how decentralisation is controlled". He applies Deleuze's "rhizomatic" to analyse the structure of Internet networks, positing that the Internet network is tree-like: nodes are dispersed within the network and they can be linked to one another beyond a hierarchical structure. However, because of Internet protocol itself, a node can also be cut off from the network as well.

Lindgren (2013) also applies Bourdieu's "theory of practice" to a disruptive space and argues that discourse and Internet protocol are also intertwined with relations between communicators. It is thus impossible to analyse Internet discourse without considering

relations between spaces and the positions of discourse producers. Consequently, the Internet and language are not only tools used to communicate but they operate within power relations. A notion of disruptive spaces is especially pertinent to YouTube spaces which are employed by Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces to represent themselves and against how they are being represented in the mainstream media. This can provide a crucial method on how to examine a construction of Thai Muslim identity in online representational spaces.

Secondly, the issue of “race” is largely absent in new media research. Works on new media tend to downplay the role of racial discourse in Internet communication. Furthermore, Western scholars appear to assume that new media practices are the same, regardless of racial groups. On the other hand, Nakamura (2002, 2008) argues that there still exists “cybertype” in the new media environment; “race” is not diminished but it takes a new form in the new media language. She further posits that, “The internet is a visual technology, a protocol for seeing that is interfaced and networked in ways that produce a particular set of *racial formations*” (Nakamura, 2008, p.202). In their more recent volume that critically examines the prevailing concept of the “postracial” in American society, Nakamura and White (2011) observe that:

As the shift from analog to digital media formats and ways of knowing continues apace, continued social pressure is brought to bear on the idea of race as a key aspect of identity and an organizing principle for society. Yet no matter how digital we become, the continuing problem of social inequality along racial lines persists. (Nakamura and White, 2011, p.1)

Nakamura’s observation is useful for this research since race appears to central to identity politics when it comes to Thai Muslims in the south. As discussed in Chapter One, a Western concept of race came to Siam in the colonial period and Bangkok elites adopted this concept to a construction of “Thainess” in maintain their superiority. On the other hand, Muslims responded to this exertion of power by constructing multiple self-identity e.g. Patanians (*kon patani*) , *ore jawi*, *ore nayu*. Consequently, besides perceiving YouTube as

disruptive spaces, the visual representation within these disruptive spaces and a process of construction of “a particular set of *racial formations*” (Nakamura, 2008, p.202) has to be taken into account.

Lastly, since YouTube is a public space, another pivotal question arises: that of what is at stake when Internet users participate in public video sharing. Chouliaraki (2012)’s “self-mediated publicness” might be a useful study of new media since it argues that, different from Harbermasian public sphere, people who participate in public in the new media environment “are characterised by playful activisms, narcissistic self-expressions, critical discourse and fleeting solidarities that may or may not lead to the politicisation of public culture” (p.1). Chouliaraki further argues “[T]his radical proliferation of popular participation in public culture is hailed for blurring traditional boundaries between media producers and consumers and for leading to a hybrid form of civic participation” (p.1). However, their visibility in the public space such as the internet can be crucial to this exploration as it is “the interface between technologies of mediation that enable public visibility of the ordinary, on one hand, and the hybrid potential for democratisation and control that such visibility entails, on the other” (p.1). As noted in the introductory chapter about an emerging trend among Muslim youths in the three southern border provinces to represent themselves to an online public sphere as cool and playful Muslims, yet embracing Islamic principles. Chouliaraki (2012)’s “self-mediated publicness” is thus another crucial theoretical tool to analyse playfulness found in YouTube video made by the Muslims.

The recent media study works noted above provide fresh insights into the emergent media practices enabled by new media infrastructure and can be employed to unpack several dimensions of self-representation of Thai Muslims on YouTube. However, these concepts are still insufficient for this current research. Since YouTube is a video-sharing site where content is largely visual and thus pertains to visual representation, how can we make sense of this visually dominated medium? As noted in the very beginning of this chapter that a discourse of

“Thainess” and stereotypes of Muslim others within were originated in the colonial period. Applying Bhabha’s stereotypes and a colonial discourse as a point of departure, this research argues that *a process* of construction of a colonial Self versus the Other is intrinsically *visual*. But what are theoretical tools which can be employed to analyse *this process* and shed light on how Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces use *visual* to construct their own Self on YouTube.

The next section provides different theoretical strands, albeit some overlapping, on visual studies which will enable this research to delve further into visual practices and subjectivity among Thai Muslim video producers. From painting and photography to film, pixel screen and the Internet, visual scholars examine how human’s subjectivity is constructed by visual practices and vice versa. This section is divided into three subgroups, comprising: 1, semiotics - signification practices and visual analysis; 2, the pictorial turn - visual culture, visibility and power: and 3, the gaze, subjectivity and psychoanalysis. It would be futile to discuss these strands separately so this section aims to put all these theories into a single dialogue with each other.

Since semiotics has laid the foundation of and still has a stronghold in cultural studies, which is one of academic disciplines that informs this project, firstly, I shall turn to three foundational texts that offer linguistic methods to a study of visual representation in different mediums. After new media theories were discussed in the preceding section, the following section aims to further develop a research framework for examining visual representation on YouTube wherein the signification practices of still photography, films and television are *remediated*. These works include Ferdinand de Saussure ‘s semiotics, Roland Barthes’s denotative and connotative meaning, and John Fiske’s television codes. Among these texts, modes of production and consumption in each medium play a crucial role in constituting codes and meanings, which operate under certain ideologies.

Semiotics: signification practices and visual analysis

Semiotics is a field of study that was pioneered by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and American philosopher Charles Sanders Pierce. De Saussure was the first to coin the triadic concept of “signifier + signified = sign”: “The *signifier* is a physical object, e.g. a sound, printed word or image. The *signified* is a mental concept (bearing no *necessary* relationship to the signifier). The *sign* is the associative total which relates the two to each other” (Fiske and Hartley 2003, p.23). A relationship between a signifier and signified is arbitrary. Therefore, semiotics focuses on how the system of sign is governed and shared among people in the same society. De Saussure’s linguistic approach in studying signs was later applied in studies of visual signification in popular media.

In the essay *Image-Music-Text*, which examines signification practices of photography, Barthes (1977) contends that a press photograph has a paradoxical character since it conveys both denotative and connotative meanings, albeit contradictory, at the same time. A press photograph has the quality of “a fact” showing what was really “there” in front of the camera to a viewer and, thus, creates a reality effect. Nonetheless, to make sense of a photograph, it requires a set of knowledge such as “a stock of stereotypes” embedded in culture and society in interpreting meanings of each photograph. Comparing Barthes’ concept of the *reality effect* of a photograph to films, Metz (1974) contends that, while a dialectic relationship between a viewer and a viewed of a photograph privileges the object that has been in front of the camera over the viewer who is looking at it, the movie spectator is absorbed into the screen, not by a “has been there,” (as the way of seeing a photograph) but by a sense of “There it is” (p.6). As a result, “the impression of reality” comes in different degrees. Therefore, he posits that “films have *appeals* of a presence and proximity that strikes the masses and fills the movie theatre” (Metz, 1974, p.5).

Based on Barthes' concepts Fiske (1987) developed a theory of television studies, and examined how meanings are produced in television production norms in different levels. He argues:

television broadcasts programs that are replete with potential meanings, and that it attempts to control and focus this meaningfulness into a more singular preferred meaning that performs the work of the dominant ideology. (Fiske, 1987, p.1)

"Preferred meaning" is central to this argument. Television thus contains signs which are made meaningful by visual codes. This signifying practice functions to maintain "preferred meaning" governed by ideologies. There are several layers of codes that operate in different manners. Television programmes are produced through three codes; 1. social codes (pre-existing values such as costumes for middle class characters in TV dramas), 2. technical codes (how are they encoded electronically – shots, frames, editing, lighting), and 3. representational codes (these are organised into coherence so that the audience can make sense of it – an ideological level).

However, another crucial character of television is that it is *polysemic*. This means that meanings can be interpreted in different ways, the audience can be more active. For Fiske, meanings of television programmes are the "ideological struggle" or the site of contestation: "programs are produced, distributed and defined by the industry: texts are the product of their readers. So a programmed becomes a text at the moment of reading" (Fiske, 1987, p.14). Some constraints of television in the mode of its production help reinforce the preferred meaning to be produced. For example, since television drama is a form of popular culture produced under the pressure of advertising (to provide funding) and also its competitors, stereotypes (or something that can be understood easily) are usually encoded in order to attract the broadest audiences as possible.

Semiotic concepts such as denotation, connotation, television codes offer insights into a relationship among signs, a viewer, shared meanings and ideology. These could be employed to

analyse how Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces use visual signs on YouTube to create shared meanings among the minorities. However, their effort to distinguish between different visual media can be a pitfall since the modes of production and consumption of the online videos are probably different from the more traditional media as new media scholars above suggest. Consequently, semiotics alone may be insufficient to investigate further into a construction of subjectivity through the use of visual signs in an online space like YouTube. Therefore, I draw in “visual culture” which contends that the signification approach is not sufficient to examine the way in which humans visualise objects around them. Mirzoeff (1999) argues that the semiotic approach lacks a historical aspect to explain an interaction between the viewer and the viewed. The aim of visual culture is thus to study genealogy of “visuality” in the different periods. Visual culture will thus add historical dimension to analysis of the visual representation of Thai Muslims in the three southern provinces. This theoretical tool is especially crucial as this research perceives an identity as a process which evolves through different periods.

However, before moving on to an interdisciplinary concept of visuality referred to as ‘visual culture,’ it would be useful to discuss the works of the French post structuralist Michel Foucault, since his work, to a certain degree, has laid the foundation for understanding human visuality, visual discourse and visual subjects in the field of visual culture. I shall start this section by providing a background to Foucault’s key concepts which include discourse and *panopticism*.

Foucauldian discourse and the visuality of modern subjects

In an introduction to Foucault’s *The order of discourse*, Young (1981) posits that this seminal work, like other works of other poststructuralist scholars in the same period, is an “auto-critique” of his previous work. By changing his methodology from archaeology (see his

previous work *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, first published in 1969) to cartography, Foucault offers a methodology for mapping discursive practices with institutions and powers. Young (1981) explains how a discourse, in Foucauldian term works;

Discourse itself is playfully analyzed in terms of a model reminiscent of ego and the id (or perhaps the pleasure principle and the death drive). It is constituted by the relation between desire, which wants discourse to be unrestricted, 'infinitely open', and the institutions, which assert that discourse comes into formation through constraint and control, and that it is in this way that it possesses power. (Young, 1981, p.49)

Consequently, once a discourse emerges, it enables something to be sayable while this desire to say something is limited by the constraints and institutions regulating who can say it, who can talk about it and where they can talk about it. These discursive practices let 'power' come into play. But what incites a discourse?

In the modern West, what drives the creation of a discourse is a "will to truth" and "will to know". Hence, Young (1981) posits that "Foucault suggests that we must call into question our will-to-truth, restore to discourse its character as an event, and throw off our acceptance of 'the sovereignty of the signifier'..." (p.50). This "will to truth" is also echoed in scholarly works discussed in the previous sections; Said (1978)'s "the system of truth" and Bhabha (1983)'s "productive ambivalence" and Thongchai (2000b)'s "the others within" (discussed the beginning of this chapter) which argue that knowledge driven by "will to truth" about the Orient and colonial was constructed by the colonizer (the West and Siamese elites alike) in order to create colonial subjects. Through discursive practices (e.g. observing, gazing, documenting, representing), these colonial discourses function as an apparatus to maintain power of the colonizers. Besides "will to truth", visibility appears to be another aspect which plays a crucial role in a construction of modern subject.

Foucault's work that examines visibility in the modern period of Europe is thus especially related to this study. Foucault (1977) argues that the panopticon epitomises the way modern society disciplines its subjects and that visibility plays a crucial role in this disciplinary project. The building was designed for inmates to live in an individual space and while the inmates cannot see each other and cannot see the supervisor, the supervisor who is in the column building within the panopticon can see each and all of them. This creates a consciousness among the inmates that they are being seen at all times.

Foucault (1977) argues that "[h]ence the major effect of the panopticon is to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (p.98). This concept can be applied to the disciplinary in daily life when this disciplinary is internalised in the subjects and they, with an awareness of being looked at, follow the norms of society without coercion. As Foucault puts it:

The body of the king with its strange material and physical presence, with the force that he himself deploys or transmits represented by panopticism; the domain of panopticism is, on the contrary, that whole lower region, that region of irregular bodies, with their details, their multiple movements, their heterogeneous forces, their spatial relations, gaps, series, combinations, and which use instruments that render visible, record, differentiate and compare; a physics of a relational and multiple power, which has its maximum intensity not in the person of the king, but in the bodies that can be individualized by these relations. (Foucault, 1977, pp.68-69)

The "modern individuated subject" is thus disciplined by an awareness of constantly being gazed. By perceiving Muslims in three southern border provinces as subject, visibility becomes a vital tool which can be employed to interrogate postcolonial subjectivity of the minorities in the Thai state. It's now apparent that visual and identity construction are intertwined and they are vital for analyzing representation of Thai Muslims on YouTube. Nonetheless, as noted earlier the relationship between the signifier and the signified and rules that govern them alone are insufficient for analyses on how a certain visual discourse of Thai Muslims came into

being on YouTube. Scholarly works on visual studies based on Foucault's genealogy, focusing on the historical aspects of visual practices and subjectivity are therefore much needed.

The next section offers a review of two visual culture theorists - Nicholas Mirzoeff and Lisa Nakamura, who both argue that, rather than focusing in a particular medium, e.g. still photos, films, television etc., tracing genealogy of visibility is pivotal to understanding subject formation and the power relations which that entails. This is especially the case when it comes to YouTube where boundaries among different media appear to be blurred.

The pictorial turn: visual culture, visibility and power

Mirzoeff (1999) examines visibility in the Western context and conceptualizes genealogy of visual culture" based on Foucault's genealogy. He offers "a strategic reinterpretation of the history of modern visual media understood collectively, rather than fragmented into disciplinary units such as film, television, art and video" (p.13). The main purpose of visual culture, as an interdisciplinary approach, is to extend the arguments of two disciplines - art history and cultural studies - on how visibility and culture work together to create visual experience and visual subjects.

Rather than focusing on each media genre, visual culture turn to the interaction between the viewer, the viewed and visual technologies which is intertwined with power. Mirzoeff (2002) posits "[F]or visual culture, visibility is not so simple. Its object of study is precisely the entities that come into being at the point of intersection of visibility with social power" (p.10). Mirzoeff (1999) coins the term "visual event", arguing that visual culture is not defined by medium but by the interaction between viewers and viewed. He describes the term visual event, saying "[W]hen I engage with visual apparatus, media and technology, I experience a visual event. By visual event, I mean an interaction of the visual sign, the technology that enables and sustains that sign, and the viewer" (p.13). Regardless to types of

visual medium, visual culture is interested in how “visual event” enables people in different periods visualise things around them. “In other words, visual culture does not depend on pictures themselves but the modern tendency to picture or visualize existence. The visualizing makes the modern period radically different from the ancient and medieval worlds” (Mirzoeff 1999, pp.5-6).

The practice of visualizing in the modern period also brought about a formation of visual subject. Mirzoeff (2002) contends that in the current media environment, we are in a “new visual subjectivity”: “[b]y visual subject, I mean a person who is both constituted as an agent of site (regardless of his or her biological capacity to see) and as the effect of a series of categories of visual subjectivity”. As visual subject is both constituted and constitutive, “the visual is contested, debated and transformed as a constantly challenging place of social interaction and definition in terms of class, gender, sexuality and racialized identities (p.4)”.

“Visual events” and “visual subjects” can be used to examine subjectivity of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces who produce images through videos and upload them to public. As social and religious minorities who are marginalized by a notion of “Thainess”, their visual practices on YouTube may shed light on how they contest their identity as *khaek* and the others within. However, in this research “visual event” e.g. self-produced YouTube videos, takes place in a new media milieu (discussed in the previous section) which is characterized by “participatory culture (Burgess, 2008)”, a practice of “produsage” (Bruns, 2008), “media convergence” (Jenkins, 2006), “mass-self communication” (Castells, 2007). Instead of being represented, now Thai Muslims represent themselves within these new media environments which is arguably different from traditional media e.g. television and cinema. Visual culture theories that can help explain these discontinuities in visual representation are much needed.

In a recent study on self-produced visual media, Nakamura (2008) uses the term “internet visual culture” and argues that “visual culture critiques are concerned with tracing

the genealogies of media use in new media, identifying specificities of genre or kinds of production and imaging practices, and producing readings of images that gesture toward identity formation in the matrix of power” (pp.10-11). Furthermore, she contends that visuality is a crucial part of the Internet since it offers “a range of imagistic and interactive practices that produce a distinctively different media scape from the world of the static literary text” (p.92).

In order to investigate visuality of the internet, Nakamura (2008) examines the use of Instant Messaging’s avatar or, as it is called, “AIM buddies” among American minorities. This type of visual, which is both static and semi-moving, was used alongside IM conversations. It is a visual cue that each participant can create (such as by scanning from an image or digitally creating) and share and modify. She argues that, “AIM buddies are liminal objects in several ways. They occupy the space separating still image from cinematic sequence, icon from avatar, between personal signature and mass-produced image, between photo-realistic representation and cartoon representation, between orality/textuality and visuality” (p.45). Nakamura (2008) finds that this visual practice of AIM “creates raced and gendered bodies with a distinctive and innovative visual culture and mode of circulation and deployment (p.53)” This illustrates how online image production among minorities intersects with “the matrix of power” and results in identity formation in “distinctive and innovative visual culture”.

Therefore, a characteristic of the visual culture of the Internet that we have to take it on board is that audiences, especially minorities, are not just users but also producers themselves: “By examining a range of new digital production practices by creators of minority popular visual culture on the internet, I have hoped to give a sense of how this group of users sees, rather than how they are seen or represented, what they are making as well as what they are using, what they are doing as well as what they are being” (p.208). This provides a

crucial tool to examine Thai Muslims YouTube media producers whose audio-visual practices are also part of an identity formation process.

“Remediation” is another important aspect of internet visual culture. Nakamura (2008) conceptualises a notion of “remediation”; visual forms of other media such as TV, cartoons, cinema and printing are remediated on the internet in the case of AIM buddies. In fact, Nakamura explains, remediation has occurred throughout media history. She gives an example, saying that between 1905-10, films remediated theatre and literature, which were considered “high art,” while in the previous period, films, on the contrary, had remediated Vaudeville and other lower-class entertainment. In more recent history, a digital game remediates “the cinema of attraction” which is a genre of films whose aim is to visually attract an audience quickly, rather than maintaining audience attention for a longer time in a conventional story form. The AIM buddies “remediate” “cinema of attraction” which does not need a sequence of shots but just to attract the viewers. However, by remediating cinema of attraction, “these minifilms exploit the discontinuity of these images to produce a complex intersectional identity in a highly compressed form that runs ad infinitum or loops in the context of IM” (p.65). As a result, discontinuity of image production and consumption (e.g. from cinema to YouTube, from television screen to mobile phone) which paves ways for “remediation” of media genre and possibly re-construction of identity among Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces has to be taken into account.

Thus far, Nakamura’s notions of “internet visual culture” and “remediation” have filled a theoretical gap between visual culture and new media. This is pertinent to the study of the representation of Thai Muslims on YouTube because this strand of visual culture provides tools for investigating an identity construction of minorities through a practice of creating and downloading videos to YouTube. Furthermore, when different genres of videos (while related in terms of content and, in this case, Thai Muslims in the three southern

border provinces) are placed together on YouTube, now viewers see them on computer screens, smart phones and tablets and examining how YouTube videos “remediate” other genres of visual media becomes something crucial.

Among scholars in the field of visual culture Hall, in his volume of *Visual culture: the reader* (1999) applies, various theoretical approaches to visually, placing the emphasis more firmly on the relationship between the gaze and subjectivity. He posits that one method that can be used to examine visual culture is to shift the focus from the conceptualisation of the visual to “the relation between the viewer and the viewed” (p.309) and that the two are “mutually constitutive” (p.310). He further argues that: “The subject is, in part, formed subjectively through what and how its ‘see’, how its ‘field of vision’ is constructed. In the same way, what is seen, the image and its meaning, is understood as not externally fixed, but relative to, and implicated in, the positions and schemas of interpretation which are brought to bear upon it” (p.310). Hall (1999) further argues that being subjects of the gaze is an “unfinished process which is both social and psychic – a subject-in-process” (p.311). This brings us to the following section that will discuss another aspect of visibility – that of the gaze and subjectivity.

The gaze and subjectivity

According to Hall (1999), the gaze can be both social and psychic and he contends that the two foundational texts of subjectivity, Louis Althusser’s *Ideology and ideological state apparatus* and Sigmund Freud’s *Fetishism* are a useful point of departure. Both texts discuss the formation of subjectivity in human beings from different aspects. Althusser (1971) argues that ideology cannot operate without the function of the subject: “there is no ideology except for concrete subjects, and this destination for ideology is made possible only by the subject” (p.320). Althusser coins the term *interpellation* in order to explain the process of subject formation. He further argues that,

“ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individual into subjects (it transforms them all) by a very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing: Hey, you there!” (p.320-321). A person thus becomes a subject under an ideology because he or she is being addressed by other people in society. The formation of a subject therefore hinges on the existence of the Other.

On the other hand, psychoanalysis offers an insight into subject formation, yet operates at the psychic level. Freud (1927) asserts that the formation of subjectivity occurs at a subconscious level in the form of “fetish” and that this form of subjectivity revolves around a disavowal of lack and substitution. According to Freud, a boy assumes that everyone has a penis. However, at a later stage, beginning to be aware of his mother’s genitals, the boy comes to realise that not everyone, including his mother has a penis and therefore, he is afraid that one day he will be castrated. This kind of anxiety occurs during childhood and does not fade away but is repressed in his subconscious: “that is to say, it should normally have been given up, but the fetish is precisely designed to preserve it from extinction. To put it more plainly, the fetish is a substitute for the woman’s (the mother’s) penis that little boy once believed in and, for reasons familiar to us, does not want to give up” (p.324). A good example of how to apply Freud’s *fetishism* to an analysis of the representation of the Other can be found in Bhabha’s work (discussed at the beginning of the chapter) which argues that *stereotypes* of Others are used by the coloniser to mask the lack of *wholeness* of the colonised.

Since this study focuses on the visual representation of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces on YouTube, the questions of gaze and subjectivity are central to this analysis. As a result, besides the social aspects of the media (discussed in semiotics and visual culture sections), psychic ones are equally crucial. As Hall argues, “the subject itself is not a completed entity but something which is produced through complex and unfinished process which are both social and psychic – a subject-in-process” (Hall, 1999, p.311).

This very idea of *subject-in-process* leads us to the second theoretical strands that will inform this research. Many scholars in film and visual studies, in particular E. Ann Kaplan, deployed psychoanalysis as their key research method. In the introduction to her volume *Psychoanalysis & cinema*, Kaplan (1990) provides an historical account of how psychoanalysis has been applied to the study of literature and films, ranging from a Freudian autobiography analysis examining the relationship between a writer and his/her psychic process to a Lacanian method in analysing the motives and drives of characters in film, to the transference between the viewer and the viewed (the viewer and the screen). She points out that, besides the “freshness” of Freudianism in film analysis in the British academy in mid 1970s, Lacan’s *Imaginary* became a viable concept for analysis, especially for the emerging field of film studies.

Lacan’s theory of the mirror phase, for instance, readily lent itself to analogy with the screen spectator situation in a way that did not happen in relation to literature. The different signifying systems of film and novel account in part for the different usage of Lacan. The *enounce/enunciation* axis works differently in literature; it is not so easy for the fiction reader to believe that that he/she is creating the text as it is for the cinema-spectator to believe that he/she is producing the images on the screen. (Kaplan, 1990, p.10)

Thus, the mirror stage, which argues about the relationship between the viewer and the screen, is especially pertinent to film studies as Kaplan (1990) contends: “In film the spectator readily loses him or herself in the text as a result of classical cinema’s suturing techniques” (p.10). This in turn can be a point of departure in applying psychoanalysis to examine Thai Muslims on YouTube for this project in order to interrogate a psychic process of visual subject. This psychological aspect of visual also resonates with Bhabha’s “stereotypes” which was discussed at the beginning of the chapter. The next section reviews some aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis and discusses how it can be employed to the study of visual.

As noted in the previous section, semiotics is mainly drawn from the fields of linguistics and anthropology which argue that individuals in a society are mediated by language and thus privilege “a signified” which has shared meanings. Nevertheless, Lacanian psychoanalysis reverses this semiotic argument and contends that what governs relationships between human beings is not only in the conscious e.g. using a word or language to represent an object in a social world, but also the unconscious which is working through “a signifier” employed by a speaking subject. Homer (2005) argues in the introduction to his book that “...Lacan tries to articulate through the structure of language something that remains beyond language itself: the realm of unconscious desire” (p.12). He further posits that what distinguishes Lacan from his predecessors such as Sigmund Freud is that while, in a Freudian sense, the unconscious is totally excluded from language, an innovative method formulated by Lacan offers an insight into the influence of the unconscious even at the Symbolic level (when people began using signs or to be “speaking beings”) (Homer, 2005). Lacan’s key ideas can be divided into three parts, - the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. These three concepts are not discrete units but can be mapped as a triadic model that illustrates their relationships

Psychoanalysis is a vast field of studies so this research project chooses to put the emphasis on Lacan’s *Imaginary* and *Symbolic* as analytical approaches since the *Imaginary* tells us how human beings and their subjectivity are intertwined with the gaze, while the *Symbolic* illustrates how a speaking subject uses language in order to position him/herself vis-à-vis the Other. However, as noted earlier, the use of signs in human beings appears to revolve around an axis of *Imaginary* and *Symbolic*. This paves the way for a researcher to gauge a psychic process through an examination of language and in the case of this research, visual language. Lacanian psychoanalysis provide a useful methodology for analysing the self-representation of Thai Muslims who are regarded as Others within Thailand.

Lacanian psychoanalysis is especially crucial when it comes to an examination of desire and pleasure of using visual in everyday life. An interplay between the *Imaginary* and the

Symbolic thus becomes central here. Based on Lacan's Mirror Stage, Mulvey (1975) contends that when analysing films, it is not sufficient to focus merely on objects that are represented on screen at the expense of the function of a camera that appears invisible and the gaze of the audience. As a feminist, Mulvey is interested in the *pleasure of seeing* the beauty of women in films, especially in popular feature films. She argues that the pleasure of watching narrative films rests on the patriarchal system. This system consists of two psychoanalytical aspects: scopophilia; and narcissism. Scopophilia is the pleasure of voyeurism which has been developed since the childhood period (curiosity in other people's genitals) and cinema can serve this pleasure by letting the audience sit in a dark auditorium watching the big screen as if he or she is the only person watching it, and the camera in the production is hidden to make it seem like no other people are involved in this voyeuristic pleasure.

The second aspect is the narcissistic aspect of the ego. An audience can relate with the image of the male protagonist and enjoy the momentary pleasure of an "ideal ego" on screen (and at the same time, is actually disturbed by the fact that it is in contradiction with the "self-image" - misrecognition). This duality of pleasure in watching films leads to the "male gaze projects" – "in their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey, 1995, p.837). Therefore, Mulvey (1975) concludes that in a patriarchal society, "the presence of women is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative films." This study of Muslim representation is not directly about gender and the patriarchal system which Mulvey terms "male gaze projects", but this concept might be useful for an analysis of the visual pleasure of gazing Thai Muslims which is, historically, a colonial project in making the minorities being seen. Furthermore, by using this as a starting point, this research may extend this psychological approach to analysis of self-produced visual media who now gaze themselves and perhaps gaze back to "Thainess".

The gaze and subjectivity are intertwined and are pivotal to analysis of an identity construction of Thai Muslim minorities using visual media such as YouTube. Besides the social aspect of visibility discussed in the preceding section, the psychic dimension of visual practices above is no less important.

Thus far, strands of theories ranging from Thai cultural studies, postcolonial studies, new media studies semiotics, visual culture and psychoanalysis are being discussed in order to form interdisciplinary frameworks which will be employed as theoretical tools to analyse the representation of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces. As noted earlier, YouTube in this research is treated as disruptive spaces emerging from a relationship with other spaces (e.g. mainstream visual media). It is thus crucial to compare and contrast the representation of Thai Muslims in the three southern provinces on YouTube with other media spaces as well. However, since studies on media representation of Thai Muslims in mainstream media is largely absent, the next two chapters (Chapter Three and Four) will shed light on how the Muslims minorities are portrayed in the Thai mainstream audio-visual media. Some theories from this chapter will be employed as a tool to delve further into the representation of the Muslims.

Chapter Three

Visualising Muslims in Thai cinema

The preceding chapters provided a literature review on the representation of Muslims in the media and also a review on new media and the various strands of visual theories which inform the conceptual framework for this interdisciplinary research. Since YouTube is a visually-dominated media platform where images are produced, circulated and consumed, visual theories, ranging from semiotics and visual culture to psychoanalysis were discussed at length in the previous chapter, thus offering vital methodology for examining the self-representation of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces on YouTube.

Nevertheless, the way Thai Muslims *portray themselves* on YouTube and how they are themselves *portrayed* in the mainstream Thai media are not mutually exclusive. In order to examine the effects and function of media representation, scholars (Lindgren, 2013; Mirzoeff 1999; Nakamura, 2008) suggest that other media spaces/practices need to be taken into account. In this regard, YouTube is not a discrete unit but has to be perceived as “disruptive spaces” (Lindgren, 2013) where “visual subjects”¹⁸ construct their identity in relation “to a matrix of lived cultural practices, identities, geopolitics, and postcolonial, racial, and political positions” (Nakamura, 2008, p.204). Visual representation as “lived cultural practices” in emerging digital spaces is thus pertinent to powers and relations among different spaces. The visual representation of Thai Muslims in traditional media is, therefore, indispensable. It is a pivotal starting point for examining Muslim identity formation through self-representation in a newer visual space such as YouTube.

Having said that, there is still an absence of research on the visual representation of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces. After a new height of violence was reached in the south of Thailand in 2004, the body of research on Muslims and Islam in

¹⁸ Mirzoeff (2002) argues that in the modern period, seeing is a crucial element in the formation of subjects in a nation-state. Thus, a modern subject is both constituted by visibility and also disciplined by it: “By visual subject, I mean a person who is both constituted as an agent of site (regardless of his or her biological capacity to see) and as the effect of a series of categories of visual subjectivity (p.10)”

Thailand has grown rapidly and this intellectual inquiry unquestionably contributes to the field of study. Nevertheless, these scholarly works tend to put the emphasis on the conflict between the Thai state and Muslim minorities in terms of military operations, separatist movements, government policies towards Thai Muslims, Islamic radicalism, and Islamic schools (Bajunid, 2005; Dorairajoo, 2004; Harish, 2006; Kavi, 2004; Jory, 2007; McCargo, 2009, 2012; Tan-Mullins, 2006; Thanet, 2006, Wattana, 2006; Wheeler, 2010; Yusuf, 2006 among others). There are also some works contributing to representation and identity formation, but they still focus on an aspect of language use among Malay-speaking Muslims (Nilsen 2012, Le Roux, 1998), and the representation of Muslims in Siam/Thai official documents (Loos, 2006) and literature (Pichet, 2008). This shows that media representation in general and visual media in particular is downplayed in this field of research in spite of the increasing role of the media in constructing and circulating visual tropes about Thai Muslims. Thus, this chapter aims to redress this issue and attempts to shed light on how visibility of Muslims in Thai cinema functions in a Thai cultural realm as Mirzoeff (2002) posits “for visual culture, visibility is not so simple. Its object of study is precisely the entities that come into being at the point of intersection of visibility with social power” (p.10). Therefore, prior to analyses of YouTube videos in the subsequent chapters, this chapter contributes to an analysis of the representation of Thai Muslims in mainstream Thai films, with reference to four particular films about Thai Muslims.

This genre of visual media was selected primarily because films provide richness in terms of visual data and narratives. It should be noted that Thai Muslims are under-represented in the Thai mainstream media unless their activities disturb a notion of “Thainess” e.g. in the case of Muslim separatist movements in the three southern border provinces, which receive extensive news coverage (Treepon, 2006). Moreover, when “Thainess” is being represented to the outside world, e.g. to promote tourism, “Muslimness” is excluded; a selection of images such as central Thai traditional folk dance, royal handicrafts, monks,

Buddhist temples and Buddha images are, for example, represented in advertising campaigns (Peleggi, 2007; Van Esterik, 2000). Therefore, having “Muslim others” as objects *to-be-looked-at* in the mainstream Thai cultural space is tellingly significant and deserves attention.

Furthermore, the gaze and the relationship between viewer and screen offer a vital tool to delve into an identity construction. Scholars (Kaplan, 1990; Mulvey, 1975; Metz, 1974) contend that films become popular due to their own visual technique e.g. voyeuristic pleasure when watching in a dark auditorium (Mulvey, 1975), “suturing techniques” when the audience “loses him or herself in the text” (Kaplan, 1990, p.10) and “presence and proximity that strikes the masses and fills the movie theatre” (Metz, 1974, p.5). This visual aspect of cinema is thus pertinent to this research that examines visual representation and the subject formation of Thai Muslims. This could be a vital point of departure especially when Muslim video-makers *remediate* storytelling and the visual technique of films to their videos on YouTube.

As noted in Chapter Two, Muslims and Islam are depicted in the Western popular media e.g. press, television and films, as backward, violent and incompatible with the “modern” world (Baderoon, 2002; Karim, 2003; McMaster, 2003; Ross, 2003; Shaheen, 2003; Shumsky, 2004), and their violence-inflected representation in the media has been fueled by terrorist attack incidents e.g. the 9/11 event. Visually, Muslim references such as the turban and headscarves have come to symbolise the threat to the West (Amin-Khan, 2012; Morey and Yaqin, 2011), a belief that resonates with Said’s *latent Orientalism* when the century-old stereotypes of Islam are reproduced in order to legitimise the West. *Orientalism* is therefore a point of departure for analysing the representation of Muslim minorities in Thailand. However, the distinctive character of Thailand’s *internal colonialism* has to be taken into account. Hence, *internal colonialism* in Siam/Thailand is the creation of “a system of truth” (Said, 1978, p.204) about minorities that hinges on the notion of “the others within” (Thongchai 2000a) which has been practiced by Bangkok elites for decades in order to preserve the social hierarchy. As a result, the representation of Muslim others in the Thai contexts may illustrate how “a system

of truth” functions in Thailand’s postcolonial condition and how power operates in this visual representational practice.

Visualising the Other Within: Muslim minorities in Thai films (1985-2003)

Ongoing violence in the southernmost provinces of Thailand since 2004, resulting in more than 4,000 casualties, has raised the crucial question of how the Bangkok elites, from the late 19th century until the present day, have managed to preserve their dominion over internal minorities. This domination is not only exercised in terms of coercion but also represents an extensive deployment of ideological works such as education, literature and mass media to create a consensual form of “Thainess” in the imagined community of Thailand. As noted earlier, films, as a visual discursive practice, offer a richness of visual data about Muslims where politics and aesthetics go hand-in-hand to present visualised Others for the viewer. The aim of this chapter is to investigate the underexplored visual representation of Thai Muslims in the southernmost region in Thai mainstream films. The research questions are:

- 1) how are Thai Muslim characters portrayed in the films.?
- 2) how are Thai Muslims juxtaposed with Buddhist Thais and “Thainess”?
- 3) how are the visual spaces of Muslim-majority regions depicted in the films?
- and 4) what does the gaze of the Other in cinema function in the context of Thailand?

Theoretical frameworks, which include postcolonial studies, Thai cultural studies and visual culture discussed in Chapter Two, will be employed to unpack the visual representation of the Muslim minorities in Thai cinema.

Performing Muslim: the visual codes of Muslimness

The first visual aspect of the films that I am going to examine is the visual representation (facial features, skin complexions, clothes etc.) of the main characters of Thai Muslims in comparison with Buddhists or Sino-Thais in four Thai films. These are *Pheesuea Lae Dokmai* (Butterflies and Flowers, released in 1985); *Pulakong* (Pulakong [place name], released

in 1989); *Talumphuk* (Talumphuk [place name]; released in 2002) and *OK Betong* (OK Betong [place name], released in 2003). Since in these films, Muslim characters are juxtaposed with Buddhist Thai and Sino-Thai characters as an impetus for plotlines, portrayals of Buddhist Thai characters are examined as well in order to compare and contrast them with Muslim ones. Each actor and actress was selected whether they were Muslim in real life or not, and this leads to the question, what is at stake when Buddhist Thai actors/actresses are selected to perform “Muslim” in these films directed by Buddhist Thai directors (and two of them are based on novels written by non-Muslims)?

Most of the leading characters of these four films are not Muslim actors/actresses but “social codes” (Fiske, 1978); particular appearances, coupled with their names and costumes in the films, make them look “real” i.e. visually convincing that these are Muslim characters for a Thai audience. Fiske (1987) argues that “the actors and actresses who are cast to play hero/ines, villain/esses and supporting roles are real people whose appearance is already encoded in our social codes” (p.9). Therefore, the particular types of facial features and the skin complexions of actors playing Muslims suggest a socially agreed-upon look for *khaek* (the term *khaek* is discussed at length in Chapter Two). Interestingly, however, while their visual aspects were carefully crafted, most of these Muslim characters are not “Muslims.” Instead, facial features and skin complexions (beards, dark skin, big eyes, sharper nose), Arabic or Malay names (such as Huyan, Sakina, Soleh, and Faruq) and daily outfits (the *hijab* and skullcaps) of these characters are “social codes” extensively and discursively employed to distinguish Muslims from Buddhists and, thus, bring about a sense of reality to the films. This visual practice also suggests an attempt to *fix* Thai Muslims with stereotypes in the mainstream cultural realm.

Pheesuea Lae Dokmai (dir. Euthana Mukdasanit) released in 1985, is based on a Thai language novel by Nippan that reflects the economic and social problems of rural Thailand in the late twentieth century. This novel was first published in 1976 and Nippan can be seen as a

pioneer of a wave of teacher-cum-writers during 1978-1988 who wanted to illustrate the burden of teachers teaching the Thai language to Muslim students in the three southern border provinces in attempts to integrate them into “Thainess”. In these writings, Muslim subjects were portrayed as uneducated people who were living in underdeveloped areas. Thus, the texts promoted the Buddhist Thai responsibility to educate and save the uneducated Muslims from poverty (Pichet, 2008).

The story takes place in Thepa (a district in Songkla in the south of Thailand where Malay-speaking Muslims are the majority) where the author of the book grew up and attended a teacher’s college. The leading roles are a Muslim boy (Huyan played by Suriya Yaowasang; *see figure 1*) and girl (Mimpee played by Wassana Pon-yium; *see figure 2*) who are classmates, both of them are from impoverished background and dreaming of a better life. However, because of their background, these two students have to leave school in order to work and support their family. It should be noted that in real life, these two actors are not Muslim but are portraying Muslim children in rural (*ban- nok*) Thailand.



Figure 1: Huyan



Figure 2: Mimpee



Figure 3-4: teacher

Visually, Muslims have darker skin, sharper noses and bigger eyes than Thais. This “Muslim” complexion and these facial features are highlighted in contrast to the Buddhist Thai teacher (see figure 3) who has fairer skin. A non-Muslim character who plays a crucial role in *Pheesuea Lae Dokmai* is the teacher. The Thai teacher is depicted as one who is kind and is always concerned about the impoverished Muslim boy, Huyan, and wants to help his family out of poverty. The teacher would like Huyan to further his education but since his father cannot earn enough money as a day labourer, Huyan has to leave school and sell popsicles for a living, and eventually ends up being involved in illegal rice trading at the Thai/Malaysian

border. Huyan's father (played by Suchao Pongwilai¹⁹, a central Thai Buddhist actor (*see figure 4*) has darker skin with a moustache and sharp nose. Other visual references to being Muslim are also connected to the portrayal of their jobs, what they do for a living. Huyan's father is portrayed as a helpless person because, as a day labourer, he cannot earn enough money to cover his daily expenses or to pay for his children's education.



Figure 4: Huyan's father

Besides their appearances, Muslim characters in this film are visually portrayed as people wearing worn-out clothes and living in rural and shanty houses (*see figure 5-6*). Their clothes are in contrast to those of the teacher who wears a "modern" "formal" white blouse and skirt and has a clean and neat look. So far, findings suggest that visually, Muslim characters are fixed with the *khaek* look (darker skin, bigger eyes, sharper noses), live in poverty (shanty house, worn-out clothes) and are backward (working as labourers and living in a rural setting). By fixing characters with these visual stereotypes, this contrast also highlights the temporal difference between "Muslim" and "Thai" (having a school as a symbol) as "modernised" and "developed." Buddhists and Muslims are portrayed as people living in the

¹⁹ It is interesting to note that due to his facial features, throughout his acting career he was typecast as a villain. Suchao plays villains in most of his films and television series. Even though Suchao does not play a villain in this film, choosing a Buddhist actor with a "villainous look" to play a Muslim character suggests how the social code of Muslimness is constructed for the Buddhist Thai gaze.

same country but these Muslims are depicted as “the others within”, Malay-speaking Muslims who need to be educated and learn how to be civilised or *siwilai* (Thongchai, 2000b). However, sometimes they are helpless, as in the case of Huyan’s education.



Figure 5: Huyan and his brother, Dunya, and sister, Akreya living in a shanty house

Figure 6: Huyan, wearing torn t-shirt and his father in a teashop

Therefore, in some sense, the *Muslimness* of the characters remains only at the surface level. Their looks, outfits, rituals and religious references are employed to portray characters as fixed social codes while the substance of being “Muslim” is divorced from them. In the case of *Peesuea Lae Dokmai*, Huyan and his father are portrayed as Muslims who respect the formal Thai education system and appear to accept the ideology of “Thainess”. However, what goes unmentioned are other Islamic educational institutions such as *Por Noh* that have prevailed in the region as centres of community and historically, as the centre of Islamic education in the Malay world (see also in Chapter One). It should be noted that these characters perform Muslim observance such as praying in a mosque with the shot showing Arabic characters, but their piety for Islam does not appear to be a principle employed in their

life. On the contrary, Islamic visual references coupled with poverty and backwardness are employed here as objects *to be looked at* when representing Muslims as inferior others.

Interestingly enough, what is emphasised, instead, is the virtue or “*kwam dee ngam*” of life which is propagated by the Thai education system. This also suggests that while *Muslimness* is highly emphasised by the visual depiction of the characters, these characters embody “Thainess” in their outlook. Since *Pheesuea Lae Dokmai* is hailed as one of the best one hundred books that Thai teenagers should read (Reading Thailand, 2012), these Muslim characters might be an example of good Muslims (good “others within”) which will be one of the criteria in judging the degree of their “Thainess”. At this point, the findings show that visibility of Thai Muslims in Thai cinema is imbued with a sense of poverty and backwardness compared to Thai characters who are more civilized. In the light of this visual representational practice, visibility of Thai Muslims becomes a visual discourse which allows certain social codes to be reproduced and foreclose other possibilities in depicting Thai Muslims and I shall call these visual stereotypes *visuality of Muslimness* hereafter.

While *Pheesuea Lae Dokmai* has Muslim central characters, *Pulakong* (dir. Somchai Samipak, released in 1989) has non-Muslim leading characters but they are surrounded by Muslims. *Pulakong* is the story of a young man (Khem, played by Ampon Lampoon; *see figure 7*) and a woman (Nu Tun, played by Katanyoo Prajammuamg; *see figure 7*), both newly graduated, urban middle class Thais from Bangkok who embrace the notion of an ideal life in improving the quality of life of the “locals” in a village called Pulakong. Similar to *Pheesuea Lae Dokmai*, *Pulakong* depicts Thai government officials e.g. teachers and police officers, as Buddhist Thais who come to a rural Muslim-populated area to “develop” and “integrate” them into “Thainess”.

Pulakong is located in Yaring district in Yala province (one of the three southern border provinces of Thailand) where 90 percent of the population is Muslim. (The novel is based on a true story from around 1976.) In the film, overall Muslim supporting characters have dark

complexions and Islamic visual references e.g. headscarves, skullcaps and sarongs prevail in the film in order to differentiate between Buddhists and Muslims. For example, Munoh (played by Piyada Penjinda, a Buddhist Thai actress; see *figure 8*), a young, educated Muslim, is a fellow teacher of Nu Tun (a leading female character).



Figure 7: Nu Toon (left) in denim shirt and blue jeans and Kem (right) in a police uniform



Figure 8: Munoh in modest dress

Even though Munoh is visually represented as a “more modern” Muslim (she is a teacher and educated), she is still portrayed as demure, polite, docile and naïve. In the film, she always wears a *hijab* while wearing a blouse and skirt at work. This is in contrast to the Buddhist Thai leading role, Nu Tun, newly graduated from a prestigious university in Bangkok, who has fairer skin and always wears modern dress and blue jeans. Nu Tun is portrayed as an outsider from Bangkok who has a passion for improving the quality of Muslim life through education. She is also the protector of Munoh who, at the end of the film, becomes a widow

after accidentally getting pregnant by Nu Tun's friend who was non-Muslim and was later shot dead. Likewise, Khem, who mostly wears a police uniform, would like to save good people from bad people by getting rid of Muslim bandits in the forest. This suggests that there are both "good" and "bad" Muslims and that it is the responsibility of the Thai authorities to save the "good Muslims" from the bad ones.

However, there are two kinds of villainous Muslims in *Pulakong* – ones that need to be suppressed such as Sulaiman, a bandit leader, and Karim who is a *jone klap jai* - a bandit-turned-good person - who had been misled before changing his mind. Karim is played by Kamel Salwala (see figure 9), an actor of Afghan descent. The *jone* (bandit) characters have beards and darker complexions except for Karim who comes from an affluent background and went to university in Bangkok. He has the look associated with the *khaek khao* (*khaek* = Muslims, *khao* = white) appearance, a term in Thai widely used to describe Muslims from Arabic and Persian backgrounds who are mostly affluent. Despite differences in skin complexions, what the two Muslim bandits characters share are "beards."



Figure 9: Karim

Thus far, beards, moustaches, skull caps and the *hijab*, *sarong* and dark complexions are used as stereotypical markers of Muslim characters. This *Muslimness* is not only conflated with poverty and backwardness, but in *Pulakong* it can also be tied to a Muslim villain. *Visuality of Muslimness* become clearer, especially when they are juxtaposed with Buddhist

characters that are visually depicted in uniform and modern dress. It should be noted that, while Western representations of Islamic visual references e.g. skullcaps, the hijab and beards as a threat to the West (Amin-Khan, 2012; Morey and Yaqin, 2011), *Muslimness* visual codes are not necessarily *a threat* to the Thai state as long as they are “good Muslims”.

These themes also recur as *visuality of Muslimness* in the two more recent films, *OK Betong* (dir. Nonzee Nimibutr, 2003) and *Talumphuk* (dir. Piti Jarupatara, 2002). Prior to the analysis, it should be noted that these two films were released soon after the events of 9/11 in 2001. As noted in chapter 2, this event tainted the representation of Islam in the media. Said (1978) argues that, from the Gulf war to 9/11, the *latent orientalism* which is, “an almost unconscious (and certainly an untouchable) positivity” (p.206) has been a discourse in media coverage about Islam. Said gives an example of the “latent inferiority” (p.209) of Islam among Islam experts in the late nineteenth century that has been translated into a portrayal of Islam in the news media of the late 20th century which equates Islam with terrorism (Said, 1981). In the context of Thailand, this is coupled with the proliferation of separatist attacks in the three southern border provinces of the country that has led to the so-called new height of violence in the “Deep South” in 2004. Therefore, these events must be taken into account when analysing Muslim representation after this period.

OK Betong is the story of a man (Tham, his name also connotes “dharma” in Buddhism, played by Puwarit Poompuang; *see figure 10*) who has to renounce the Buddhist monkhood in order to take care of his sister’s daughter, Mariah whose father is a Malaysian Muslim. Tham’s sister has been killed by a terrorist bomb blast in a train in the south of Thailand, so Tham takes responsibility for raising his niece in Betong (populated mostly by Muslims but also Chinese and Buddhist Thais), the southernmost district of Thailand and sharing a border with Malaysia. In this film, Buddhism is thus juxtaposed with Islam. Tham has many things to explore after being a monk for almost all of his life, one thing being that he learns from living in Betong is to love (to hold on to something) and to be deprived of someone he loves. He falls in

love with Lin (played by Jirawan Monojam; *see figure 11*), a Sino-Thai neighbour, but Lin has a Muslim boyfriend called Faruk (played by Atthaporn Teemakorn, a Buddhist Thai actor; *see figure 10*). While Tham has fairer skin with a clean-cut look, and wears t-shirt and trousers, in stark contrast, Faruq has darker skin with a moustache and beard and always wears *thobe* and skullcap, his character being also harsh and unsmiling. Faruq is also alleged to have been involved in the bomb blast on the train which took the life of Tham's sister.



Figure 10: Tham



Figure 11: Faruq



Figure 12: Lin

In real life, the actor, Atthaporn, who plays Faruq is not a Muslim; however, like other Muslim characters played by Buddhist Thais, his “visual” facial features and skin appear to be Muslim, suggesting social codes of *Muslimsness* that govern the production of the film. However, in the film, some Muslim characters have a lighter complexion with a sharper nose and bigger eyes, Mariah and her Malaysian father (Kasem) being examples. It is also interesting to note that Kasem, who is a Malaysian from an affluent background, like Karim in *Pulakong*, has a *khaek khao* look with a beard. In this case, different complexions might suggest *khaek* from different economic backgrounds as well.

Unlike the previous three movies, the location of *Talumphuk* is not in the three southern border provinces. However, the visual representation of Muslims in the film appears to be shared by a Muslim-populated area. *Talumphuk* (dir. Piti Jarupatara, released in 2002) is the story of a big storm that hit the coastal village of Talumphuk in the upper south of Thailand in 1962. Sakinah, a leading female character, (played by Sasithorn Panichchanok, *see figure 14*) is a Muslim girl who is in love with Phrao (played by Thaan Thanakorn, *see figure 13*) a Buddhist Thai. However, Sakinah’s father wants her to marry a Muslim, Soleh (played by MR Mongkolchay Yukol – MR is a title for Thai royalties, *see figure 15*) who is portrayed as a villain in the film. Kulasatree (played by Promporn Yuwawes; *see figure 16*), a Buddhist Thai nurse sent to Talumphuk, is another character who plays an important role especially in intervening

in Soleh and Sakina's arranged marriage. The story line of a "love triangle" also leads to human tragedy coupled with natural disaster.



Figure 13: Prao

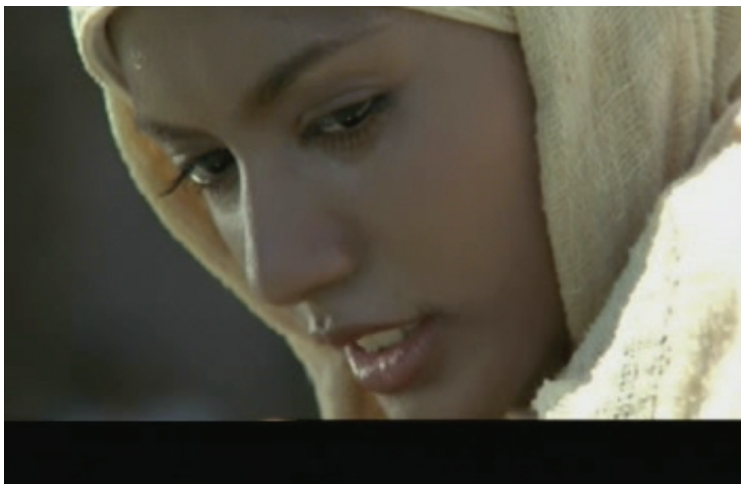


Figure 14: Sakina



Figure 15: Soleh



Figure 16: Kulasatree

Like previous films, the *visuality of Muslimness* is prevalent throughout. Sakinah (in real life, the actress who plays this role is a Muslim from Bangkok) has dark skin and big eyes, and wears a *hijab* and *sarong*, while Soleh has a fair complexion with a beard and an aggressive personality. In contrast to the Muslim characters, Phrao, a Buddhist Thai villager, has a fair complexion and is clean cut. Sakina and Phrao are both from fisherman families, while Soleh's father is an *imam* (a worship leader in a mosque) who is well respected by the villagers. These characters are portrayed as *chao ban-nok* (trans. rural dwellers), whether Muslims or Buddhists, in a far-flung "close to nature" fisherman village. Conversely, Kulasatree,

with a Chinese look, comes from a more modernised place and wears either dresses or a nurse uniform while interacting with the locals. Like the visual representation of Muslim characters in the previous movies, these visual codes of *Muslimness* prevail, however, it is interesting to note two things: firstly, it is rare to have a Muslim actor who performs as leading Muslim characters in the Thai films analysed above; secondly, Soleh the Muslim villain in *Talumphuk*, is played by a member of the Thai royalty²⁰ and visual codes of this case are beards, skullcap and *sarong*. Therefore, these observations lead to two important questions: how can *Muslimness* be represented visually in films when being Muslim in Thai films is *a matter of religion* rather than *race* (e.g. Malays)? And is it possible then that Muslims (regardless of their ethnic backgrounds are) are *racialised* and, thus, *othered* in visual representations?

The *Visuality of Muslimness* spelled out in the analyses above appears to illuminate the capacity of visual representation in constructing a Thai Muslim identity. While Muslims in Thailand are diverse in their complexions and facial features, the above analysis suggests that in Thai films, the *visuality of Muslimsness* is limited to darker skin, sharp noses, big eyes and beards. Furthermore, these *khaek* characters are portrayed with poverty and backwardness. This visual representation echoes the anthropological research of White and Chavivun (1983) which details negative connotations of the category *khaek* as being “associated with various kinds of undesirable characteristics, including aspects of appearance (dark skin, oily or dirty hair, overdressed) religion (very religious, and avoidance of pork and dogs) and behaviour (ethnocentric, unfriendly, selfish, lazy, untrustworthy, poor, and lusty [among males])” (p.13). This thus can be suggested that these pre-existing *social codes* of *khaek* are thus *translated* into *representational codes* in these films.

Conflating Thai Muslim characters with *khaek* stereotypes in the mainstream cinema in order to bring about “the impression of reality” (Metz, 1974), this discursive visual practice

²⁰ In real life, he holds a royal title *mom rajawong*. This title holder is a more distant royal progeny and are considered commoners. However, this title suggests that their ancestry can be traced back to a king.

attempts to reduce Thai Muslims (who are actually diverse) into a single *racial* group, namely *khaek*. As a result, this visibility constructs “a system of truth” (Said, 1978, p.204) about Muslims in the Thai nation state that hinges on the notion of race: Thai Muslims are darker than Buddhist Thais from Bangkok and are thus inferior. These taken-for-granted visual codes of Muslims shed light on a naturalisation process that functions to fix these stereotypes as Hall (1997) argues “[N]aturalization is a representational strategy designed to fix ‘difference’, and thus *secure it forever*. It is an attempt to halt the inevitable ‘slide’ of meaning, to secure discursive or ideological ‘closure’” (p.245). Consequently, at an ideological level, the ‘difference’ of Thai Muslims is organised into coherence so that an audience can make sense of *khaek* characters and these tropes can be reproduced over and over again. This naturalization process functions to foreclose other possible meanings of being Thai Muslims.

The visibility of Muslims in the films, in front of a Thai audience also underpins the notion of “Muslim others” as a visual object: their differences and “to-be-looked-at-ness” are constructed to be gazed at by “Thai visual subjects”. Their “backwardness” suggests that Muslims need to be civilised by “us” (but they never achieve it) as in the case of *Pheesuea Lae Dokmai*, *Pulakong* and *Talumphuk*. This also resonates with Thongchai’s notions of “the others within” (2000a) and “*siwilai*” (2000b) where stereotypes of Muslim minorities are produced and reproduced by Bangkok elites (in this case authors, directors, cinematographers, film companies which are concentrated in Bangkok) to maintain the dominance of the centre of “Thainess” and a social hierarchy it entails. This notion will be spelled out further in the next section that examines scenes from these films which portray an encounter between Buddhists and Muslims.

Encountering the Muslim Other: Thais have a responsibility to “save” good and docile Muslims from “bad Muslims”

A further aspect of the representation of Muslims is highlighted by examining particular scenes that involve encounters between Buddhist Thais and Muslims in various respects, since these scenes attempt to shed light on how the films *Pheesuea Lae Dokmai*, *Pulakong*, *OK Betong* and *Talumphuk* use cinematography and *mise-en-scène* to narrate the position of Buddhist Thais and Muslims. The results show that Muslims are portrayed as either naïve, poor and uneducated or violent, and are sometimes victims of “bad deeds” and “bad Muslims”, while Buddhist Thais, usually government officials, have a responsibility to educate, civilise and save “good Muslims” from “bad Muslims”. This thus suggests a hierarchical relationship between Muslims and Buddhists in the films.

The interaction between a Thai teacher and Muslim students can be seen at the beginning of the film *Pheesuea Lae Dokmai*. The scene starts with a close-up of a map showing the south of Thailand sharing borders with Malaysia and voiced over by a student reading aloud about neighbouring countries to Thailand. This sequence suggests that the location of the story is part of the Thai state. After the teacher (played by Buddhist Thai actress, Duangjai Hataigan²¹) says that pictures of flowers on the wall are from colder regions such as Europe or North America, Mimpee raises her hand and says that she has been to Malaysia whereupon the teacher pauses and says that some good students can even get a scholarship to study abroad (*pai rian to mueang nok*). Then, as the camera pans from the teacher to Huyan, the audience can see his humble, and perhaps, sad face (because he knew he would have to leave school).

This scene is tellingly suggesting how the film situates Thailand and neighbouring countries as against Europe or the U.S. when the teacher mentions studying abroad. In this

²¹ Even though it does not mention in the film where the teacher comes from, the way she speaks suggests that she is a central Thai. Normally, when people from the south of Thailand speak central Thai dialect, they are seen as still having the sound of Southerners. *Tong dang* is a pejorative term used to describe an accent people from the south have when they speak standard central Thai. By having a character with a Bangkok dialect as a “good” teacher in a Thai educational institution, this can be suggested that Bangkok culture embodies “Thainess”.

sense, this suggests that by education a smart student can go to a more *civilised* place. While a foreign country or *mueang nok* for Mimpee is Malaysia, for the teacher it is further and more civilised such as the West. While the teacher is showing the Muslim what a civilised place is, this opening scene to the movie echoes an argument about Thailand's quest for modernity in that it is a desire for the West (Harrison, 2014). This suggests that it is a central Buddhist Thai who know what *siwilai* (trans. civilisation) is. However, when compared to the later scene when Huyan, after being involved in illegal rice trading (*see figure 17*), is proud to see his brother and sister going to school, his teacher, noticing his new clothes, is disappointed with his involvement in a "bad deed". It is interesting to note that in these scenes, Huyan is not wearing worn out and torn clothes anymore, he is wearing jeans and a jacket, which can connote "Western-ness". However, it is his teacher who has to tell Huyan that doing illegal rice trade is wrong.



Figure 17: Huyan in blue jeans jacket. In this shot, the teacher is showing her disappointment in Huyan's involvement in Thai-Malaysian rice smuggling

The encounter between Buddhists and Muslims suggests a hierarchical relationship between the two. In another scene, starting with a close-up shot of Huyan preparing fish for cooking, the camera then pans to his younger sister, Akreya, who is reading a school text book out loud. Huyan's neighbour comes to his house with her two children in anger because Huyan's younger brother, Dunya, has been bullying her child. She says that she would not lend rice to his family anymore, which suggests a hierarchical relationship between Huyan and the Buddhist family.

Besides encounters between Buddhist Thais and Muslims, *Pheesuea Lae Dokmai* includes shots showing the interaction between Muslims and “Buddhist space”. A Thai temple is included in several shots, sometimes appearing in the background while Muslims are in the foreground. This kind of visual convention is spelled out in a scene showing a long shot of Huyan’s house. It begins with a long shot of a temple and then the camera pans left and lowers down to his shanty house. When the camera stops, the house becomes the foreground with mountains, trees and the top of a mosque dome as the background (*see figure 18-19*). Thus, the temple appears to be a visual reference suggesting Muslims living in a Buddhist Thai territory. This type of shot with a Buddhist temple in the background also appears in earlier scenes. In a scene showing Huyan and his father having a conversation at a train station, the scene ends with a long shot of the two parting from each other off camera and the still shot (about five seconds) shows a temple gate right across the railway (*see figure 20*). Another example is a scene showing a Muslim crowd walking (however, the sound of *azan*, an Islamic call for *salat* or prayer, suggests that they are going to a mosque), with a Buddhist temple as the background (*see figure 21*). This visual convention could suggest that Muslims are *included* in the Buddhist space, but with the visual *Muslimness* noted above, Muslims are still “others within” and are lower on the hierarchical ladder.





Figure 18-19: showing a temple that is the beginning of a shot before the camera pans to Huyan's shanty house with a mosque and mountain as the background.



Figure 20-21: shots with a Buddhist temple as the background

At times, in *Pheesuea Lae Dokmai* Muslims are portrayed as hopeless and, thus always needing to rely on Thai institutions such as schools. After the previous scene, Huyan's father returns home and says that he does not have enough money because there was no more work for him as a day labourer and says he will borrow money from wherever he can. Huyan replies that he would like his brother and sister to go to school. The scene ends with a close-up of the father's face and the natural sound of Muslim prayer from a mosque. This suggests the sound from the mosque, which in previous scenes was shown in a long shot among natural

surroundings such as trees and mountains, is made obscure and far away while the audience (in the same way as formal education) is intentionally directed to the temple. A close-up shot of the father's face in high contrast lighting showing darkness is followed by a reaction shot of Huyan (looking at his father) whose face is brightened up by light. This audio-visual technique suggests that what the father is pondering is related to Islam. However, this does not help him and his family out of the hardship as the dim light on his face suggests. As noted earlier, Islamic visual references, and in this case, also audio references such as *azan*, are an important element of the audio-visual representation of Muslims. However, Islamic principles themselves appear "divorced" from these characters.

This encounter between the teacher (as a symbol of Thai education) and a Muslim boy has raised the question of the role of Islam in the life of Muslim characters in this film. Besides their appearance as Muslim, the voice of a prayer, their *hijab*, *sarongs* and skullcaps and their names, Islamic principles appear unnecessary for their worldly life. On the contrary, the school and the teacher play the role of "polishing up" the Muslims. Even Huyan's father seems to accept Thai education saying "it is the responsibility of a grown-up to have, while you, as a kid, do well in class" when Huyan asks him from whom he will borrow money.

Similar to the Buddhist Thai teacher-Muslim student relationship in *Pheesuea Lae Dokmai*, the relationship between Thai government officials and local Muslims in the region in *Pulakong* also sheds light on the patronising nature of the Thai state. It suggests that Thais (or "Thainess") help "develop" backward Muslims and also save "good Muslims" from "bad Muslims". In *Pulakong*, the film deals with the tension between ideals (*udomkhati*) and the money of the Bangkok middle class. Both Khem and Nu Tun went to Pulakong because of a belief in their capacity to make a better life for people instead of working for money in Bangkok. Khem, as a policeman, wants to get rid of bad people (bandits) in the area while Nu Tun wants to improve people's lives in terms of education and health. Pulakong is, thus, their destination; it is the place of their desire.

At the beginning of the film, the audience is directed to a scene of fighting between policemen (led by Khem) and bandits in a forest in Pulakong, establishing Pulakong as a dangerous place. The first scene of Nu Tun's encountering a Muslim local begins with a long shot of a house at dawn (it is dark) with the natural sounds of birds and music. The audience is then led to the interior with a pan shot from a storm lantern to a mirror showing *Nu Tun* combing her hair while somebody appears in the mirror. By looking at the person's facial expression, she is somewhat scared but she then finds out that it is Kodyoh, the daughter of the principal of the school and owner of the house. The visual depiction of this first encounter suggests Nu Tun's awareness of danger. Kodyoh sits next to Nu Tun and admires her as a smart person who is going to improve people's lives, then Nu Tun replies that "anybody can be smart if studying a lot".

The beginning of the scene clearly suggests an ambivalence toward Muslim Others. Similar to Khem, Nu Tun is actually aware of the "danger" of this place but at the same time it is her desire to "improve" the lives of Muslims living there. In *Pulakong*, *pa* (forest) and *thammachat* (nature) are employed as visual representations of a dangerous space (as much as the danger of Muslims) and thus this place and people need to be "tamed", either by force or by education, and the two protagonists epitomise Buddhist Thais who take on that role.

The depiction of a "modern" Buddhist Thai character as a person who modernises and "tames" a Muslim natural space is evident in Pulakong. In some scenes, Nu Tun, who is visually depicted in "modern dress" such as blue jeans, is placed with Muslim characters who wear *hijabs*, skullcaps and *sarongs*. In these scenes, Nu Tun is shown trying to work with local Muslims to build a school for Pulakong locals which suggests a recurring visual theme showing Buddhist Thais developing Muslim Others (*see figure 21-23*). This suggests that this visual discourse conflates Muslims in the southernmost region with "nature": compared to educated and "cultured" Bangkok Buddhist Thais, the Muslims are less knowledgeable and thus, less civilised.



Figure 21-23: shots showing Nu Tun helping Muslims to develop Pulakong

The visual narrative of a Buddhist Thai saving good Muslims from bad Muslims can be found in *Pulakong*. However, in this film, “bad Muslims” are portrayed as bandits hiding in the jungle. A long shot of Nu Tun and Kodiyoh shows them walking in a place covered with trees and, suddenly, a boy (Nafi, wearing a *sarong* and skullcap) calls her and tells her that someone is dying. They go to the scene and find Karim, the ex-bandit of the Sulaiman gang, in the forest sitting and leaning against a big tree because he has been shot (*see figure 24*). Karim speaks in Malay from the beginning while the boy translates for Nu Tun. The boy seems to be willing to help Karim at first, but Nu Tun tells him that she will inform the headman of the village. Suddenly, Karim speaks Thai instead and this makes Nu Tun come back to Karim and clandestinely help him.

Nu Tun later finds out that Karim attended the same university as she did, but later joined Sulaiman’s militant group in the forest near Pulakong. However, he was shot because he decided to leave the bandit group. It is interesting to note that even though the majority of Pulakong inhabitants speak Malayu, most of the time the Muslim characters speak Thai. That Karim switches from speaking Malayu to Thai in the scene also suggests that, from the point of view of Nu Tun, Thai language is a sign of being Thai, or “us”, and thus Karim deserves help. Karim himself is portrayed as an example of a person who now knows better, turning back from doing bad things (*jone klap jai*). This reinforces the idea of the bifurcation between “good” and “bad” Muslims and that “*jone klap jai*” can be redeemed. However, again, the person who has “saved” this Muslim is Nu Tun who is a Buddhist Thai official.



Figure 24: Nu Tun, along with Nafi and Kodihoh, help Karim who is injured trying to escape from Sulaiman's armed gang.

Like the films analysed above, *Taloompuk* illustrates an interplay between the dichotomy of culture vs. nature; modernised and educated Buddhist government officials and “pure” and “traditional” “close-to-nature” Muslims. The first encounter between Kulasatree (a nurse who is moving to the area) and the rural town is in a pickup truck that is carrying her and other passengers through green and natural areas. Her shot in the pickup truck, sitting next to several Muslims, is then switched to a sequence of a long shot of boys wearing skullcaps and playing in the green fields, and then a close up shot of a dragonfly on the top a green leaf. In the truck, Sakinah who is wearing a *hijab* and sitting and knitting on the opposite side, then grasps a leaf from outside, making it into a whistle (*see figure 25-26*). This sequence ends with the camera elevating to a bird's eye view showing Kulasatree wearing a 1970s dress and sunglasses standing among the Muslim locals, who are darker, wearing *sarongs* and *hijabs* along with the sound of foreign music. Through her point of view, it is suggested to the audience that they are viewing a Muslim village and that Kulasatree is very different from this place. Shots of nature (*thammachat*) are emphasised, suggesting her moving from *muang* (city) to *pa* (forest).



Figure 25: Kulasatree's (left) first encounter with Sakina (right); in this shot, Sakina is knitting



Figure 26: the same scene, Sakina is making a whistle from a tree leaf

Another similar scene is to be found when Kulasatree visits a village with a *kamnan* (headman) and the way she dresses (floral patterned blouse and a skirt) distinguishes her from the Muslim villagers who are wearing *sarongs*, skullcaps and *hijabs* (see figure 27). After that, she explores the town further and stops at a Chinese monastery where she does Chinese fortune sticks.²² While she and Sa (her Muslim assistant) are reading the horoscope on the paper, an old Chinese man tells Kulasatree that there is going to be a natural disaster. This shot of Kulasatree, Sa and the old and young Chinese males with visual cues such as Chinese script, a *hijab*, and Kulasatree in modern dress, suggest a diversity of ethnic groups in the village which will shape the proceeding narrative (see figure 28).

²² A Chinese fortune telling practice usually conducted in a monastery. A person chooses one stick from a bucket full of bamboo-made flat sticks and that chosen stick will determine the oracle outcome.

Interestingly, after Kulasatree and Sa leave, the background score with sound effects that connote Chinese-ness begins with a close up shot of a Chinese deity in the monastery. It then dissolves to a shot of a crescent moon and star at the top of a tower, suggesting Islam. This shot then tilts down to show a Muslim man beating a drum as a signal for gathering for a ritual. The shot further tilts down to the ground showing a crowd of men wearing *sarongs* and skullcaps and women wearing full, mostly white, *hijabs*. The prayer voice begins and we see a close-up shot of Kulasatree's smiling face. It is interesting to note that this kind of multicultural visual discourse, which includes visual references to Chinese-ness, does not exist in films made in earlier periods - namely *Pheesuea Lae Dokmai* and *Pulakong*.



Figure 27: Kulasatree in Talumpuk village



Figure 28: Kulasatree and Sa in front of the Chinese monastery

As with government officials in previous films, Kulasatree plays the role of a Buddhist who is trying to save “good Muslims” from “bad Muslims”. In a local government clinic, Kulasatree tries to convince Sakina’s father that this is solely the business of the two teens who should be able to decide for themselves their romantic relationship. However, the father angrily replies that she should not use her personal opinion to judge Muslims such as them (see figure 29). This suggests the role of the modern urban female is one of saving local female Muslims from the male-dominated society which is enforcing “irrational” judgements. From her “liberal” point of view, Sakina’s father is nonsensical. As opposed to Lin, the Sino-Thai character in *OK Betong*, Sakina as a Muslim does not have the choice to decide her relationships. For Lin, her pursuit for love is something that she can choose to do and to convert to Islam is her own decision. This may suggest that from the point of view of films (produced and directed by Buddhist Thais), Buddhist Thais and Sino-Thais are more “modern,” in the sense of being able to adjust to modern life and to such ideologies like liberalism instead of adhering to a strict rule of a religion. And again, these visual representations and narratives help confirm the stereotype of “strict Muslims”.



Figure 29: Kulasatree tries to save Sakina from an arranged marriage

Unlike the previous three films, where Buddhist-Muslim interactions mostly take place between Buddhist officials and local Muslims, the encounter between Buddhists and Muslims in *OK Betong* is among the locals themselves. However, Islam is still portrayed as inferior to Buddhism. The scene starting with Lin finding out in the newspaper that her boyfriend, Faruq, may be involved in the bombing of the train that killed Tham's sister, is so telling.

After learning about Faruq's involvement in the bombing, Lin cries and rushes to Faruq's enclave to find out the truth, accompanied by Tham. The enclave is a cave where Lin finally meets Faruq and argues with him about his wrongdoing. However, Faruq denies the accusation, and Tham also cries when he finds out that Faruq was involved in the death of his sister. This is followed by a cutaway to a sub-scene depicting Tham in jail surrounded by people and reporting to a policeman about Faruq who deprived him of the two important persons whom he loves - his sister and Lin. The policeman asks Tham how he knows that these persons really belong to him. There follows a shot of Lin putting her hand on Tham's shoulder and then of Faruq staring at the camera. A mid shot of Tham deep in thought appears again before another long shot of a golden Buddha statue.

This series of shots is combined as a montage to allude to the fact that Tham encounters Buddhist teachings about the principles of suffering caused by holding on to something. On the contrary, the following scene is of a conversation between Faruq and Tham

about his being blamed as the person who killed Tham's sister, Faruq denying the accusation saying that that is not the method of his movement. The conversation ends with Faruq saying "May Allah bless you". This sequence suggests that Muslims make Tham understand *dharma* more than before. However, while Buddhist teachings recur throughout the film, Islam is limited to the visual representations (stereotypes) of dress and skin and just the phrase "May Allah bless you." Similar to previous films, Islamic principles are not included, and furthermore, Lin is depicted as a person who can do anything for her love which also suggests that she converted to Islam because of Faruq. By presenting Islam in this light, religion is set on the margins of "Thainess" and the Thai nation.

The encounters between Buddhist Thais and Muslims in these films suggest an imbalanced relationship between Thais and Muslims in real life. Through these "inter-racial" visual codes, stereotypes of Thai Muslims are normalised. These recurring themes of the visual representation of *Muslimness* depicting Muslims as *inferior Others* in turn helps reinforce the construction of Thai visual subjects. However, the results above also suggest that the control of the Other is not total, in that Muslim and Malay Muslim stereotypes are not fixed.

Findings in the last two films, which were produced after the year 2000, suggest that besides the multiculturalism noted above, that *closeness* between Buddhists and Muslims became "new" visual codes in films representing Muslims. While *Pheesuea Lae Dok Mai* and *Pulakong* portray Buddhists (usually government officials) as people to come to Malay Muslim regions to *develop* and *civilise* Muslims, in *Talumphuk* and *OK Betong*, Muslims are also depicted as friends (equal relationship), lovers, and people who can be part of a family. In *Pulakong*, the *visible closeness* and physical intimacy (e.g. leaning on each other) between Phrao and Sakina are emphasised in order to show that they are in love (see figure 30). There is also a scene of Soleh's and Phrao's fathers discussing Phrao's involvement in the arranged marriage between Sakina and Soleh (see figure 31) which suggests a friendship between the two. In *Ok Betong*, because of love, Lin eventually converts to Islam in order to get married to

Faruq (*see figure 32*). On the other hand, Faruq eventually decides to turn himself in to the police after being asked to do so by Lin (*see figure 33*). Even though the two are not portrayed as being physically close to each other, this suggests that both have given up something because of love. Another example of *visible closeness* is in the scene showing Lin, before converting to Islam, trying to blend into the Muslim community (*see figure 34*) and Mariah is hugging Tham when Tham comes to visit her in Malaysia (*see figure 35*).



Figure 30: Phrao and Sakina



figure 31: Soleh's father and Phrao's father



figure 32: Lin after converting to Islam



Figure 33: Faruq is turning himself in to the police



figure 34: Lin is greeting her Muslim friend



Figure 35: Tham and Mariah

This illustrates in visual representation a scene when Buddhists and Muslims are together. It echoes Bhabha's notion of "the productive ambivalence of the object" (Bhabha 1983; p.96) which prevails in colonial discourse. Bhabha (1983) argues that this ambivalence towards the Other consists of the desire for the Other; "the economy of pleasure and desire" (p.96) and the control of the Other; and "the economy discourse, domination and power" (p.96). In these films, the *visuality of Muslimness* is ambivalent: Muslims are an object of desire (as in the case of Lin in *OK Betong* who has desire for Faruq, and Phrao in *Talumphuk* who is in love with Sakina) and they can also be a threat to Buddhist Thais and to the Thai state (e.g. Karim who used to be a bandit in *Pulakong* and Soleh in *Talumphuk*).

Looking afresh at Muslim stereotypes in Thai cinema

Muslims, whether they are from the three southern provinces or not, are of course diverse, yet despite this, visual discourses in these films attempt to *fix* what Muslims in Thailand look like. Even though *Muslim* is not a race and "Thainess" has long been employed to create national unity where all citizens are supposed to be Thai regardless of their religious and ethnic backgrounds (Connors, 2003), it is apparent that Muslim characters in these films are *racialised*, as a racial category. This racial category relies on the visual stereotypical "*khaek*-look" that marks the difference between Muslims and Buddhist Thais. I call visual discourses of

Muslim minorities in Thailand the *visuality of Muslimness*.²³ The *visuality of Muslimness* includes the particular characteristics of facial features and complexion and clothes (e.g. big eyes, sharper noses, darker skin, *sarong*, headscarves and skullcaps). It should be noted that besides their Malay and Arabic names, Malay-speaking Muslim characters hardly speak Malay in these films, even though Malay is still widely spoken in the region. As a result, this implies that in order to create a “reality effect” in films, the visual cues of *khaek* and the non-Thai names play their roles in making audiences believe that these characters are “real” Muslims (even though most of these actors/actresses are not Muslim) while Malay language use among these characters is downplayed.

Furthermore, the results also suggest that Muslims in these films are conflated with being “*chao ban-nok*” (trans. rural dwellers) which connotes “*khwaam la lang*” (trans. backwardness). The poverty of Muslims doing menial jobs, such as a day labourer, a street vendor, a farmer and a fisherman, is emphasized in these films. They are living in a far-flung rural area such as a fisherman’s village, the forest or even in caves. Along with *khaek* visual conventions, these films place Muslims as the “others within” (Thongchai, 2000a): Muslims are thus portrayed as others who live in Thailand *yet* in a different temporal and spatial space. This argument is supported by the recurring pattern in these films where “more modern” Thais go to rural Muslim areas to help “less developed” Muslims to solve problems. There are also two types of Muslims: “bad” and “good”. Therefore, Thais (especially Thai civil servants) have a responsibility to *civilise* and also *save* “good” Muslims from “bad” Muslims. What then is at stake when the *visuality of Muslimness* in Thai cinema attempts to *normalise* Thai Muslims as *inferior “others within”*?

²³ I use the term “visuality” to refer to the social practice of seeing. While vision refers to a physical ability to see, *visuality* is socially constructed, resulting in a subject formation, and is intertwined with power. Studying *visuality* in this research thus covers more than just visuals or pictures themselves since *visuality* governs what to see and how to see things around us. Visual theorists employ the terms e.g. “visual event (Mirzoeff, 1999)” “scopic regime (Metz, 1975)” “scopic regime of modernity (Jay, 1988)” to suggest “the modern tendency to picture or visualize existence (Mirzoeff, 1999)” where *seeing* is equivalent to *knowledge*. *Visuality* is thus a pertinent question of visual representation of Thai Muslims and power relations within the Thai state.

At the social level, the *visuality of Muslimness* paves the way for interpreting “preferred meanings” (Fiske, 1987) of Thai Muslim characters in these films. While the image itself can potentially convey more than one meaning, it is the visual representational practice that functions to *privilege* a certain connotation of the Muslims. The prevailing visual themes of *inferior* Muslims (e.g. backward and poor rural dwellers who wear *hijabs* and *sarongs*) vis-à-vis *civilised* Buddhists in the findings above attest to this representational practice. However, the visual discourse *alone* is not sufficient to illuminate how this normalisation process works in this discursive visual space. With regard to the visual culture perspective (see also Chapter Two), the viewer and the viewed are mutually constitutive (Hall, 1999; Mirzoeff, 1999, 2002). Therefore, the *preferred meaning* of the Muslims relies on a relationship between the spectator and an object appearing on the movie screen. Hall (1999) points out while looking at the image, “[T]he viewer is understood as socially positioned, these positionings shaping the parameters within which interpretations are made” (p.310). In order to make images of Thai Muslims in these films signified as such, a subject position of the spectator has to be *recognised* by individuals (viewers) first in order to provide a “subjective capacity” (Hall, 1999, 310) to interpret signifiers on screen. This is where subjectivity and power come into play. In this light, power operates through a normalisation process of the visual subject. However, what then could possibly constitute *visual subjectivity* for a Thai cinema audience? I would argue that a construction of “Thainess” plays a significant role in forging a visual subject position. Historical aspects of “Thainess” thus deserve attention here.

Scholars (such as Loos 2010; Thongchai 1994; Thongchai 2000a; Thongchai 2000b among others) argue that the construction of “Thainess” or *kwam pen thai* in late 19th century and the early 20th hinged on an effort to be on an equal footing with Western colonisers. By doing so, the elites adopted Western knowledge (e.g. anthropology, geography and law) in an attempt to *reassert* power relations with other groups through notions such as “contested colonialism” (Loos, 2010), “the others within” (Thongchai, 2000a) and “*siwilai*” (Thongchai

2000b)” (see also Chapter One). It should be stressed here that the construction of this social configuration in the modern state was driven by an act of *seeing, observing* and *recording*. Moreover, along with the “modern” mode of seeing, the elites began to adopt an imaging technology, namely a camera and photography, to record and *construct* visual knowledge of *less civilised* or *uncivilised* groups of people in Siam (Power, 2015; Woodhouse, 2012). By doing so, the elites employed the use of visual technology as a tool to *redefine* the relationship between themselves and the “others within”, yet *always* inferior others, and *reinforce* their superiority. The recurring visual themes of *inferior* Muslims who are “saved” or “civilised” by Buddhist Thais found in the mainstream films in different periods of the late 20th century resonate well with the function of “Thainess”. Therefore, I would argue that “Thainess” which is embodied by *Bangkok Buddhist elite culture* has been *translated* into a popular visual form and practice such as cinema. In this discursive visual space, “Thainess” operates through a *normalisation* of subject position, which in turn enables “Thainess” *visual subjectivity* in the viewer. Due to the hierarchical nature of “Thainess”, the spectators (Buddhist majority) use their *subjective capacity* to make sense of the inferiority of Thai Muslims on screen and this process in turn reinforces the subjectivity of “Thainess”. Consequently, “Thainess” visual subjectivity coupled with *taken-for-granted* practices, such as a film production processes (e.g. choosing an actor to play a Muslim character) and the visual practices in everyday life (e.g. going to the cinema), can be argued to help normalise the superiority of *Buddhist Bangkok elite culture* and hence serve to legitimise the centralisation of power within Bangkok.

However, the *visuality of Muslimness* does not only operate at a social level. “Thainess” *visual subjectivity* which governs the relationship between the viewer and the viewed (signifiers of inferior Muslims) also operates at the *subconscious level*. Besides its function in evoking shared meanings, the gaze, Hall (1997) argues, also “engages feelings, attitudes and emotions, and it mobilizes fears and anxiety in the viewers” (p.226). As a result, in terms of subject’s unconscious desire, the gaze could also imply “the existence of a

particular structure of gaze, for seeing and for excitement, desire, voyeurism or fear in looking; visual culture always provides a physical and psychical place for individual spectators to inhabit" (Evans & Hall; 1999, p.4). With regards to psychical space and subjectivity, Kaplan (1997) asserts the role of psychoanalysis that "can best access interiority, understand the formation of subjectivity and address issues of textual identification" (p.xiv). What visual appeals, voyeurism and desire etc., does cinema offer when gazing at Muslim others? How does the normalisation process work in a psychic level of representation?

Strands of psychoanalytical concepts and their application to the analysis of subjectivity and the gaze in cinema are relevant to analysis here and can be engaged with the *visuality of Muslimness*. Applying Freud's *scopophilia* and Lacan's *Imaginary* to the analysis of visual pleasure in cinema (see also Chapter Two), Mulvey (1975) coins the term "male gaze project", arguing that with the suture techniques employed in narrative films, audiences in a dark auditorium momentarily lose themselves or are absorbed in the screen by identifying themselves with the male protagonist (this process of an imaginary identification is compared to a Lacanian baby who identifies itself with an image in the mirror to create an *ideal ego*). Furthermore, through this imaginary identification with the male protagonist, the audiences are also gazing at a female body in order to satisfy their *scopophilia*, an erotic pleasure in looking at others as *an object*. Paradoxically, while the female body connotes "*to-be-looked-at-ness*" (Mulvey, 1997, p.837), it also evokes the fear of castration. As a result, Mulvey (1997) argues, the pleasure of the gaze in cinema derives from an identification in the realm of *the Imaginary* and the gaze at the female object which occurs in "a patriarchal order" (p.834). This, Mulvey argues, results in *a patriarchal subject position* while watching narrative cinema (whether that audience is male or female) and it is paramount to a patriarchal society.

Taking Mulvey's argument as a point of departure to analyse the *latent* level of the gaze, the recurring patterns of emphasising socially constructed visual *Muslimness* (darker skin, *hijabs*, skullcaps and *sarongs*, backwardness and poverty) in these narrative films do not

only operate at a social level. I argue that, through a suture technique of feature films which enables an imaginary identification, the *visuality of Muslimness* may also potentially offer a *psychical place* for audiences and put them in the subject position of a “*Thainess*” gaze.

While following the storyline, audiences are absorbed by the screen and identify themselves with Buddhist Thai characters (as their *ideal ego*). Moreover, Thai Muslims, as a constructed *racial* category within “*Thainess*” symbolic order, are made an *object to-be-looked-at*. It is important to note that, from the findings above, the visual representation of Thai Muslim objects in these films apparently connotes *inferiority*. This therefore suggests that Muslim’s *inferiority* could be a source of *visual pleasure* and shape the structure of the gaze. How then does the visual pleasure which derives from the gaze at *their inferiority* function within a “*Thainess*” symbolic order?

By taking postcolonial Thai studies and visual culture literature (discussed above) as a starting point to interrogate “psychical place for individual spectators” (Evans & Hall, 1999, p.4), I argue that *modern visuality* and *visual subjectivity* play a crucial role in the construction of “*Thainess*” *Self vis-à-vis the Others*. However, being shaped by the colonial condition, “*Thainess*” *Self* which offers a psychical place for a film audience is caught in “a purgatory of in-betweens” (Loos, 2010, p.80). Loos (2010) argues that rather than being simply a *coloniser* like other Western counterparts, Siam was an in-between, both colonized (by Western knowledge) and a colonizer (of smaller kingdoms/chiefdoms, including *Patani*). As a result, psychologically speaking, “*Thainess*” *Self* (which connotes an attempt to be *civilised* and *superior*) can be argued to be entangled in an anxiety of being *not quite as civilised* (as the West). As a result, I argue that visual pleasure in watching the *inferiority* of Thai Muslims Others could derive from this anxiety, which lays a basis for “*Thainess*”.

Anxiety of “*Thainess*” *Self*, *not being quite civilised* (since still *inferior* to the West), results in an objectification of Thai Muslims as *inferior Others*. While constructing Muslims as a *racial category* and an *object to be looked at*, the disavowal of the lack in “*Thainess*” *Self* which

hinges on a notion of “*siwilai*” (yet *not civilised enough*) is anxiously projected to Muslim objects. Similar to Mulvey’s male gaze project, *voyeuristic pleasure* in the “Thainess” gaze project is achieved through the gaze at Thai Muslim’s signifiers which connote inferiority (e.g. *hijabs, sarong, darker skin, khaek* facial features and their backwardness and savagery). This unconscious structure of the gaze results in “*Thainess*” *subject position*. Again, this is where *pleasure* and *power/aesthetics* and *politics* intersect. While the “Thainess” gaze project functions to attract moviegoers to theatres to spend their leisure time in watching feature films, this psychical place also helps confirm “*Thainess*” *visual subject* and *Muslim object*. Like the signification process in the social level, this very subjectification process in terms of pleasure and desire functions as a tool to normalise “Thainess” subject position and hence an ideology of “Thainess”.

It is also important to note that the constructed racial category of *khaek* in these films is not portrayed in a monolithic way and also not fixed. The two most recent films, *OK Betong* and *Talumphuk*, portray ethnic groups in more diverse ways. There are interactions among Buddhist Thai, Sino-Thais and Muslims. Furthermore, romantic relationships between Buddhists and Muslims are emphasised more in these two films (between Prao and Sakina in *Talumphuk*, and Lin and Faruq in *OK Betong*), while, on the other hand, a relationship between Thai government officials and local Muslims prevails in Thai films in the previous period. While *Pheesuea Lae Dokmai* and *Pulakong* were made during the period of extensive government projects in *civilising* others, different ways of representing Muslims in the three southern border provinces may be the result of changing government policy towards multi-culturalism²⁴ where all ethnicities were supposed to be treated equality in a democratic society.

These changes in visual representation suggest that stereotypes of the other are employed as visual codes to *fix* Muslim minorities to maintain the “Thainess” ideology. A

²⁴ Thailand’s government policies are extensively based on ethno-nationalism. During the 1950s, these policies were extensively employed to assimilate ethnic minorities. However, in the 1980s, the Thai government began applying selective multi-culturalism to its policies but it has not yet replaced the assimilation ones.

process of producing stereotypes itself is especially pertinent to the findings above. A stereotype is the result of an interplay between an Imaginary, a lacking self and a plentitude, and the Symbolic, an attempt to produce signifiers to cover the lack. Applying this psychoanalytic notion to colonialism, Bhabha contends, the power of the oppressor/coloniser is not total. The colonisation works under the rationale that the West is more civilised and its responsibility is to civilise the other. This is how it legitimises its domination, by introducing education and administrative systems (Huddart, 2005). However, simultaneously at a subconscious level, the coloniser is caught up with anxiety about the similarities they have with the colonised. This results in colonial discourse which “operates through metonymy: the substitution along a vertical axis in terms of parts for whole, a never-ending substitution that cannot reach any point of full presence” (Huddart, 2005, p.65). Therefore, stereotypes of Muslims, illustrated in terms of visual representation, are constantly produced with an attempt to ‘fix’ the colonised with certain characteristics. By analysing films that were produced in two different periods, I suggest that *visual closeness* between Buddhists and Muslims receive greater emphasis in the more recent films. With a stance towards the more multiculturalist policies of the Thai government, coupled with an increasing violence in the three southern border provinces and the 9/11 event, “Thainess” itself is *re-defined*. This might also result in a process of redefining Muslim others in the *re-imagined* Thai state. This argument is much clearer when it is placed in the context of an increasing degree of violence among separatist movements. While the insurgency conducted by “bad Muslims” is getting out of control, keeping “good Muslims” close to “us” is important. This is spelled out in the findings showing changes of some elements of the *visuality of Muslimness*. However, the stereotypes in visual representation noted above still maintain a gap between the Thai self and Muslim Other. Muslims are, thus, always *in the process* of being “not quite” civilised (like us) and this gives legitimacy to the Thai state to continue dominating the minorities.

Thus far, this chapter has laid down background knowledge on the visual

representation of Muslims in Thai cinema. This visual analysis is undoubtedly useful for further analysis of the self-representation of Muslims in subsequent chapters. It is important, in these chapters, to extend beyond the analysis of film texts, in part because cinema has its own modes of seeing which differ from the way audiences consume visual texts on YouTube i.e. rather than watching a film in a dark auditorium, the same film can now be watched in one's living room. Furthermore, the representation of Muslims nowadays also prevails beyond traditional media such as films: thousands of videos about Muslims have been uploaded, be it by professionals or amateurs, onto YouTube. Analysing other genres of visual media will provide a fuller picture of how Thai Muslims are portrayed by non-Muslims on YouTube. By analysing different genres of media, we can also examine the *visuality* of Muslims which has to be "understood collectively, rather than fragmented into disciplinary units such as film, television, art and video" (Mirzoeff, 1999, p.13). The next chapter will examine music-related videos about Muslims made by non-Muslims. This ranges from professional music videos made for popular Thai bands during the 1980s but only uploaded to YouTube within the past decade, to amateur montage videos with music made by Thais who are living or working in the three southern border provinces. By using the *visuality of Muslimness* found in this chapter as a point of departure, the next chapter aim to explore further into the *visuality* of the Muslim minorities in a space of YouTube.

Chapter Four

Thai Muslims in music videos on YouTube

The previous chapter laid down knowledge of the representation of Thai Muslims in Thai cinema. By doing so, it helped redress the gap within a growing body of literature on the three southern border provinces which still lacks a media studies perspective; and while an increasing degree of violence in the three southern border provinces has brought about a proliferation of scholarly works, media representation of minorities is still largely overlooked by scholars working on the region. The findings in the previous chapter offer a pivotal point of departure for analysing the *self-representation* of Muslims on YouTube in subsequent chapters. The visual representation of *Muslimsness* is limited to darker skin, beards, skullcaps, *hijabs* and *sarongs*. Moreover, Muslims are portrayed as backward and uneducated people who need to be “civilised” by Buddhists, and Buddhist characters are depicted as people who save “good Muslims” from “bad Muslims.” The Muslims are also “Others within” who become aligned with space/nature as dangerous, unruly/uncivilised.

The *visuality of Muslimness* in mainstream Thai narrative cinema observed above creates “Thainess” *visual subjects*, while simultaneously fixing stereotypes of Thai Muslims. This process of subjectification enables Thai Muslims to become an object that deserves *to-be-looked-at* and this, therefore, perpetuates Thai Muslims as “the Other within” in the Thai state. Moreover, the pleasure of gazing at Muslim Others in the films could possibly, as argued in the previous chapter, put audiences in the position of adopting a “colonial gaze”, and yet again, maintain the domination of “Thainess”.

Nonetheless, with the rapidly growing popularity of online space, in what way Thai Muslims stereotypes are circulated, reproduced, negotiated, or perhaps challenged in other audio-visual media spaces needs further investigation. This especially pertains to this research, which examines the representation of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces on YouTube. This chapter therefore focuses its attention on representations of Thai Muslims in

music videos on YouTube as opposed to Chapter Three, which dealt with cinematic representations.

YouTube is an online video sharing site created in 2005 in America by a group of media-savvy friends. As its previous slogan “Broadcast Yourself” suggests, YouTube provides a platform for people, whether professional video makers, amateurs or just casual users, to share their videos with the public. YouTube rapidly became popular among media users and was later bought by Google for US\$1.65 billion. The YouTube website claims that it has over a billion users from all around the world and that it gains income from adverts on its website. It may be still too early to measure the impact of YouTube on society, given that it was first introduced just a decade ago and new media studies itself, compared to other disciplines e.g. cultural studies, film studies, is still in its infancy. Nonetheless, its penetration into the daily life of millions of people makes the online video sharing site a space not to be overlooked.

New media scholars (Poster, 2001; Bruns, 2008; Castells, 2007; Deuze, 2012; Jenkins, 2006; Papacharissi, 2011 among others) contend that emerging forms of online technologies e.g. participatory and convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006), “user-led media content” (Bruns 2008) etc. have the potential to bring about “new types of the subjects” (Poster, 2001) and multiplicity of “networked self” (Papacharissi, 2011) among users. This “networked society” can also potentially disturb pre-existing power relations (Castells, 2007). Moreover, research on YouTube suggests that its participatory culture paves the way for alternative voices and diversification of content (Burgess 2008; Christensen 2008; Lange 2008; Lindgren 2011; Papadopoulos 2009), while other scholars (Antony and Thomas, 2010; Wall, 2009; Zoonen, Vis & Mihelj, 2011) cast doubt on the celebratory notion of new media, arguing that stereotypes and myths about particular groups of people such as Muslims and Black Africans, are reproduced on YouTube.

In order to provide a fuller picture of the visual representation of Muslims in Thailand, this chapter turns to YouTube, a video-sharing space currently containing around 80

million videos including ones about Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces. It aims to examine the representation of Thai Muslims in a “non-traditional” media domain. Putting Thai cultural studies, visual studies and new media studies into dialogue, this chapter will examine the visual representation of Thai Muslims in music-related YouTube videos on YouTube.

Besides its richness in visual data, music-related content about Muslims in the three southern border provinces has been selected as a case study since it is a popular genre of videos on YouTube which normally attracts a large audience (shown in view counts under each video). I also found that this genre of videos is largely remediated by YouTube videos made by Thai Muslims in the southernmost region. I acknowledge that there are other types of YouTube videos depicting Thai Muslims e.g. news reports, television series, and documentary, but music videos contain visual data and a narrative line about the Muslim minorities where visual aesthetics intersects with the politics of identity. As a result, analyses of this genre of audio-visual texts will provide a fuller picture of the notion of the *visuality of Muslimness*. The questions this chapter poses include:

- 1) in what way are Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces visually portrayed in music-related videos uploaded to YouTube?
- 2) who are the people who make and upload these videos?
- 3) to what extent does YouTube enable a broader representation of Thai Muslims?

There are several music videos portraying Thai Muslims in the southernmost provinces of Thailand uploaded on YouTube, however, I purposefully selected music-related videos (regardless of their years of production) based on their popularity. The popularity of videos is taken into account since popular videos have the potential to reach wider audiences. The music-related videos that were selected can be categorised into two groups: 1) music videos made for popular musicians/bands; and 2) professional/amateur-made music-related videos. The first category represents mainstream visual texts made to be broadcast on television but

later uploaded on YouTube, while videos in the second category are *not* made for the mainstream broadcast domain and are uploaded into YouTube. I will compare and contrast findings from these two categories in order to shed light on how Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces are portrayed on YouTube.

Thai Muslims in Thai popular music videos on YouTube: who really creates Muslim imagery on YouTube?

The first category of videos includes: 1) *Abdullah* (a person's name; artist: *ZuZu*, released in 1989); 2) *Long Tai* (trans. cruising to the south; artist: *Carabao*, released in 1990); 3) *Lob Ma Ban Rao* (trans. return to our home; artist: *Luang Kai*, released in 2004); and 4) *Sumpaikun Hati* (Malay, trans. sending the heart to you; artist: *Thongchai McIntyre*, released in 2005). These videos were made in different periods, however, YouTube enables videos that were actually made for television to be archived and watched again online.

YouTube contains millions of videos and this fact makes a generalisation of the medium impossible, which has been a challenge for new media scholars. However, a first glance at these selected YouTube videos, which is just a slice of experience, suggests that an argument about new media as a "new" space carved out for self-produced media or user-led content is not the case here. These videos were professionally made for singers/bands in record companies concentrated in Bangkok. While it is true that this space is open to amateurs, semi-amateurs or even professionals from outside Bangkok to upload their videos (this will be a central theme in Chapters Five and Six), media corporations appear to make their way to YouTube, which casts doubt on the popular new media rhetoric e.g. "user-led content" "self-produced media" "participatory media" which is believed to potentially *democratise* media content.

It should also be noted that it is challenging for new media research to identify who is the person uploading these videos, since many YouTube channel owner (who uploads their

videos to their channel and shares) reveals their real identity. What appears under each video are the title of a video, the day it was uploaded, views, and the name of the YouTube user. In order to delve further into the representation of Thai Muslims in music videos, the following section investigates the *to-be-looked-at-ness* quality of Muslim Others in these videos which motivates YouTube users to upload them and that appeals to hundreds of thousands of views.

Representing Thai Muslims in music videos: reproducing the visibility of Muslimness as inferior religious others who need to be civilized by Buddhist Thais

Even though these selected videos were made in different periods, what they all share is the portrayal of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces along with a song. Similar to other media genres, the portrayal of Thai Muslims in Thai popular music videos is still rare. These videos can be categorised roughly into two periods: *Abdullah* and *Long Tai* were made during the period of the late 1980s to early 1990s; while *Luang Kai* and *Sumpaikun Hati* were produced after 2004, which marked a new height in the violence in the south. The more recent videos (made after 2004) explicitly use music to disseminate the notion of “peace” and “unity” to bring the “the three southern borders” back to normalcy. Having said that, this does not mean that before 2004 there was no conflict and violence in the Malay-speaking provinces at all. Che Man (1990) notes that responses to national integration policies beginning in the 1940s created “a spectrum of responses from the Muslim community – ranging from the ‘accommodationist’ to the ‘liberationist’/‘separatist’” (p.256). As a result, since the 1940s, the relationship between the Thai government and Muslim minorities in the southernmost region has been volatile. Besides separatist movements which are a “local” event, this political factor is also coupled with the preceding global events of 9/11 in 2001 which tainted the image of Islam and Muslims. As a result, the fact that the latter two videos were made after 2001 and 2004 should be taken into account.

The first music video to be examined is *Abdullah* (15 Jun 2009, 1,336,651 views, duration 3.21), a music video made for the popular band ZuZu. The song *Abdullah* was released in 1989 when the *harappan baru* project (Malay language, trans. new hope) was implemented by the government in order to “develop” the south to tackle unrest. The name of this project was later changed to *Taksin Pattana* (trans. Southern development), which again connotes an idea of “developing” the area to tackle the separatists. The story of *Abdullah*, who is a hard-working and religious Muslim man, is employed in the music video to epitomise a “good Muslim”. The lyrics praise *Abdullah* saying that he is a hard-working person who looks after his family very well and therefore, is “a role model for Muslims”. The discourse of “good Muslims” vs “bad Muslims,” which is also prevalent in the previous chapter and my previous research on the representation of Thai Muslims in the southernmost provinces in Thai newspapers (Treepon, 2006), is reproduced in this music video when the song clearly makes reference to the *harappan baru* project initiated by the government. A Thai Muslim person such as *Abdullah* is also portrayed as a person who will protect, as the lyrics say “the golden axe holder” (*dam kwan thong khong thai*).²⁵

While *Abdullah* is represented as a “good Muslim” in this context, this can imply that “bad Muslims” are those separatists who cause violence and are thus a threat to Thailand. *Abdullah*, on the other hand, does not go against the Thai state (and is thus docile) and is therefore a good Muslim. How, then, is a “good” Muslim visually portrayed?

²⁵ “the golden axe holder” (*dam kwan tong khong thai*) is a widely-employed discourse in the news and media, including *Abdullah*, when they represent the three southern border provinces. A Thai geo-body of Thailand can be visualised as a “golden axe (*dam kwan* means an axe holder and *thong* means gold),”: a shape of Thai map looks similar to an axe and “gold” which is used as a modifier, represents fertility of the land. Insurgency conducted by separatist groups in the south is, thus, considered as a threat to the “golden axe,” especially, an axe holder.



Figure 1: *Abdullah* in a rubber plantation



Figure 2: *Abdullah* praying in a mosque

In the video, Abdullah always wears a *sarong* and a skullcap. In keeping with the visual convention of *Muslimness* noted in the previous chapter, he has a dark complexion, sharper nose, big eyes and wears a moustache. In order to make a living, he works in a rubber plantation (see figure 1) and is also a fisherman. It should be noted that visual references to fisheries and rubber plantations have been tropes of Thai Muslims in three southern border provinces and will be a recurring visual theme in the next videos. The interesting point, though, is how a mainstream music video constitutes a Thai Muslim role model while separatist movements and violence prevailed the area.

While he is praised in the video as a “good” Thai Muslim and thus deserves to be a role model for other Muslims²⁶, this also shows the ambivalence of the discourse of “Thainess” towards Thai Muslim. While a Muslim man such as Abdullah is admired, by being visually represented in a rural setting such as a rubber plantation and a fishing village in Thailand, visual stereotypes of Muslims, his *khaek* looks, skullcap, *sarong*, and moustache are being reproduced in this genre of visual text (see figure 2). This role model of Muslims is also tied to being *chao ban-nok* (trans. villagers outside Bangkok, portrayed by places where they live) who can only do menial jobs. It is clear that *Muslimness* and *chao ban-nok* (trans. rural dwellers) are conflated when the mainstream Thai media visualise Thai Muslims. Being Thai Muslim is not only foreign to “Thainess” but it equals being *chao ban-nok* who are not the same as *chao krung* (the more civilised population in Bangkok). This also suggests that Thai Muslims who are

²⁶ Part of the lyrics says *kao pai tuk tang baeb yong kong muslim* (เขาไปถูกทาง แบบอย่างของมุสลิม trans. He is going to the right direction – a role model of Muslims). This connotes that Abdullah behaves like “a good Muslim” should do as against separatists who are “bad Muslims”.

doing professional jobs such as teachers or entrepreneurs *do not* deserve *to-be-looked-at* in the framework of the *visuality of Muslimness*. There is a scene of Muslim pupils studying in a classroom but it is just a short scene while the whole story takes place in a rural setting. Consequently, I would argue that the *visuality of Muslimness* both *includes* and *excludes* Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces, placing them in an inferior position while, as part of “Thainess”, they need to become “civilised”.

Thai Muslims also appear to be an *indispensable* visual element when representing the south of Thailand, which is very telling in the opening scene of the music video *Long Tai* (trans. Cruising the South) by *Carabao* (9 April 2011, 639,660 views). The establishing scene shows a male musician playing an Asian flute appearing in front of the audience who is sitting on the floor (see figure 3), and the musician is wearing a skullcap and *sarong*. What is at stake when even a producer chooses the Muslim musician in the opening scene of the music about the southern Thailand?



Figure 3: an establishing shot of *Long Tai*

The story of *Long Tai* is about a Buddhist traveler (suggested by Yuenyong Opakul, who is the lead singer of the band, playing guitar and singing songs) who is describing the beauty of each province, which goes along with the lyrics describing the beauty of province after province. Even though the song is about the south in general, which is populated mostly by

Buddhists, all the villagers appear to be predominantly Muslim and they are in a rural setting. Their *Muslimness* is suggested by the visual references of their outfits such as loose headscarves, skullcaps and *sarongs* (see figure 4). Visual references such as a fishing boat, sand and coconuts suggest that the setting of this story is a fishing village. Yet again, these visual codes of *Muslimness* tie Muslims to a rural and natural space.

The lyrics say that “if you go to the south it is like travelling in heaven, and visual references of the beach, *nang talung* (shadow puppets), *norah* (Southern traditional dance) are employed to show the beauty of provinces in the upper south which are populated mostly by Buddhists. Interestingly, when the song describes the three southern border provinces, Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, the visuals switch to a scene showing a Muslim magician playing tricks in front of a Muslim audience (see figure 5). In this regard, it appears that the representation of Thai Muslims has also been *exoticised* by the gaze of a traveler from the centre of “Thainess” because it says in the lyrics that these travel experiences and the beauty of the south will be in “memories”. Consequently, in this case, the “beauty” of *ban-nok* (as suggested by the rural setting, houses and outfits) and *Muslimness* (as suggested by the outfits) are the two things intertwined in this visual representation.



Figure 4: Some Muslim villagers in *Long Tai*



Figure 5: A Muslim magician in *Long Tai*

Consequently, their constructed “beauty” of the south, including *Muslim* visual codes, is employed in this music video for the pleasure and fantasy of a “Thai” audience. I would argue that both southerners and Muslims are “others” and “*ban-nok*” from the vantage point of “Thainess” and, thus, their visual codes are to be gazed at for pleasure and to confirm their “Thainess” subjectively: to be there at least for a while and then we as ‘the bearer of the look’ have to return to our “Thainess”.

So far, the recurring visual themes found in these videos include the visual conventions of *Muslimness* (darker skin, headscarves, skullcaps, moustache and beard), *Muslim backwardness* (rural living such as a fisherman’s village or rubber plantation and doing menial work), and *exotic Muslims* (Muslim rural beauty and magic). This *to-be-looked-at-ness* quality of Thai Muslims in the visual conventions in music videos is shown to represent/include Muslim Others, and are similar to the qualities found in the film analysis in Chapter Three. In these videos, the Muslim Others are objects to be gazed at by Thais and this gaze is to maintain the subjectivity of “Thainess” in a *superior position*. These findings echo Said in *Orientalism* (1978) where he argues that the construction of the Orient, the colonised, as “a

system of truth" (p.204) is constructed by the West as a coloniser. This knowledge construction is also constrained by imbalanced power relations between the two. Nonetheless, this is a case of *internal colonialism* where historically, the Bangkok elites have attempted to preserve their dominance through the notion of "Thainess" to control minorities in the Thai state. In this case, this ideology operates through a system of representation where the *visuality of Muslimness* is circulated in these visual texts. The gaze of these texts helps confirm "*Thainess*" visual subjects while perpetuating Muslim visual objects as "the Other within" (Thongchai, 2000a).

Through this visual representational practice, the power relations operating via "Thainess" (where Bangkok Buddhist elites are at the top and Thai Muslims are inferior) become *normalised* in order "to secure discursive or ideological 'closure'" (Hall, 1997, p.245). The portrayal of Muslim separatists found in the previous chapter and in this chapter epitomises the attempt to maintain this ideological work. In the *visuality of Muslimness*, the separatists are merely *reduced* to "bad Muslims" while their political motivations (e.g. seeking autonomy or social justice) and the historical contexts of their movements (e.g. Siam/Thailand's internal colonialism) are foreclosed. Consequently, it can be argued that the everyday consumption of the *visuality of Muslimness* either in cinema or on television can bring about *taken-for-granted* knowledge about Muslim separatists. This practice in turn helps legitimise the use of military force by the Bangkok government to suppress these "bad Muslims".

However, an emerging political factor, such as the increasing degree of unrest in the southernmost provinces and global terrorism in the 21st century, could *disturb* the configuration of the hierarchical relationship that "Thainess" is trying to preserve, and these factors also *unsettle* the Thai Self. This forces the coloniser, in this case the Thai state, to *re-create* stereotypes of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces, as discussed further in the next section.

Visuality of Muslimness after 2004: representing Thai Muslims as “friends” yet “inferior” and as “foreign” in our “home”

In this section, I analyse two music videos about Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces made after 2004 that share the same message in trying to use music to restore peace in the region as the violence deepened. Visual stereotypes of *Muslimness* still prevail in these videos, while it becomes evident that *Muslimness* is also part and parcel of the representation of the south of Thailand. Moreover, *visible closeness* which suggests an intimacy between Buddhists and Muslims is an emerging visual theme found in music videos made in this period.

The music video *Lop Ma Ban Rao* by Luang Kai, a Buddhist Thai singer from the south (Lop Ma Ban Rao trans. Returning to our home) (26 Oct 2011, 785,256 views), concerns a southern Thai man (who is not Muslim) waiting for his girlfriend (also non-Muslim) to return home. The man (played by Luang Kai, the singer) is waiting for his girlfriend (another female singer performing a duet in this song) who is travelling by train to the south, although the destination is not actually clear. The setting of this train station can only be suggested by the sign of a tea place at the train station. The establishing shot of the train station is followed by a close-up showing a sign in Thai. It reads *ran cha betong* (trans. Betong teashop; Betong is the southernmost district in Yala, one of the three southern border provinces) as in the film *OK Betong* discussed in Chapter Three, therefore suggesting that this teashop is located somewhere in the three southern border provinces. There follows a scene of the male singer wearing a denim shirt and jeans and singing while sitting in the tea shop. In the following wide shot, the singer is surrounded by people who are walking in the station and are all wearing skullcaps and *hijabs*, suggesting that this is a Muslim area (see figure 5-6).

It should be noted that music videos usually last around three minutes and have to make the audience “make sense” of people and places immediately. As a result, stereotypes

are, as Said (1978) argues “a system of truth” (p.204) and are useful since constructed knowledge about Muslims is known by the audience. Running a teashop is a stereotype of Muslims especially in the south and is thus used to provide a visual cue for the audience. Muslim visual representation in these opening scenes, as with previous videos, suggests the rural-ness of being a Muslim area.



Figure 5-6: Muslim men and women at *Betong* train station as in *Lop Ma Ban Rao*

The story is about a romantic relationship between a couple from the south. The man is longing for his lover to return to a place they call “our home” (the title of this song means “returning to our home”), however, visually this takes place in a Muslim-populated province.

This visual representation raises the question, what is at stake when Buddhist Thais call a place “our home” while that place is visually populated by Muslims? This question is also pertinent to the recurring pattern of incorporating visual references of *Muslimness* to represent the south in general. This can be found in *Lop Ma Ban Rao*, *Long Tai* and also *Pak Tai Ban Rao* (trans. the south is our home) (*Pak Tai Ban Rao* music video is not included in this analysis since it contains hardly any visual references of *Muslimness*, but its visual references in some scenes will be selected to support this argument).

In the music video *Pak Tai Ban Rao* a group of young non-Muslims are returning home in the south. The setting of their hometown could be anywhere in the south, but interestingly, their home is Yala, one of the three southern border provinces (see figure 7). When they arrive home in the next scene, one of them rushes to a rubber plantation to hug his mother. The scene also shows a boy wearing a skullcap in a rubber plantation thus visually suggesting the boy is Muslim (see figure 8).



Figure 7: a group of young people arriving at Yala train station in *Pak Tai Ban Rao*



Figure 8: a Muslim boy in a rubber plantation in *Pak Tai Ban Rao*

It has been argued that Muslims and Islam are marginalised and are still “foreign” in Thailand since “Thainess” ties Thailand to Buddhism (Gilquin, 2005). However, when representing the south, at least in these music videos, the reason that *Muslimness* is always included is, I argue, because *Muslimness*, as an object of the gaze, is a signifier that connotes *rural-ness* and *inferiority*. This representation of inferior Others, such as poverty stricken folk from Isan or lazy northerners, is a crucial aspect of the process of preserving “Thainess” as a sense of Self, which is hierarchical. As findings in previous chapters and previous sections suggest, the *visuality of Muslimness* is conflated with *rural-ness* and backwardness. These Muslims who “look different from us” always appear in rural settings such as a fisherman’s village or a rubber plantation or a more normal place for Muslims such as a tea-shop in a far-flung train station. Therefore, Thai Muslims are *fixed* not only by the way they look but also *what* they do and *where* they live.

They also live in a place that we call “home”, namely *ban rao* (“our home”), and in these music videos this connotes *the south of Thailand* which belongs to “us”. However, the visual representation of a group of friends (non-Muslim) in *Pak Tai Ban Rao* and a southern woman (non-Muslim) on a train returning home in *Lop ma Ban Rao*, suggests that this “home” belongs to southern Buddhist Thais where there also reside Muslims; they are normalizing and are thus part of “our nation”. However, with the *visuality of Muslimness*, they are still

backward and thus inferior when compared to “us”. This imbalanced power relationship is also spelled out in scenes and shots showing Thais and Muslims together. By visually representing “home” as a place also resided in by “the Other”, this resonates well with the notion of “the others within” (Thongchai, 2000a). However, in this respect, Muslims appear to be the inferior others within “the south” of Thailand.



Figure 9-10 interaction between Thais and Muslims in *Lop Ma Ban Rao*

The interaction between Muslims and Thai government officials is also portrayed in this video where there are shots representing Muslims (known by the visual references of the *hijab*) being taken care of by a nurse and a teacher in uniform (see figure 9-10). All these characters are smiling, and these visual references suggest that they are well taken care of by Thai government officials. The government officials can be read as *a metaphor* for the Thai state in that they are there to protect Muslims. It is interesting to note that this visual

representation shares similarities with Thai films such as *Pulakong*, *Pee Suea Lae Dok Mai* and *Talumphuk* (discussed at length in Chapter Three). In these films and music videos, Muslims are “saved” and “protected” by Thais and therefore perpetuate the stereotypes of Muslims as inferior and less developed. Consequently, by representing Muslims in this light, it helps preserve the social hierarchy which places Muslims as inferior others.

It should also be noted that this music video, made in 2004, mentions bringing peace to the south in the lyrics. The visual representation of Muslims being protected by Thais (which also represent the Thai state) also sustains an ideology of “Thainess”. This might suggest that the violence in the south is not caused by the Thai state because Thai government officials save these “good Muslims”, and militants themselves are the culprits in this ongoing violence.

Having said that, it should also be noted that the visual portrayal of *inter-racial relations* between Muslims and Buddhists is a theme found in music videos after 2004. Even though the visual code of Thai officials helping Muslims is employed, subsequent shots also show *closeness* between Buddhist and Muslim children. A boy in his school uniform and a girl in traditional Malay dress wearing a *hijab* are shown together in a long shot which then cuts to a close-up of the two children holding hands (see figure 11-12). This visual representation suggests *friendship* between the two children and that even though they are from different religious backgrounds they can be united. In this light, Muslims are not just the backward and docile Others “saved” by Buddhists, nor are they seen as exotic Others. Rather, Buddhists and Muslims can be *integrated*, even if they have different cultural and religious backgrounds.



Figure 11-12

This relatively new *visuality of Muslimness* is also evident in Thai films made after the year 2000. In the previous chapter, Sakina (Muslim) and Phrao (Buddhist) from the film *Talumphuk* fall in love as does Lin, a Buddhist, who eventually converts to Islam so as to be married to Faruq in *OK Betong*. The emerging trend in portraying *closeness* between Buddhists and Muslims in these visual texts suggests a discourse of multiculturalism, in that despite being of different religious backgrounds, we can be together. This may suggest a shift in the political stance towards minorities. Government policies towards minorities have shifted from normalizing to multiculturalism, and therefore, this multiculturalism may bring about a shift in representing the minorities in an attempt to create a more integrated society. Consequently, so far, multiculturalism and *interracial* *visuality* appears to trigger a *re-definition* of *Muslimness* (this issue will be discussed in detail at the end of this section).

This *interracial visibility* between Buddhists and Muslims can also be found in the music video *Sumpaikun Hati* (uploaded 11 August 2009, 133,909 views). In 2005, this song and music video aimed specifically at creating unity among Buddhists and Muslims. The name of the song means “sending my heart to help you”. This music video was a project initiated by the Thai government with the cooperation of the giant music record company, GMM Grammy, to use music to create unity and peace in the three southern border provinces. The song is in Malay and sung by a famous Thai singer, Thongchai MacIntyre and the story is about the friendship between two boys, one of whom is Muslim and the other a Buddhist. The Buddhist boy meets the Muslim boy during a trip in the southernmost region and, as with other Muslims portrayed in previous music videos and films in the previous chapter, the Muslim boy has dark skin, big eyes and a sharp nose, and is always wearing a skullcap. Stereotypical places of Muslims are included in the visual representation but, as noted, the *closeness* between Buddhists and Muslims, in this case a form of friendship, is visually emphasised.

The two boys are seen in a rubber plantation, which is another stereotype of “Southern-ness” (see figure 11) where the Muslim boy is teaching the Buddhist boy to tap rubber from a tree. In the final scene where they meet again, the two boys are sitting on a boat and fishing together (see figure 12). At this point, it is evident that not only the *rural-ness* of Muslims, especially in rubber plantations and fisherman’s villages, is a recurring visual theme, but that the relationship is also emphasised. The Buddhist boy is enjoying stereotypical Muslim jobs.



Figure 11 The two boys in a rubber plantation (*Sumpaikun Hati*)



Figure 12 The two boys' reunion (*Sumpaikun Hati*)

After the Buddhist boy returns to his hometown (visually suggested to be located outside the southernmost provinces), he is watching television and sees a news report about a school in the southernmost region that has been burned down by militants. He sees a group of Muslim students collecting their textbooks amidst the ruins of the school (*see figure 13*) and, in the following tighter shot, the boy also notices that his Muslim friend is among those students.

This visual representation suggests that these pupils are victims of an insurgent operation and this attack has deprived them of their education, which is important in their lives. In this dramatic scene, the Buddhist boy who is watching his friend from home with tears in his eyes is thinking about what he could do to help his friend. He therefore decides to buy stationary and send it to his friend by mail in order to help him to be ready to resume lessons.

It should be noted that, before 2004, separatist groups usually targeted government establishments such as government schools and offices because these places 160ormalizi the Thai state. The ruins of schools after being burnt down were a regular item in news programmes.

Again, the visual narrative of a Thai who saves “good Muslims” from “bad Muslims” appears in this video. The “good Muslim” (the Muslim boy) is portrayed as a victim of separatist movements, and the school, which also 160ormalizin the Thai state, is an institution employed to educate “rural Muslims”. However, it is now under threat from “bad Muslims”. Thais who are living outside the area should thus understand and help them, as the title of the song says, *Sumpaikun Hati* means “sending my heart to support you”. The song conveys a sympathetic message from (Buddhist) Thais to Thai Muslims who are living in the “troubled south”. Part of the lyrics say:

“As you know, we unite. We are ready to go together, whenever we smile, hurt or cry. And I know, no matter how far you are away from me, my heart is always there for you. When you are hurt, I will be hurt too”.

Buddhists are thus encouraged to have empathy towards these “good Muslims”, and that even though we are different, we can live together. Having a Buddhist Bangkok Thai superstar singing in Malay in order to convey this message to Muslims in a mainstream media domain is a rare event, given the fact that the Malay language has been 160ormalizing160 by the Thai state. Therefore, this Malay-language music video suggests that “we” (Buddhist Thais) do not only 160ormalizi Muslim minorities in the region, but “we” also understand and are connected to them. This resonates with the emergent visual discourse of *visible closeness* found in recent films in Chapter Three and music videos in this chapter and also spells out the fact that “Thainess” itself is *not* static.

Visual discourses of *visible closeness* and *intimacy* between Buddhists and Muslims suggest that with the escalation of unrest in the three southern border provinces, “Thainess” has been disturbed by political and security factors which has resulted in a *re-construction* of

“Thainess”. Nonetheless, this kind of representation, coupled with the language choice, downplays the political motivation of insurgents to gain independence from the Thai state. At an ideological level of representation, these visual codes and narrative of *Muslimness*, help to confirm the superiority of “Thainess” and perpetuate the perception of Muslims as “the other within.”



Figure 13 Muslim pupils collecting their books after their school has been burnt down (*Sumpaikun Hati*)



Figure 14 Muslim pupils singing the national anthem (*Sumpaikun Hati*)

The visibility of Muslimness in the mainstream space: 161normalizing power relations and articulating Muslim stereotypes through productive ambivalence

Findings, thus far, suggest that *the visibility of Muslimness* is reproduced across genres of visual media. From mainstream Thai cinema (in Chapter Three) to music videos in this chapter, the Thai Muslim characters are depicted visually with stereotypes of *Muslimness* such

as dark skin, big eyes, with a beard or moustache, and wearing headscarves, skullcaps and *sarongs*. These are in contrast with Buddhists who wear “modern” dress such as a uniform or shirts and jeans. Moreover, Muslims undertake what is considered in Thailand to be low-brow labour-intensive jobs such as a rubber plantation farmer or fisherman and these visual representations are coupled with stereotypes of the mostly rural places where they live. This therefore conflates *rural-ness* and also backwardness with Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces. The findings in this chapter in particular also suggest that *Muslimness* becomes an indispensable visual cue for music videos that want to represent the rural south of Thailand. It can therefore be implied that *Muslimness* itself is a visual reference that can signify *rural-ness*. Yet again, the visual codes of *Muslimness* function to confirm “*Thainess*” visual *subjectivity* through the visual representational practice in the mainstream space and this helps normalise a hierarchy of “*Thainess*”.

Furthermore, even though *the visibility of Muslimness* attempts to *fix* Thai Muslim objects through “*Thainess*” visual subjectivity, the findings also suggest that the Muslim object of this visual discourse is *ambivalence*. It is obvious in *Abdullah* that while the government-initiated *harappan baru* (Malay language, trans. New aspiration) project to “develop” Malay-speaking Muslim areas in order to tackle on-going unrest, through the portrayal of the main character *Abdullah*, stereotypes of Muslims as backward and docile people are still emphasised and Abdullah is portrayed as a “role model” for all Muslims. This visual discourse suggests that the notion of “development” for Thai Muslims is actually to *fix* them as *always* “less-developed” people. By doing so, the hierarchy of “*Thainess*” still maintained. Similarly, in *Sumpaikun Hati* and *Lop Ma Ban Rao*, a Buddhist and a Muslim person are portrayed as friends or are close to each other, Muslims are part of “our home”, Muslims are “our friends”. It suggests that even though we are different, we can be together in a multicultural society. Nonetheless, at the same time through visual representation, Muslims are “foreign” in “our” home and they are still “unequal” in “our” friendship. The contradiction of *the visibility of*

Muslimness echoes Bhabha's (1983) argument on the ambivalence of stereotypes; from a postcolonial perspective, he states that "[T]he construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation form of difference" (p.96). In order to examine how colonial power is exercised through an *articulation form of difference*, Bhabha applies Lacan's *Imaginary* (see also Chapter Two) to analyse the subjectification process in the colonial context. Bhabha (1983) argues that the subjectification process which pertains to both *domination* and *dependency* of colonial objects (the colonized) results in a split of a subject (the coloniser) and hence ambivalence towards the Other. This ambivalence consists of "the economy of pleasure and desire" (p.96) and "the economy of discourse, domination and power" (p.96).

In the case of Western colonisers, while advances in technology and economic systems create a sense of the superiority of the West over its colony, a lacking colonial Self has to rely on the Others (colonial objects) in order for it to exist. As a result, in colonial discourse, *race* (which is can be easily distinguished) is constructed and kept as a social category in order for the coloniser to keep producing stereotypes of colonial objects. However, it should be noted that, unlike Western colonisation where a difference of skin colour between whites, the coloniser, and non-whites, the colonised, is obvious, in most cases, Thai Muslims look similar to Buddhist Thais. Moreover, Thai colonialism is based on a century-long pre-colonial hierarchical relationship between Siam, as the overlord, and *Patani*, as a tributary. Therefore, the modernisation of Siam deployed by the Bangkok elites was a selective process, in that education, they tried to preserve their indigenous traits such as social hierarchy. These colonial contexts in turn shape the construction of "Thainess".

While "Thainess" is a discourse which has been employed to *dominate* Thai Muslims, the concept of lacking a "Thainess" Self also *depends* on the existence of Muslim Others ("Thainess" Self was also discussed in Chapter Three). This results in an ambivalence of Thai Muslim objects which are neither *included* in nor *excluded* from the "Thainess" Self. Buddhist

Thai visual subjects *desire* Muslim objects and thus want them to be part of Thai society (as a “good” Thai citizen who we can “develop”, as a good friend we care for, as an important part of our home) but we are afraid of letting them become too close to being “Thai”. Therefore, the visual subjects have to anxiously articulate Muslim difference through stereotypes (in a form of *racialising* Thai Muslims and fixing them with *inferiority*). The power of the Bangkok government and the superiority of the Buddhist Thai are legitimised through what Bhabha (1983) terms a “productive ambivalence”. While *the visibility of Muslimness* enables a visual discourse to be constantly reproduced across visual media genres and across time periods (as the findings in Chapter Three and this chapter illustrate), its ambivalence helps maintain “Thainess” visual subjects through a desire for Muslim objects.

Nonetheless, it should be stressed that, as also discussed in the previous chapter, the representation of Thai Muslims is *not static*, as Huddart echoes Bhabha’s notion of unsettling the colonial Self, saying a coloniser’s “fixing strategies require an un-fixed, monstrous supplementary so that he can always invent new stereotypes that are yet to conform to what he already knows” (p.61). This seems to be the case for the representation of Thai Muslims in the Thai mainstream media after the year 2000. While the films and music videos in the previous period depict the Muslim minorities as undeveloped religious Others who are “saved” by Buddhists, these visual texts portray Muslims as *friends/lovers who can be in an intimate relationship* with Buddhists. In the previous chapter I termed this type of visual representation as *visible closeness*. This changing trope of Thai Muslims found in mainstream cinema and music videos in the two different periods confirms that the *visibility of Muslimness* itself is not static, but rather an “unfinished process which is both social and psychic – a subject-in-process” (Hall, 1999, p.311). During this process, the visual representation of *Muslimness* as a stereotype of the Other has to be constantly produced in order to *subjectify* the Thai Self (it is a lacking Self that has to rely on the Other for itself to exist) *and*, simultaneously, this visual stereotypical discourse confirms the Muslim’s inferiority and thus preserves an ideology of

“Thainess” and legitimises its domination.

The emerging discourse of *visual closeness* can be partly explained by Thailand’s growing civil society and debates about multiculturalism in the last two decades. Since the 1990s, the term *pahuwattanatham* (trans. multiculturalism and cultural diversity) became as a discourse which plays a vital role in a re-defining the term “minorities” in Thailand. Sirijit (2013) argues that in order to be accepted on the world’s stage (as part of global socio-economic network), Thai governments began to adjust their policies towards minorities according to a global discourse of multiculturalism. From the 2007 constitution and national policies which guarantee rights and the participation of minorities to the change of official term from *chon klum noi* (trans. minorities) to *klum chattiphan* (trans. ethnic groups), this suggests a move towards multiculturalism rather than homogeneity as it used to be. However, scholars (Horstmann, 2013; Surijit, 2013) argue that the notion of multiculturalism in Thailand (which was adopted from the West), has been transculturated to fit with Thai society which is hierarchical and therefore the rights of people are not as important as the normalcy of society. The findings above resonate with the move towards a “Thai version” of multiculturalism. While their visual representation suggests *visual closeness*, as friends and neighbours, diversity appears to be accepted however, the equality of the people (in the Western sense) does not seem to be the case here. On the other hand, differences (in the form of *inferiority*) of the Thai Muslims prevails in *the visibility of Muslimness*. It can be argued that Thai Muslims, as a *racial category*, have to be kept in order for the “Thainess” Self to keep inventing new stereotypes in emerging social contexts and in this case, it is a multicultural yet hierarchical society.

With regards to the space that is YouTube, even though YouTube opens up “a platform” for everyone to participate in video sharing activities, mainstream videos made by professionals still find their way onto the platform. The popularity of these music videos (as suggested by view counts appearing under each video) suggests that Muslim stereotypes are

to-be-looked-at (worth looking at) under a “scopic regime of modernity” (Jay, 1988). This *visuality of Muslimness* directs the way Buddhist Thais gaze at Muslim minorities in the Thai state. Having view counts ranging from more than a hundred thousand to more than one million, these online videos suggest that YouTube audiences do not necessarily watch “alternative” amateur videos.

The construction of race in the online video sharing space, in this case, is a form of the *visuality of Muslimness* when portraying Thai Muslims, and resonates with the views of new media scholar, Nakamura (2002; 2008) who, as discussed in Chapter Two, argues that there still exists “cybertype” in the new media environment, in that “race” is not diminished but takes a new form in the new media language. Nakamura further posits that, “[T]he internet is a visual technology, a protocol for seeing that is interfaced and networked in ways that produce a particular set of *racial formations*” (Nakamura, 2008, p.202). The previous sections examine music videos found on YouTube but that were first made for the mainstream media. It is clear that the line between “traditional” and “new” media is not clear-cut, and that mainstream *visuality of Muslimness* also prevails in the YouTube space.

Having said this, however, YouTube’s participatory culture and the changing character of a “visual event” (Mirzoeff, 1999)²⁷ has enabled non-mainstream videos to be shown on a public platform. To further test Nakamura’s argument on the role of “interfaced and networked” *visuality of YouTube* in producing “a particular set of *racial formations*”, I will now turn to two case studies of YouTube videos made by “non-mainstream” video-makers, both of which have been shared on YouTube. Unlike mainstream music videos, which are made to attract the masses on television, the following videos were not made for television or for media corporations. The following section therefore aims to examine the ways in which Thai

²⁷ Mirzoeff (1999) coins the term “visual event”, arguing that visual culture is not defined by medium but by the interaction between viewers and viewed. He describes the term visual event, saying “[W]hen I engage with visual apparatus, media and technology, I experience a visual event. By visual event, I mean an interaction of the visual sign, the technology that enables and sustains that sign, and the viewer.” (p.13) Regardless to types of visual medium, visual culture is interested in how “visual event” enables people in different periods visualise things around them.

Muslims in the three southern border provinces are portrayed in a less institutionalised and less professionally constrained setting.

The representation of Thai Muslims in non-mainstream YouTube videos

In order to give a fuller picture of the representation of Thai Muslims on YouTube, this section will analyse two videos that are case studies of YouTube videos not produced for the mainstream media, meaning that these videos may be used for other purposes but they are also uploaded to YouTube. They are a mixture of professional and amateur videos which suggests that YouTube is not only a space for amateurs but also for professional video-makers who want an “alternative space” to share their work with the public. Moreover, the term “amateur” itself is problematic since the line between professional and amateur has become blurred since supposed “amateurs” aspire to acquire skills in professional video-making to improve their work. (This point will be discussed in subsequent chapters where “amateur-made” videos and data collected from interviews with Muslims video-makers are analysed). In both cases, their existence on YouTube has broadened the diversity of broadcast media participants and reflects the notion of a participatory culture, as argued by new media scholars (Burgess, 2008; Christensen, 2008; Jenkins, 2006; Lange, 2008; Lindgren, 2011; Papadopoulos, 2009). However, the capacity of “collective power” (Jenkins 2006) or a “networked society” (Castells, 2007) to upset, or perhaps change the social hierarchy in the case of Muslim minorities in the Thai state, requires further investigation. This section will analyse two case studies of videos about Muslims in three southern border provinces made by non-Muslims, one made by a professional video artist, the other made by a military officer.

The first video is titled *The beautiful of 3 southern provinces of Thailand* [sic.] (published on 22nd June 2013, 1,295 views), and epitomises “non-commercialised” videos made by professional film makers uploaded on YouTube. Scholars in new media usually celebrate the capacity of the Internet to provide a space for amateur producers, but that is not

the case here. The video is meticulously crafted to a professional standard, as is the music. The producer, Dusit Sema-Ngern, a professional photographer, roamed the three provinces to show the “beautiful” sides of people in the three provinces as suggested in the caption under the video. Multiculturalism is the main theme as the viewer can see that Thais, Sino-Thais and Muslims are portrayed as living together in the same space.

In this video, we can see Muslims in various activities ranging from selling street food to talking on a mobile phone, Muslim couples socialising near a canal, a Muslim woman using a mobile phone standing near a motorcycle parking spot, Muslim women browsing in a bookshop, and Muslim students wearing white *hijabs* buying street food after school. It also shows Muslims doing *salat* (daily prayer) in a mosque (*see figure 15*). Besides backwardness, *khaek* looks, *rural-ness* and Islamic visual references, Muslim daily religious observances are also a recurring visual theme as part of the visual construction of Thai Muslims in the film and music videos analysed in previous sections and in Chapter Three, namely *Abdullah* (in the previous section *see figure 2*), *Talumphuk* (*see figure 16*), and *Sumpaikun Hati* (*see figure 17*). This kind of visuality also appears in the film trailers of *Pitiphum Haeng Rak* (this film was banned from public screening; *see figure 18*) and *Latitude6* (released in 2015; *see figure 19*). Thus, this visuality of Muslim observances is part of the *Muslimness* that appears across genres and media platforms suggesting that Muslims are “strict” observants (*khreng*) of their religious rituals. However, when Islamic rituals are tied to backwardness, rural-ness and the discourse of Buddhists saving “good Muslims” from “bad Muslims”, this visual discourse also implies that Muslims and Islam cannot be equal to Buddhists and Buddhism which embodies “Thainess”. Rather than constructing Muslims as part of *umma* or a whole community of Muslims bound together by Islam, these “good Muslims” are tied to an imagined community of “Thainess”.



Figure 15: Muslims doing *salat* in a mosque



Figure 16: Muslims doing *dua* (prayers of supplication) in *Talumphuk*



Figure 17: Muslim doing *dua* in *Sumpaikun Hati*



Figure 18: Female Muslim doing *salat* in *Pitibhum Hang Rak*

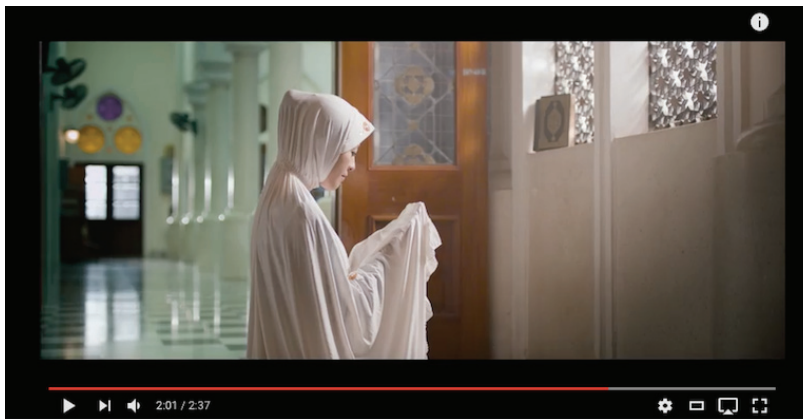


Figure 20: A leading female character of *Latitude6* doing *dua*



Figure 21: Muslim pupils with a Thai flag

The argument above is clearly echoed in the ending scene of this video (see figure 21) which shows Muslim pupils wearing *hijabs* and skullcaps and singing the Thai national anthem

with a Thai flag present in the background. A similar visual representation can also be found in the music video *Sumpaikun Hati* (see figure 14) which suggests that these “good Muslims” are Thai Muslims who are docile and who submit themselves to “Thainess” (as they respect the anthem and the flag which represents “Thainess”), while in the context of the ongoing political violence, “bad Muslims” are Muslims who want to separate from Thailand.

Muslims living in a space of “Thainess” is another recurring theme found in visual texts portraying Muslims. The previous chapter discussed a number of scenes from the film *Peesuea Lae Dokmai* showing Buddhist temples as the background when representing Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces. This representational code is also found in *The beautiful of 3 southern provinces of Thailand* [sic.] where a group of Muslims are wearing *hijabs* and skullcaps while standing in a Buddhist temple (see figure 22), and in the next video, titled *Oh...Pak Tai Ban Rao* (trans. the south is our home) (uploaded by มากกว่ารักเพื่อนบ้าน duration 4.20 (157,295 views), it shows a group of Muslim children wearing *hijabs* and skullcaps with a Buddha image in the background. This kind of visual code of *Muslimness* suggests that Muslims are living in a “Buddhist land.” As noted in the previous sections, it does not state in the Thai constitution that Buddhism is the national religion, however, this discursive visual practice upholds the ideology of “Thainess” as embodied by Buddhism.



Figure 22: Muslims in a Buddhist temple in *The beautiful of 3 southern provinces of Thailand*



Figure 23: Muslim children in with a Buddha image in a background in *Oh...Pak Tai Ban Rao*

It is also interesting to note that the song that goes along with this music video is *Pak tai ban rao* (trans. the south is our home). This song, as discussed in the previous section which examines Muslims in mainstream music videos, was originally sung by the rock band *Hammer* and has been re-arranged here. Its “catchy” phrases such as *oh oh pak tai ban rao* (trans. oh oh the south is our home) are familiar to an audience that grew up in the 1990s. Many comments under this video say how they are “proud” of and “miss” the south since the south is their home. However, as discussed at length in the previous section regarding the notion of “going back to our home”, in some music videos this visual representation raises the question of whose home it is. It appears in this music video and others noted above that Buddhist visual references, such as the Buddha image, play a significant role in constructing this “home.” Ideologically speaking, this reaffirms the notion that “Thainess” and Buddhism are intertwined.

These findings suggest that the visual stereotypes of *Muslimness* found in the mainstream media, such as films and videos, are also reproduced in non-mainstream music videos on YouTube. The *hijabs*, skullcaps, *sarongs*, and Muslim street vendors are still recurring visual themes found in “non-commercial” videos on YouTube. When comparing these findings with results in previous sections and in Chapter Three, it helps confirm that the *visuality of Muslimness* in the context of Thailand, has to be “understood collectively, rather than fragmented into separate disciplinary units such as film, television, art and video (Mirzoeff 1999; p.13).” In this regard the *to-be-looked-at-ness* of Thai Muslims in the three southern

border provinces is a recurring visual code when visualising Thai Muslims across visual genres and platforms. Analysis of the representation of the Muslim minorities in films, music videos and non-mainstream YouTube video shows that stereotypes have made their way into new media spaces such as YouTube. This confirms the findings of media scholars (Antony and Thomas, 2010; Nakamura, 2008; Wall, 2009; Zoonen, Vis & Mihelj, 2011) who argue that racial stereotypes still prevail in YouTube and other new media.

Having said that, this YouTube space and participatory culture also seems to pave ways for other visual references outside the visual tropes of Malay found in previous sections. In *The beautiful of 3 southern provinces of Thailand*, Muslims are portrayed as an educated people, in particular depicted in the scene in the bookshop (see figure 24) or that Muslims can engage with modern technology, such as a mobile phone, and live in urban areas. In the opening scene of *Oh...Pak Tai Ban Rao*, a Muslim boy wearing a colourful skullcap is shown playing a violin in an orchestral band (see figure 23). Unlike previous videos, here Muslims are portrayed as more *urbanised*: they are not necessarily in the forest, living by the sea or working in a rubber plantation. It appears that the non-Muslim outsider (the maker of this video) explored the region to show its “beauty” (as suggested by the video title) in the midst of violence in an attempt to broaden the way in which Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces are represented.



Figure 23: A Muslim boy plays the violin for Yala’s Youth Orchestral Band



Figure 24: Two Muslim girls in a bookshop

The Visuality of Muslimness across media genres and platforms: reproducing or reinforcing visual stereotypes of Muslimness?

So far, the *visuality of Muslimness* has become a visual norm when Muslims in the three southern border provinces are represented in visual media made by non-Muslims in Thailand. Thai Muslims in the region are portrayed as backwards, docile, and uneducated people living only in rural areas of Thailand. They can thus be *civilised* by Buddhist Thais, such as teachers, and Thai institutions, such as schools. They are also portrayed as “good Muslims” who are saved from “bad Muslims” such as bandits and violent insurgents by Buddhists. These “preferred meanings” of Muslims regulated by visual conventions help to propagate an ideology of “Thainess”, and the stereotypes of Muslims as *inferior Others within* is thus reinforced in these visual texts.

These findings also attest to the notion, as mentioned in the introductory chapter and in Chapter One, that *colonialism* is the impetus for the Bangkok elites to adopt Western techniques of the *visual or seeing* as a way to construct *knowledge* about their subjects, including Muslims, in the newly-created nation. A good example was when the Bangkok elites applied anthropology, a form of Western knowledge employed by Western colonisers, to categorise their subjects in order to legitimise their claim to be a superior group of people (Thongchai 2000b). With the rise of the film and television industries in Thailand, the discourse

of Muslim minorities is adopted and translated into visual codes. The visibility of Muslims is now mediated by the mass media in the imagined community of the Thai state, and therefore, this *visual event* has resulted in the visual production through video cameras of the *visibility of Muslimness* for the *Thainess visual subject to gaze*.

However, my findings suggest that the *visibility of Muslimness* is far from static and monolithic. While gazing at inferior Thai Muslims with anxiety and as subjects of “Thainess”, as lacking a self, we need to keep producing and re-defining stereotypes of the Thai Muslim other for “Thainess”. This is evident in an emerging new strand of stereotypes of Thai Muslims in visual texts produced after the year 2000 which marked a new height in the violence in the three southern border provinces.

The results of this last section show that non-mainstream YouTube videos have also broadened the representation of Thai Muslims as well. The availability of visual equipment e.g. home-use cameras and smart phones, and a space for video-sharing such as YouTube, may have encouraged a different way of representing Muslims. Using this as a point of departure, the following chapter will examine the *self-representation* of Thai Muslims on YouTube where their videos and the interviews of Muslim YouTube video producers (both in Bangkok and three southern border provinces) conducted during fieldwork will be analysed. Nakamura (2008) notes in her methodology in analysing online self-produced media among social minorities, that “this group of users *sees*, rather than how they are seen or represented, what they are making as well as what they are using, what they are doing as well as what they are being” (p.208). Furthermore, within online visual self-produced media environment, social minorities can remediate mainstream media genres and possibly “exploit the discontinuity of these images to produce a complex intersectional identity...(p.65)”. As a result, the YouTube environment provides a platform for Muslims to construct their own visual codes and *visualise* themselves as Thai Muslims in the public space. To see visibility in a more active sense, this could be the point where “the visual is contested, debated and transformed as a constantly

challenging place of social interaction and definition in terms of class, gender, sexuality and racialised identities” (Mirzoeff, 1999, p.4). As a result, the following chapter will delve further into the realm of YouTube. It aims to shed light on how *visuality of Muslimness* and a discourse of “good Muslims” are being contested and negotiated through a practice of self-produced media in an online space.

Chapter Five

Constructing “good Muslims” in halal media: negotiating the mainstream media’s

visuality of Muslimness

The previous two chapters have examined visual representations of Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces in mainstream Thai cinema and music videos in order to shed light on how Muslim minorities are portrayed. Moreover, through *the gaze*, it also spells out how this visual knowledge of *Muslimness*, which is constructed with a sense of being *Others within*, is intertwined with power relations in the Thai nation-state. The findings led to the conclusion that the *visuality*²⁸ of *Muslimness*, as an ongoing process of the visual construction of Thai Muslims, has brought about stereotypes of Thai Muslims in popular media forms. Islamic social codes or stereotypes, such as darker complexions, skullcaps, *hijabs*, *sarongs*, and beards, coupled with their backwardness and rural-ness, are designated to Muslim characters vis-à-vis the “civilised” and “developed” Buddhist characters. Being juxtaposed within Thailand’s *internal colonialism* framework, this *visuality of Muslimness* thus functions to construct a Muslim visual object for the gaze. This discursive practice of *visuality* also helps sustain the *Thai Self* in relation to Thai Muslims who are portrayed as *inferior religious others*.

The *visuality of Muslimness* noted above offers fresh insights into the function of *visuality* in Thai mainstream media in *othering* Muslim minorities, whereas this research dimension is still largely absent in the study of Thai Muslims in the violence-ridden southern border provinces. That said, while this insight can contribute to the field of study, it is still

²⁸ I use the term “visuality” in this and the previous chapters to refer to a practice of seeing. While vision refers to a physical ability to see, *visuality* is social construct, resulting in a subject formation, and is intertwined with power. Studying *visuality* thus covers more than just visuals or pictures themselves since *visuality* governs what to see and how to see things around us. Visual theorists employ the terms e.g. “visual event” (Mirzoeff, 1999) “scopic regime” (Metz, 1974) “scopic regime of modernity” (Jay, 1988) to suggest “the modern tendency to picture or visualize existence” (Mirzoeff, 1999) where *seeing* is equivalent to *knowledge*. *Visuality* is thus a pertinent question of the visual representation of Thai Muslims. In the previous chapter, I argue that *visuality of Muslimness* is a result of the colonialism in Thailand as in the early 20th century, the Bangkok elites began to travel to localities using Western knowledge e.g. anthropology (Thongchai 2000b) to observe their subjects and recorded their appearances and lifestyle. Data collected through the act of *seeing* became knowledge (e.g. stereotypes) which governs the way Buddhist Thais *gaze* at Muslim minorities while both, “visual subjects” are in a process of subject formation.

inadequate to comprehend the *visuality* of the minorities when online visual media spaces have been proliferating incessantly. From Facebook to YouTube, more than ever before, the everyday lives of millions of people in the 21st century is bombarded with images and screens. Furthermore, the relationship between people and the visual media seems to be changing. Unlike in the past, audiences do not just consume *but* are “produsage” (Bruns, 2008) who also represent themselves visually via various user-led media platforms. Consequently, this ubiquity of visual and user-led media content, enabled by online spaces, is likely to affect the way in which the domain of visuality operates, including the *visuality of Muslimness*.

This chapter thus turns to the terrain of self-produced visual representations of Thai Muslims in new media spaces. It aims to explore in what way online spaces and new media practices are employed by Muslim minorities while the *visuality of Muslimness*, as argued in the previous chapter, positions them as *inferior Others within*. However, as discussions above suggest about an interplay between representation between mainstream media and emerging new media space, a fresh theoretical tool is much needed in order to shed light on this complex phenomenon. Therefore, I shall draw in new media theories and the concept of visual culture from Chapter Two and the Thai cultural studies and historical background from Chapter One as a tool to analyse self-produced audio-visual texts by Thai Muslims.

This chapter consists of two parts. In this first part, *halal media* will be examined. I will first lay the foundation in understanding *halal media* by attempting to locate *halal media* in the Thai media sphere and other socio-cultural and political contexts. Then I shall move to a discussion on how *halal media* is developed. This is followed by sections which examine what constitutes *halal media* and how this Islamic media concept is employed by Muslims in Bangkok and Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces in order to re-construct “good Muslims”. In the second part, I examine the self-representation of Thai Muslims in videos with references to Islamic principles on YouTube that will illustrate themes of content

found in videos produced by Thai Muslims. It is followed by discussions on *halal media* and a re-construction of “good Muslims”.

In the next sections I shall examine one of the most striking features of Muslim-produced YouTube videos: *halal media*. First of all, it should be noted that in Islam, *halal*²⁹ means “to be allowed or permissible”. This religious principle is usually applied to food products to inform Muslims whether they are allowed or not to consume them. However, now we can see the emergence of audio-visual texts called *halal media* on YouTube. This emerging type of “religious” audio-visual text poses the question: what is at stake when Muslim minorities employ YouTube to create *halal media* and audio-visual media that follows Islamic principles? In order to further explore *halal media*, the theoretical frameworks noted above, coupled with historical background in Thai culture and Thai media discussed in Chapter Two, will be drawn into the analysis.

Representing “pious Muslims” as “good Muslims” in online visual spaces

Interviews with Muslim media producers conducted during my fieldwork in Thailand suggest that there has been an effort by Muslims in Thailand, especially in Bangkok, to carving out a media space in order to represent themselves more accurately. Educated Thai Muslims in Bangkok who have access to resources and social connections are enthusiastic in *participating* in public spaces. New media scholars (Burgess, 2008; Jenkins, 2006) argue that online spaces bring about a participatory culture and therefore, they enable a “bottom up” method of negotiating with power, be it political or corporate. Emerging *halal media* produced by Thai

²⁹ *Halal* (allowed) and *haram* (not allowed) are the two Islamic principles which are employed to indicate what Muslims are allowed or not allowed to do. While *halal/haram* is a binary concept that guides Muslims’ way of life, permissibility/impermissibility in Islam can be elaborated into categories. Curtis (2013) explains in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Islamic Studies* that human activities are rated and then organised into the following scale 1. *wajib* – this refers to obligations require all Muslims to do (e.g. prayer, fasting). If they fail to do, they will be punished. 2. *mandub* – this term refers to activities that are recommended but not required (e.g. extra prayer, showing kindness for people in need). If Muslims do these recommended activities, they will be blessed by God. 3. *mubah* – this term refers to neutral activities. Muslims won’t be either blessed by God or punished for not performing it. These are activities that are not involved with God’s judgement 4. *makruh* refers to activities which are discouraged while *not* punishable and completely forbidden. However, the interpretation of *makruh* varies between different schools of Islam (e.g. swearing) 5. *harom* – it refers to activities which are sinful and Muslims committing these acts will be punished (e.g. eating pork and drinking alcohol, pre-marital sex and crime). The opposite of *harom* is *halal* which means permissible (Curtis, 2013).

Muslims seems to fulfill this role and, as a result, besides mosques, Muslim *public* spaces where daily prayers (*salat*) and Friday sermons (*khutbah*) take place, television and emerging new online spaces appear to be another *public* space where Thai Muslims make themselves *visible*. This demonstrates attempts by Thai Muslims to use all available means for communication to participate in the *public space* of “Thainess”.

In fact, the participation of Bangkok Muslims in the Thai media sphere is not a new phenomenon. Even before the proliferation of new media outlets such as the Internet and satellite television, and before the discourse of *halal media* emerged, there was great effort by Muslim media producers to participate in the Thai public sphere, interestingly, carried out through cooperation with the Thai government. This is suggested by an interview with Arun³⁰ who runs a YouTube channel, *Institute of Islamic Studies Thailand*³¹, and says that his media production house, which provides knowledge on Islam, has been allocated late-night time slots from the government-run National Broadcasting Television (NBT) during *Ramadan* (fasting period) for more than ten years. This suggests that the Thai state actually recognises Islam and Muslims as part of the nation, even though Muslim producers merely deserve airtime during the annual holy month of *Ramadan*.



³⁰ Personal interview in Bangkok, July 2015

³¹ <https://www.youtube.com/user/ISLAMICSTUDIESTH/videos>

Figure 1: an Islamic teacher doing summon on *Institute of Islamic Studies Thailand* YouTube channel. This programme was broadcast on both the government channel, National Broadcasting Television (NBT) and on YouTube. This is a typical visual when Muslims appear on mainstream television during special occasions.

With the affordability of new media spaces such as YouTube, Muslim media producers are able to increase their visibility and Thai Muslims have begun to exploit new media spaces to pursue their mission in creating Muslim media for Muslims or people who are interested in Islam. Along with the special *Ramadan* programme on mainstream television in 2013, Arun began running his own YouTube channel by using part of the apartment building he owns as an office and a studio. Having his channel on YouTube also enables his Islamic organisation to produce and broadcast more videos. Arun epitomises the educated middle class Muslims in Bangkok who give up their “worldly” professions and devote their lives to the propagation of Islam in the media. This also shows that Muslim media producers see YouTube as an opportunity to get their message and Islamic principles across to a wider audience.

While Arun’s channel is aimed at using YouTube to attract a larger and broader audience, *White Channel*, another Muslim-run media (which will be discussed at length in subsequent sections), is more ambitious in creating media outlets which not only aim to propagate Islam but also apply Islamic principles to the way they produce their content and run the channel. *White Channel* programmes are broadcast both on satellite television and the Internet, and began using YouTube in 2012. With its slogan *sathanee khwan dee yee sip see chua mong*³² (trans. A station for good deeds running 24 hours), the station adheres to Islamic principles when producing content and aims to *sang-san sangkom nai rup-baep mai*³³ (trans. to create a new type of society). Similar to Arun, *White Channel*’s staff consist of university-educated and middle class Muslims (ranging from teens to media professionals in their 40s) who strongly believe that *Muslim media* are able to create “a new type of society” and help solve problems in Thailand. Therefore, they are enthusiastic about producing and using visual

³² สถานีความดี 24 ชั่วโมง

³³ สร้างสรรค์สังคมในรูปแบบใหม่

media in many outlets to propagate Islam both for Muslims and to create an understanding of Islam for non-Muslims.



Figure 2: White Channel YouTube page during *Ramadan* 2017 with its slogan *sathanee khwan dee yee sip see chua mong* (trans. A station for good deeds running 24 hours)

Mumintr³⁴, a station manager at *White Channel* states that even though they are using more social media platforms, such as YouTube and Facebook, they still keep broadcasting on satellite television because it can reach people who live in far-flung areas and who do not necessarily have access to the Internet, especially Muslims in the three conflict-stricken southern provinces. This ambitious move by *White Channel* subscribes to the idea that Muslim media producers in Bangkok have adjusted themselves to the new media landscape and are able to carve out a space offered by new media to propagate their Islamic principles to create “good Muslims” all over Thailand.

Nonetheless, what marks the difference between *White Channel* and other Muslim-run media is the way *White Channel* adopt popular media forms that can be found on Thai mainstream television. Instead of merely showing an *ulama* sitting in front of a camera conducting a sermon, *White Channel* remediates other audio-visual genres, ranging from music videos, animation, television drama, chat shows and cooking shows. This is where *halal* intersects with popular and entertainment visual forms of media. While they employ these entertainment-related audio-visual forms as a tool to propagate Islam, *halal* principles are still

³⁴ personal interview in June 2015

indispensable. This results in an emerging hybrid form of *halal media*: *halal* short films, *halal* television drama, animation and *nasheed* videos (or *NV*, rather than *MV* or music video with popular music) in the spaces of YouTube, satellite TV and Internet TV. While adopting popular audio-visual forms in their online spaces, *haram* elements of these forms, which are common in mainstream media, are not permitted. Therefore, these hybrid audio-visual forms have become an “alternative” to other audio-visual material in the mainstream media.



Figure 3: White Channel animation about Islamic principle



Figure 4: White Channel's cooking show



Figure 5: White Channel's *nasheed* video (nv)

The term *halal media*, which occurs several times in this chapter, appears to play a central role in the self-representation of Thai Muslims. However, it prompts questions such as what is *halal*, and what is it for Muslims in Thailand to embrace *halal* as a way of life within “Thainess”? This needs explanation in order to lay a solid foundation before the analysis of *halal media* itself.

Making audio-visual media “halal-able”

The efforts of Muslims in Thailand to carve out new, visually mediated spaces have amounted to the creation of *halal media* or *sue halal*³⁵ (*sue* in Thai means media), a new terminology which even puzzles some Thai Muslims themselves. During my fieldwork, some Muslim interviewees responded with such questions as these: is there such a thing as *halal media* or *sue halal*? is it too strict; and will this create an even more divisive society between Buddhists and Muslim minorities? Even though these questions are important and deserve further examination, it is beyond the scope of this research to answer these questions. What I

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am more interested in is how *halal media* as a phenomenon, and more specifically *halal visuals*, came into existence in the context of Thailand, a so-called Buddhist country?



Figure 6: Thai halal logo (<http://www.halalscience.org/service/>งานรับรองฮาลาล)

Previously, in Thailand, the word *halal* would merely conjure up food products which were branded as *halal* with the approval of the Halal Standard Institute of Thailand, an organisation established in 1986. The impetus behind the establishment of this institute is because a particular Thai factory was poised to export chicken to Kuwait. *Halal*, in the case of Thailand's export business, is therefore a certificate for food products to be sold to Muslim customers but made in Thailand, a non-Muslim country. It ensures that food products imported from Thailand meet *halal* standards e.g. a proper process for killing poultry and appropriate levels of sanitation (Halal Standard Institute of Thailand, 2017). Muslims in Thailand will seek the *halal* logo in order for them to consume products that meet *halal* standards. This shows that the *halal* logo is a visual reference for Islam that is used mainly for religious and business purposes. Nonetheless, nowadays the boundary of *halal* in everyday practices among Thai Muslims appears to be pushed forward, in that it now covers a broader area of Thai Muslims' way of life while *Muslimness* has become more visible in public spaces in Thailand.

The discourse of making *Muslimness* (with all kinds of religious elements and references, visual and aural) visible in the Thai public domain is a relatively new phenomenon. In the past, it was not easy to distinguish Buddhists and Muslims in Thailand, especially in provinces where Buddhists were a majority. Muslim visual references become more visible both in Thai urban and rural areas and these social codes were employed as a marker to

distinguish Muslims from Buddhists (Gilquin, 2005; Horstmann, 2007; Wanni, 2010). Gilquin (2005) argues that Islamic visual references and observances became more visible publicly in Thailand in the past few decades partly due to a “re-appropriation of Islam” (p.xvi) among Thai Muslims when confronting “modernity”, and changes in the socio-political and economic environments in Thailand (Gilquin, 2005).

Gilquin (2005) explains that various global and Thai socio-cultural and political contexts could all have possibly contributed to this re-appropriation of Thai Muslim identity. These include the economic boom during the 1980s and the growing middle class, the urbanisation and migration of rural Muslims to the cities, the growing influence of Muslim elites who were educated in the Middle East, and the economic crisis of 1997 and globalization. As suggested in the previous two chapters, Muslims are being marginalised in the Thai secular and capitalist society and are considered to be inferior others within the concept of “Thainess”. This change in representing themselves to the public by using Islamic visual references as symbols of “pious Muslims” attests to the re-assertion of Islam for their identity. One of the most distinctive ramifications of this shift is “clear and exaggerated distinctions of what is permitted (*halal*) and what is not (*haram*)” (Gilquin, 2005, p.104) which has resulted in “dogmatic inflexibility” (Gilquin, 2005, p.105). Practices among Thai Muslims that used to be tolerated have become forbidden according to Islamic sacred texts and these changes play a crucial role in their visibility in the Thai public space.

With this shift in the discourse of Thai Muslims, everything seems to be *halal-able*. Not only are headscarves, skullcaps, beards or even Arab-style clothes more prevalent in the Thai public space, but activities and establishments that have never been thought of having to be *halal* before have become *halal-able*. *Halal* has been employed for products and services other than just food; *halal* hotels, *halal* films, *halal* music and even a *halal* milk bar. This sheds light on how a line between the *Muslim self* and “Thainess” as its Other has been re-drawn and the identity of Muslims has been re-appropriated over time.

Taking this context into account, the emergence of *halal media* cannot be treated as a discrete religious phenomenon. I would rather argue that Muslim visibility, which is more prevalent in public spaces than ever before, is partly due to the current of the Thai Muslim's affirmation of Islam into their identity, and emerging online spaces. Now, in online spaces, the media is made *halal-able* as a result of this re-appropriation. Religious markers expressed via Muslim-styled clothes and everyday consumption suggests their re-assertion of Islam and these visual codes, as a symbol of their piety, visually represent "good Muslims".

However, so far, one crucial question still persists: on what basis does *White Channel* make their visual media *halal*? The next two sections examine *White Channel*, the creator of *halal media* and *halal media* codes.

White Channel and the halalisation process in online visual spaces

If the visibility of *halal* activities and observances in public is the result of the *re-appropriation* of Muslim identity³⁶ as a minority within the Thai state, *media* which is now made *halal-able*, is deemed to be "online disruptive spaces" (Lindgren, 2013) which is relational to other physical (actual public spaces) and mediated spaces such as the Thai mass media and the Internet. Consequently, the production of *halal* entertainment in audio-visual form has to deal extensively with *a process* of negotiating with mainstream media practices. *Halal media* is thus perceived as *a process* rather than *a product* due to the constant interaction between mainstream visual media practices and Islamic principles. *Halal media* producers do not deny the use of new technology such as YouTube, popular media and aesthetic forms. Rather, *halal media* in this *disruptive online visual space* makes use of these existing media forms and production techniques and so *appropriates* them to Islam. By doing so, from *halal media*

³⁶ Gilquin (2005) argues that the visibility of Muslims in the public domain is a relatively new phenomenon in Thailand. Islam visual references and observances became more visible in the past decades partly due to the "re-appropriation of Islam (p.xvi)" when confronting "modernity" (Gilquin, 2005)

content and visual codes to funding and workplace rules, the interpretation of the two sacred texts, the *koran* and *hadith*, is in every depth and breadth of this process of media *halalisation*.

Founded in 2001, *White Channel* functions as a production house providing content for multi-media platforms³⁷ including a YouTube channel, as its name - *sathanee khwam dee yee sip see chuamong* (trans. 24-hour television of good deeds) - indicates, it spearheaded *halal* visual practice, providing “good” content on several online media platforms and its movement (which will be illustrated in the next section) also influences many Muslim media producers in the three southern border provinces. Based in Bangkok, the channel produces content in various forms for its satellite television, Internet television (<http://whitechannel.tv>) and YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/WhiteChannel24H>). While other Muslim-run channels³⁸ focus mainly on propagating Islamic principles to their audience by using *ulama*, be it Muslims or non-Muslims, *White Channel* focuses on creating *halal media* as an ambitious project in *re-defining the visibility of Muslimness* within the Thai state, and *halal media*, as a hybrid form of entertainment and religious content, seems to be successful in attracting an audience. This makes *White Channel* the most popular Thai Muslim YouTube channel, with 43,418 subscribers and 15,670,155 views.

The main source of income for operating the channel comes from financial donations or *zogat*, since *White Channel* is considered a sort of ‘religious work’ so donating money to an organisation conducting religious activity is required by Islam. *White Channel* states on its website (<http://whitechannel.tv>) that it began with a donation of 300,000 Thai baht (approximately £6,700) from the audience of the *Islam in Thailand* radio station. It claims that the channel relies on “people’s money” and not on the Thai government, Arab countries or any corporations. During *Ramadan*, a holy period for Muslims, *White Channel* runs a special live television programme to raise money for the channel. Apart from *zogat*, part of its income is

³⁷ Its main website is <http://whitechannel.tv>. The website contains both audio-visual content and texts and on its front page, it also provides links to its YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Line.

³⁸ Besides *White Channel*, *Yateem TV* (<https://www.youtube.com/user/YateemTV1433/featured>) is another popular Muslim-run YouTube channel with 14,790 subscribers and 3,984,504 views. However, *Yateem TV* still relies on the traditional way of presentation, Islamic teachers doing sermons or discussing religious matters in front of a camera.

from television adverts but only *halal* products are accepted. Consequently, besides *halal* content, the funding of the channel is also *halal*.

As a result, *White Channel* is the first Muslim television in Thailand that claims to produce *media* which meets “*halal* standards” for a Muslim audience. In order to regulate *halal media* practices, the channel has a well-established *shariah* board (consisting of *ulama* or Islamic scholars) supervising and regulating its visual and audio elements. The *shariah* board, executive board and heads of production units work together to ensure that the content meet *halal* standards before being broadcast. Various issues pertaining to *haram* (to be forbidden) and *halal* (to be allowed) activities have been central to discussions and concerns among crew members. As a result, what is to be seen (and not to be seen) and what is to be heard (and what is not to be heard) on *White Channel* has been through a rigorous vetting process.

So far, online visual spaces have enabled the practice of *halal media* which Thai Muslims as “Others within” employ to re-define the *visuality of Muslimness*. Through new sets of rules, ranging from the *shariah* board supervising *halal* visual codes to *halal* funding, mainstream visual media forms are being *appropriated* by Muslim others. It is important to note that neither did this space emerge out of the government and mainstream domain but from support from within the Thai Muslim community. As a result, this emerging Muslim public space resonates with Gilquin (2005)’s argument on the re-appropriation of Thai Muslims by *re-asserting* Islam into their identity while still perceiving themselves as Thai citizens. *Halal media* and the *online spaces* can also be seen as an interplay between Thai Muslims and globalisation and the global media like YouTube which enable Thai Muslims to remediate mainstream media and create innovative visual forms. The emergence of *halal media* thus also echoes Nakamura (2008)’s concept of “remediation” which argues that a discontinuity of image production and consumption (e.g. from television to YouTube/from analog to digital/from mass-produced to self-produced media) paves ways for *remediating* existing genres into a newer media space. This remediation process, Nakamura (2008) argues, can

possibly result in the identity construction of social minorities. In this research, through the remediation of cinema, music videos and other television formats in YouTube, the *re-construction* of “good Muslims” seems prominent. Unlike “good Muslims” found in Thai mainstream visual media (discussed in Chapter Three and Four) whose religious markers are conflated with backwardness who have to be “civilised” by Buddhist Thais, the findings above suggest that “pious Muslims” as “good Muslims” in *halal media* embrace Islam as a way of life. Therefore, the practice of remediation offers different representations of what it means to be a “good Muslim” in this emerging online discursive space.

To delve further into the re-appropriation of Thai Muslims through *halal media*, the next two sections will examine the codes of *halal media* and everyday practices of Muslim media producers from data I collected during fieldwork.

Halal visual codes in an online space: negotiating mainstream visual media to construct “good Muslims”

Since television broadcasting and YouTube videos are examples of “modern” communication technology, the practice of *halal media* has to rely on principles in the *Koran*, the central religious text of Islam which Muslims believe to be a revelation from God, and *hadith*, a collection of traditions containing sayings of the prophet Muhammad which, with accounts of his daily practice or *sunna*, constitute the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the *Koran*. If the *Koran* and *hadith* do not contain principles to enable producers to cope with audio-visual texts and online media, a crucial question this section poses is how to make audio-visual media *halal*?

As noted in Chapter Two, the Thai broadcasting system has been extensively controlled by the state and by large corporations. Understanding the *halalisation* of online spaces pertains to the ways *White Channel* positions itself within the larger context of the Thai mainstream media. Against the backdrop of the Thai mainstream media, which is secular,

profit-oriented and state-controlled, *White Channel* was established under the principles of Islam. While fusing Islamic principles into the media, *White Channel* is trying to differentiate itself from the mainstream media in various ways. From sources of income, distribution channels, organisational management and audio-visual codes, *halal media* has positioned itself as “good media” which aims to create a better society. *Halal* has been extensively used to legitimise *White Channel* as “good media” within Thai society. Interviewing *White Channel* staff at several levels, including station manager³⁹, drama director⁴⁰, cameraman⁴¹ and production manager⁴², concerning the codes of conduct of *halal media*, I summarise what constitutes *halal media* as follows:

Firstly, only *halal* money is acceptable where sources of its income include donations or *zawat* and advertising. During my fieldwork during *Ramadan* 2015, while I was observing activities at the channel, I found that some audiences, especially female, came to the station to donate *zawat* money during this holy period. There was also a special live programme on their Internet TV running every day during *Ramadan* to raise money for the channel. Besides *zawat*, part of the income for running the station derives from advertising, but the products and services concerned have to be *halal* only, some products being owned by *White Channel* itself. *White Channel* states clearly in its brochure that products that want to be advertised on *White Channel* must not be *haram* products and services such as alcohol and banking or *sin-kha bap*⁴³ (trans. sinful products). As a result, *White Channel* creates their own “business model” in running the channel, which relies solely on advertising and *zawat* money.

Moreover, all the content that will be broadcast on the channel has to go through a *halal* audio-visual quality check. *White Channel* has a *shariah* board which consists of an *ulama* overseeing the content of the channel, and the board functions as a religious authority who can judge what is *halal* and *haram*. Before broadcasting, all videos have to be approved by the

³⁹ Personal interviewed in June in Bangkok

⁴⁰ Personal interviewed in July in Bangkok

⁴¹ Personal interviewed in June in Bangkok

⁴² Personal interviewed in June in Bangkok

⁴³ สิ้นค้าบาป

board, which suggests that televisual media such as television and YouTube run by *White Channel* has been Islamicised and tied to religious authorities while Thai mainstream television channels are secular and profit-oriented. This results in the third aspect, which involves audio-visual codes relating to forbidden content on the channel.

The third element of *halal media* is that no *haram* activities are allowed to be broadcast on *White Channel*. The first and major *haram* activity is music. *White Channel* believes that music, especially popular music that deals with romance, is *haram* because listeners can be in a state of *long ra ruang* (trans. intemperance)⁴⁴ which could cause “backsliding” from faithfulness to God. As a result, music is not allowed. However, since music is an indispensable component of audio-visual media, *White Channel* opts to use *anasheed* or *acapella* type of music without any musical instruments and containing religion-related lyrics, which is considered *halal*. The channel commissions *Baiyinun*, an *anasheed* band, to compose and produce the music, which can go with all kinds of their television programmes. Besides music, the second forbidden conduct is revealing the male and female body, which derives from an interpretation of the Islamic teaching of *fitnah*⁴⁵ or temptation. *White Channel* believes that revealing images of the male and female body shown on screen can instigate *fitna* that can possibly result in *khwa-m-pan-puan*⁴⁶ (trans. unrest or disorder). Therefore, all characters and presenters of the channel have to adhere to Islamic-style modest clothing and *awrah*⁴⁷ which requires Muslims to conceal their intimate parts. While both male and female bodies such as pin-ups have long been used in mainstream media to satisfy the gaze of the audience, this is forbidden on *White Channel*, especially the female body. To avoid *fitna* in

⁴⁴ Interviewees use the word *long ra ruang* (หลงระเริง) when referring to music and musical instruments that distract from faithfulness to God. Muslims should realise that they are living in a *dunya* world which is temporal as opposed to *akhriyah*, which is eternal and spiritual.

⁴⁵ Oxford Islamic Studies Online <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e665> translate *fitnah* as “Trial or testing, temptation; by extension, treachery, persecution, seduction, enchantment, or disorder resulting from these things. A hadith states that the greatest fitnah for men is women.”

⁴⁶ ความปั่นป่วน

⁴⁷ The exact definition of *awrah* (เอาเราะห์) varies from school to school of Islamic thought. In the case of *White Channel* and other Thai Muslim interviewees, the male has to conceal his body from the navel to the knees, while for females, the only two parts that can be revealed are the face and palms.

females, the *shariah* board has declared that females are not allowed to be shown on the channel at all except for girls who have not reached the age of puberty. The last aspect of forbidden visuals includes all activities that are *haram* according to Islam such as drinking alcohol, gambling, swearing and any activity involving paying or receiving interest.

Furthermore, *White Channel* does not rely on *all* mainstream media practices. Popular forms of audio-visual content such as television drama, animation and chat shows are adopted as tools to deliver Islamic teaching. However, these forms of content have been *appropriated* since it positions itself as *halal media* and hence propagating an Islamic way of life is at the forefront, and thus the channel terms this type of content *halal entertainment*. This suggests that *White Channel* selectively adopts certain aspects of the mainstream media appropriate to them as *halal* practice. It should be noted that having Islamic channel and Islamic TV programmes is not new to Thailand. As noted in the previous section, there been a few Muslim-run production companies who had air time on the government-run National Broadcasting Television (NBT) channel during *Ramadan*, however, most of the shows involve summons by *ulama* or religious scholars. On the contrary, *White Channel* provides *halal* entertainment while distancing itself from the government channels.

Lastly, the workplace environment of *White Channel* is also *halal*, being almost a “male-only business” with only men allowed to work at the channel. This is to avoid a tendency to *sina* which means to have sexual intercourse with a woman to whom one is not married.⁴⁸ However, there are Muslim women taking part in running the channel, and some women are commissioned to do script writing and create animation from their homes.

The interviews I conducted during fieldwork suggest an appropriation of audio-visual media to Islam by going back to the *Koran* and *hadith* to decide whether or not particular sights and sounds are *halal*. Islamic teachings and the Arabic terms, *halal*, *haram*, *zagal*, *awroh*, *fitnah*, *sina* have been employed by these media producers to legitimise their *halal*

⁴⁸ Separation between male and female can be seen in other Muslim public spaces e.g. in schools and mosques.

media as “good media”. This *re-assertion* of Islam to the Thai Muslim identity is suggested by an incorporation of these Islamic principles to the media, and through these Arabic terms, audio-visual media are made *halal-able*. *Halal media* principles, as stipulated by the *shariah* board, do not only include *halal* audio-visual codes which do not allow women, *haram* activities and music on their screen, but also these codes of conduct include *halal* funding and a *halal* work environment. Yet again, the findings suggest that through the active participation of these Muslim media producers and the *remediation* of mainstream visual genres in online *halal media*, the notion of a “good Muslim” (and also “good media”) is re-defined.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that the notion of *halal media* is not accepted by all Muslims. By imposing these *halal media* visual codes and religious rules, *White Channel* and its *shariah* board receive some negative reactions, and there is an ongoing debate between Islamic teachers regarding the interpretation of the sacred texts in order to legitimise *halal media*.⁴⁹ While discussions on theological interpretation are beyond the scope of this research, the fact that *White Channel* is successful while “swimming against the tide” in this competitive media business, and that nowadays audiences have so many choices to watch⁵⁰ is pertinent to this research.

Nonetheless, when a *re-appropriation* of Thai Muslims in the form of *halal media* intersects with popular forms of audio-visual texts, it appears that keeping a balance between adhering to *halal media* principles and making *halal* drama entertaining to watch is crucial. This suggests that this *online space* is also located within “the matrix of power” (Nakamura, 2008, p.11) where the media is not only shaped by socio-political and cultural factors but also economic ones. The media is a competitive business and nowadays audiences including Thai

⁴⁹ For example, *Ammen Lona*, an Islamic teacher in Bangkok, criticises *White Channel* for making movies or drama about Islam and the Prophet. On *Saeed Praduyard*, a Muslim YouTube channel, Ammen says he does not agree with *Shiek Ridor*, a member of the *shariah* board of *White Channel*, about the idea of using drama and non-Muslim actors (non-believers are called *kafir*) as a means to propagate Islam. He does not believe that there’s such a thing as *halal entertainment*. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5AXQYaCenko&t=383s>)

⁵⁰ Besides 5 mainstream television channels, in 2014, the newly-introduced digital television (under regulations of NTBC) has brought about 48 more channels to Thai television screens. These new channels are still largely occupied by existing media corporations and entertainment is ranked as one of the most popular types of programme (https://broadcast.nbt.go.th/bcj/2560/doc/2560_01_1.pdf).

Muslims have so many choices of content to choose from. Even though *White Channel* stresses that they do not employ a corporate media model in the way they run the channel and produce content, it is inevitable they aspire to make their content *appealing* to the audience in order for them to “compete” with other media. Moreover, by trying to convince Thai Muslims to consume *halal media* rather than mainstream media, especially television drama which is, from *White Channel*’s vantage point, full of *haram* activities, inevitably, the channel has to use the Thai mainstream media as “the Other” in order to construct its “own Self”. This has led to an on-going process in negotiation within a hybrid form of *halal entertainment*. The next section expands on how this process is being negotiated by the many parties involved in the production process.

“Good visual media” vs “halal media”: the interplay between aesthetic appeal and halal media codes

The process of regulating *halal* audio-visual content does not always run smoothly. When *halal media* as interpreted by *White Channel* intersects with professional media standards and aesthetic appeal⁵¹, discrepancies appear that need to be resolved. *White Channel* states that it is committed to high-quality media production, so the channel thus needs professionals who are experience or educated in the field. Many *White Channel* production staff, from the director to the cameraman, are trained in mainstream institutions and have experience in working with mainstream media before joining the channel. On the one hand, these staff are committed to professional standards when it comes to producing videos, while on the other, they have to ensure that these videos meet *halal media* requirements. As a result, discrepancies sometimes occur and this shed light on what it means to be “good media”.

⁵¹ *White Channel* states in its brochure (which I collected during my fieldwork) that besides being *halal media*, they are committed to high standards regarding audio-visual production.

During my visit to *White Channel*, I interviewed Ibrahim⁵², one of cameramen, who used to work for a mainstream production house before moving to the channel. In sharing his experience of working with the channel, he used the following event as an example. On one occasion, he filmed footage of people walking along a street to be part of a documentary. A woman appeared walking among the crowd and Ibrahim thought it would be allowed for the sake of authenticity. However, the *shariah* board told him to delete the shot from the sequence because one of the principles of *halal media* is not to show women on screen. Whenever discrepancies occur regarding the application of Islam in visual media, such as in this example, video production crews can turn to the *shariah* board to give guidance and a final decision. The *shariah* will consult Islamic texts relating to the particular issue and arrive at a decision as to whether the particular visual practice is *halal* or not.



Figure 7: In this *White Channel*'s new package, the faces of two women in the shot are blurred (at the bottom right).

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fu3kK8P-eL8>)

White Drama, one section of the channel, also faces the challenge of balancing between *halal media* principles and visual aesthetics. Mumintr⁵³, a station manager, says that nowadays people spend time watching Thai soap operas and Korean drama series which are full of *haram* activities. As a result, the channel wants to offer an “alternative drama” by

⁵² Personal interview in June 2015 in Bangkok

⁵³ Personal interview in July 2015 in Bangkok

incorporating *halal media* practices with content pertaining to Islamic principles. Like other programmes in the channel, before it can be broadcast, it has to be approved by the *shariah* board. In order to further explore deeper into this online space, this next section examines how the entertainment genre *drama* is *halalised*.

Ahmud⁵⁴ the director of *White Drama* plays an important role in making television drama *halal-able*. He is a university-educated Muslim from Bangkok who is interested in *halal media* and has a degree in drama from Thammasat University, one of the most prestigious universities in Thailand. Like other *White Channel* staff who turned their back on “the mainstream” and joined the channel to propagate Islam, Ahmud initially found it contradictory to apply his knowledge in dramatic art to *halal media*. He says that to produce television drama with *White Channel* is challenging since he has to give up some practices that “ordinary” drama producers follow, including showing females in drama series.

Working under the *sharia* board sometimes creates disagreements and Ahmud has to balance between making *halal* television drama while simultaneously making it appealing to the audience through audio-visual aesthetics. Nevertheless, he follows the rules of Islam as interpreted by the board strictly. For example, during the production period of the drama series *lakhon son khon* (trans. let drama teach us) about fasting⁵⁵, a discussion took place between Ahmud and the *shariah* board as to whether the body of a man wearing a black t-shirt but soaked in water, thus defining the shape of his body while floating in a swimming pool, should be revealed to the audience or not. Ahmud said that during the meeting the question of whether this kind of visual could possibly inspire *fitna* (temptation, which is *haram*) for a female audience was raised. In this case, where this type of visual could potentially cause *fitna* among the audience and thus be *haram*, the board chose to edit this shot from the scene. However, in order to retain the scene, which was deemed necessary to

⁵⁴ Personal interview in July 2015 in Bangkok

⁵⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izz_gnv4SKs

the storyline, they decided to pixelate an area of the man's chest while he is swimming (see figure 8).

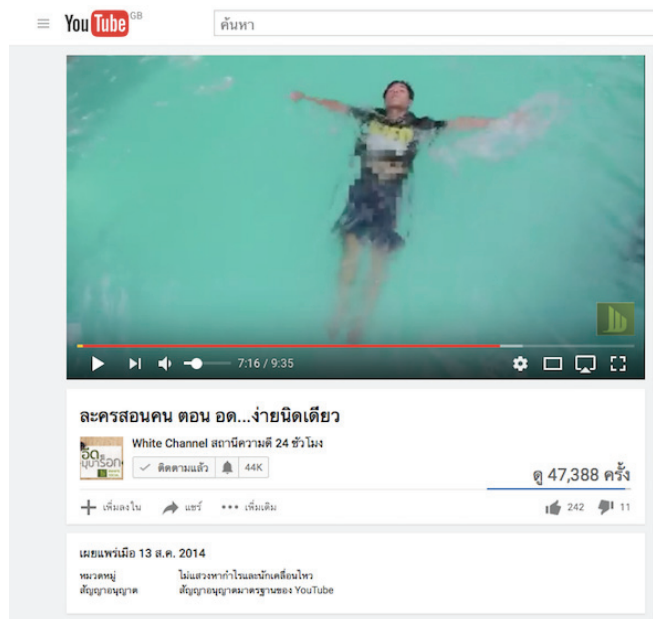


Figure 7: Pixelated body of a character in *lakhon son khon*.

This demonstrates the negotiations necessary to make the drama *halal*, and yet remain aesthetically appealing to the audience. This is especially crucial when *White Channel* aims to use this hybrid media form to propagate Islam. Moreover, as the station's manager clearly states, *White Channel* wants to use *halal drama* as a response to the mainstream Thai media which contains *haram* activities and thus is not suitable for a Muslim audience.

The findings show that the *re-construction* of “good Muslims” through *halal media* rests on *remediating* popular audio-visual forms in mainstream media in an online discursive space. This suggests that the *visuality of Muslimness* is *contested* in the public realm. However, through this process of *remediation*, the profit-driven Thai mainstream media, which also represents mainstream Thai culture, has to be negotiated. This negotiation is done at all levels of *White Channel's* media productions: the station manager who has to negotiate with *mainstream media* forms because he wants to use their audio-visual formats to propagate Islam; the director who has to negotiate with his *mainstream knowledge* in television drama production acquired from university; the cameraman who has to negotiate with his experience

in shooting that he gained from his previous *mainstream production house*. These negotiations, through active participation in online visual spaces, bring about an ambivalent attitude towards the mainstream media and while these mainstream Thai practices are appealing, they also have to be *re-defined* to fit in with the concept of a “good Muslim”.

Negotiating the “visuality of Muslimness” through halal media: the re-appropriation of “good Muslims” in online spaces

As noted earlier, the existence of *halal media* also suggests a process of *re-appropriation* of Thai Muslim identity (Gilquin, 2005) to be visible and remediation (Nakamura, 2008) of mainstream visual forms. *Halal media*, which is constructed through an interpretation of Islamic sacred texts and a negotiation with mainstream media, becomes a space where Islam is *re-affirmed* in the Thai Muslim identity. However, by saying that Thai Muslims are re-appropriating their identity as Thai Muslims is not entirely correct. What is really being negotiated in this discursive online *space*?

Based on the findings in preceding sections, I argue that the definition of “good Muslim” is being *re-defined* in visual terms. While practicing *halal media* through a remediation of audio-visual genres in online spaces, Muslim minorities simultaneously *negotiate* the social codes of “good Muslims” in the Thai state, which is represented in mainstream Thai visual media (see also Chapters Three and Four). *Halal media* codes established by *White Channel’s shariah* board give clear evidence to support this argument. By appropriating popular media forms to Islamic principles to create online *halal media*, “the media of good deeds” and “the media that will create a better society”, Thai Muslims show that by embracing Islamic principles as a way of life, they can be “good Muslims” and “civilised”. This is in contrast to the ideology of “Thainess” that constitutes “good Muslims” as docile, backward and inferior and who have to be “civilised” or have to be “saved” from “bad Muslims” by Buddhist Thais.

Negotiating “good Muslims” in public space (thee satharana): halal media as a relational public visual space on YouTube

Findings from analyses of *White Channel* and *halal media*, *halal entertainment* and *halal drama* illustrate an effort by Thai Muslims to *remediate* popular and entertainment audio-visual forms. By doing so, they appropriate mainstream audio-visual practices to Islamic principles. While the *visuality of Muslimness* explored in the previous chapters, which hinges on Thailand’s *internal colonialism*, is reproduced in the mainstream media for a “Thainess” gaze, *halal media* sheds light on the effort in negotiating with this *visuality*. I would argue that an interaction between online spaces, visual apparatus (e.g. camera), visual signs, active participation among Thai Muslims and online media audiences brings about the new “visual event”⁵⁶ (Mirzoeff, 1999) in the Thai public sphere. Against the backdrop of the *visuality of Muslimness* which prevails in mainstream spaces such as cinema and television (see Chapter Three and Four), the new visual event paves ways for a contestation of the mainstream visual codes of *Muslimness*. It enables Thai Muslims themselves to *redefine* what it means to be “good Muslims”. In a self-produced online media environment, rather than being “observed and recorded” by Bangkok Buddhist elites, Thai Muslims carry out this act of “observing and recording” Muslims themselves (through the use of a visual apparatus) and present themselves to the Thai online public space.

This change in the way *halal media* visualises Thai Muslims resonates with visual culture which argues that *visuality* is not static but always in a process of being “contested, debated and transformed” (Mirzoeff, 1999, p.4). In this light, the new visual event noted above enables Muslim minorities to transform themselves into “visual subjects”, rather than being

⁵⁶ Mirzoeff (1999) coins the term “visual event”, arguing that visual culture is not defined by medium but by the interaction between viewers and viewed. He describes the term visual event, saying “[W]hen I engage with visual apparatus, media and technology, I experience a visual event. By visual event, I mean an interaction of the visual sign, the technology that enables and sustains that sign, and the viewer.” (p.13) Regardless to types of visual medium, visual culture is interested in how “visual event” enables people in different periods visualise things around them.

merely *objects to-be-looked-at*. Through this subjectification process, they employ self-produced *halal media* as a visual tool to “contest” and “negotiate” the meaning of “good Muslims”. However, the space of negotiation itself seems to play a crucial role and thus should also be taken into account to enrich analysis of *visuality*, especially in a Thai context where public image is highly controlled.

While, there is no space for *halal media* on mainstream television, considered a mainstream public space, this Muslim media relies on non-mainstream platforms including YouTube to create online spaces that can be perceived as *a relational public space* to the mainstream one. This *relational public space* emerged out of online spaces and new media practices such as “participatory culture” (Jenkins, 2006) or “produsage” (Bruns, 2008) (see also Chapter Two). This online space makes a re-assertion of Islam as “good Muslim” *visible*. However, this public re-assertion of Islam also occurs along with representations of Thai Muslims in other mainstream and online public spaces (discussed in Chapters Three and Four). The negotiation of the *visuality of Muslimness*, which occurs in this relational online space, may thus suggest one of *nuances* of spaces of visual representation, which are in *a constant negotiation*. As the next sections and the following chapter will illustrate, the online visual spaces of YouTube are employed by several groups of Muslims for different purposes. Therefore, a binary between public and private in this context should be elaborated on to a different degree.

While the Thai mainstream media, a type of *thee satharana* (public space), is still subject to control by the “Thai regime of images” (Jackson, 1994) and a “dual system” of corporate-government control (Ubonrat, 1994) (see also Chapter Two) functions to underpin “Thainess”, YouTube is an emerging *relational public space* that enables *halal media* to exist. However, simultaneously, an online space such as YouTube may *not* be “online disruptive spaces” (Lindgren, 2013) when mainstream videos about Muslims are uploaded and the ideology of “Thainess” is reproduced (as discussed in Chapter Four). So far, this suggests that

when online public spaces intersect with different “the matrix of power” (Nakamura 2008; p.11), it results in a multiplicity of negotiations with power and several types of public spaces.

We can now see that YouTube has not brought about a single space but *multiple spaces* and *practices* within it, depending on how media practices intersect with “the matrix of power” (Nakamura, 2008, p.11). To delve further into the space(s) of *halal media*, I shall move on to an analysis of *halal media* practices pertaining to Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces.

Halal media and ongoing conflicts in the three southern border provinces

As noted in the previous sections, *halal media* is a visual discourse in online spaces that functions to negotiate with the *visuality of Muslimness*. This *visuality*, found in the mainstream media, *fixes* Thai Muslim minorities as backward *Others within* who have to be civilised or saved from “bad Muslims” by Buddhist Thais. On the other hand, these online spaces enable *halal media* to *remediate* mainstream popular audio-visual forms and *recreate* “good Muslims” in their own terms. In this regards, *halal media* are employed as a self-representation of “good Muslims” who submit to Allah and strictly follow two Islamic sacred texts, the *hadith* and the *Koran* as against the mainstream version of “good Muslims” who have to submit “Thainess”. *White Channel* is also involved in creating “good Muslims” specifically in the context of the conflict-ridden southern region of Thailand.

As for conflict in the southernmost provinces, *White Channel*, which is run by Thai Muslims in Bangkok, has a special television programme aimed at creating understanding about the Islamic way of life among Thai Muslims in the three provinces. Mumintr⁵⁷, a station manager at *White Channel*, says that the channel wants to “educate Muslims in the three southern border provinces” about the “correct” teachings of Islam, not the “distorted” ones.

⁵⁷ Personal interview in June 2015 in Bangkok

And most importantly, Mumintr says that he wants to use *halal media* to show them how to be “good Thai Muslims”.

Mumintr also states that it is crucial to educate Muslims in the southernmost regions, explaining that, “Muslims are the most concentrated in the southern border provinces. It will be unwise if we do not do *dakwah* (propagating the teachings of Islam) to Muslims in the south. Our satellite television can reach globally. The *White Channel* system, which is global, can reach a broad area. We want to do *dakwah* to them, to educate them with the correct teachings of Islam and this will help solve problems in the south”.⁵⁸ A video titled *taek-tang tae mai taek-yak*⁵⁹ (trans. different but not disunited), is a good example of *White Channel*’s efforts in using *halal media* and its space to create “good Muslims” in the border provinces who are united and, as the lyric says, *chuay sang santiphap* (trans. to help bring peace) in the region (see figure 8).

This *anasheed* video is the story of a Muslim man from the three southern border provinces who is studying in Bangkok but goes to the south to help *dakwah* work in Narathiwat. The lyrics are about his life when he first encounters his Bangkok friends who do not understand his language because he speaks Malay. However, this language difference is not a barrier, the lyrics are, “language is just a matter of words. But our hearts are connected. No matter what language we speak, we understand each other. We live together with affection. It does not matter what language you speak. Together, we will nurture *ummah* which is like *one body* forever.”⁶⁰ *Ummah* as “one body” or *ruean-rang diaw kan*⁶¹, in Thai, is a fundamental Islamic concept that ties Muslims from different backgrounds and ethnicities together. As a result, this implies that Muslims in Bangkok are also concerned about Malay-speaking Muslims in the three southern border provinces. This video conveys the message that

⁵⁸ “ภาคใต้มีมุสลิมเยอะที่สุด จะเป็นการเขลามากถ้ามาทำการดักวะให้ไปถึงเขา สื่อผ่านดาวเทียมมันไปได้ทั่วโลกนะครับ ยิ่งระบบของไวท์ชาแนลเป็นระบบโกลบอลก็จะขยายได้กว้าง ที่นี้เราเห็นว่าเราอยากจะทำอะไรก็ให้ความรู้กับเขาด้วย เป็นเรื่องของศาสนาที่ถูกต้อง ซึ่งเป็นเรื่องที่จะแก้ปัญหาทางภาคใต้ด้วย ใครละจะเป็นองค์กรที่ทำให้เขาเข้าถึงได้ง่าย ก็คือหน่วยงานที่เป็นสถาบันการศึกษารวมถึงสถาบันวิชาการอย่าง ศอบต เราก็ร่วมมือกับเขา เราก็มีการสร้างละครให้เขามาแล้วเรื่องหนึ่งให้กับ ศอบต นะครับ”

⁵⁹ แตกต่างแต่ไม่แตกแยก

⁶⁰ “โอ้เรื่องภาษาก็แค่คำพูด แต่ในหัวใจของเราผูกพัน พูดภาษาใดแต่เราก็ยังเข้าใจ เราอยู่ร่วมกันด้วยความรักใคร่ พูดภาษาใดก็ไม่สำคัญ พวกเราห่วงใยเรือนร่างเดียวกันตลอดไป”

⁶¹ เรือนร่างเดียวกัน

one should not let language differences allow “disunity” to happen among Muslims and let us all “good Muslims” nurture our *ummah* together.

To put this in the context of the ongoing violence in the three southernmost provinces, which is framed as Islamic radicalism (Harish, 2006; Wattana, 2006)⁶², this implies that some “bad Muslims” are trying to distort Islam and thus create violence while “good Muslims” should embrace the “correct” principles of Islam.



Figure 8: a *nasheed* video *taek-tang tae mai taek-yak* (trans. being different but united) made by *White Channel* in order to call all Muslims’ to cooperate in bringing about peace (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwzNdp7PGNw>).

White Channel’s ambitious move in providing “correct knowledge” about Islam for Muslims in the violence-ridden southern region to be “good Thai Muslims” is telling. This move suggests at least three things: firstly, by saying providing “correct knowledge about Islam” to Thai Muslims in the southernmost provinces, it suggests that there are “misunderstandings” or a “misinterpretation” of Islam among Muslims in the area. That is the reason why *dakwah* through *halal* media is needed.

Secondly, *White Channel*, run by Thai-speaking Muslims in Bangkok, has a responsibility to help solve ongoing conflicts in the three provinces. During my interview with

⁶² Wattana (2006) examined *Berjihad di Patani* (a leaflet distributed by insurgents) and argues that the goal of insurgency in the deep south of Thailand has shifted from “nationalism” to “Islamic radicalism”. Both external (globalisation) and internal factors play crucial roles. Harish (2006) argues that conflicts in the south of Thailand have been framed as a religious conflict between Buddhists and Muslims. By labelling violence in the south as “Islam,” it can contribute to the frightening image of Muslims all over Thailand.

Mumintr, he also says that the government and Thai military are actually in favour of the channel because it has tried to provide “correct” knowledge about Islam for Muslims in the three southern border provinces, which could help the government solve the ongoing violence in the south. Mumintr notes that *White Channel* used to produce a television drama for the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC), a government agency dealing with developing southern border provinces. Even though the conflict in the south is usually conflated with Islam and Muslim separatist groups, *White Channel* are now “helping” the Thai government in “solving” the conflict by using Islamic principles. By aligning itself to the Thai state, I argue that *White Channel* strategically employs its *halal media* to Islam and the Islamic way of life to position themselves as people who know “real” Islamic principles. This suggests that the process of negotiating with a notion of “good Muslims” also brings about a hierarchy of Thai Muslims. In this case, Thai Muslims in Bangkok employ *halal media* in an online discursive space to legitimise themselves as Thai Muslims who possess a “correct” knowledge of Islam. Therefore, they are responsible for “educating” Muslims in “the three southern border provinces” to be “good Muslims”.

Thirdly, *White Channel*’s participation in “solving” this ongoing national-level problem may also resonate for the legitimacy crisis (Askew, 2010; McCargo, 2012) that has characterised Thailand in the recent past. This legitimacy crisis, which has implications for the mainstream media, paves ways for a negotiation of the *visuality of Muslimsness* at least in this online space where people who “develop” and “save” Muslims are not Buddhist Thai officials anymore. Moreover, what can solve this problem is *dakwah*, which propagates the “correct” knowledge of Islam, rather than the “Thainess” values embedded in Thai institutions such as schools. As a result, the negotiation of *Muslimness* in this online space could be suggested through the religious element in *halal media* employed to *re-appropriate* Muslim identity by negotiating with the ideology of “Thainess”. This paves ways for Muslims in Bangkok to claim

legitimacy in educating Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces to be “good Muslims” for the Thai state.

The preceding sections have shed light on how Muslims in Bangkok *re-appropriate* their identity as “Thai Muslims” by negotiating with the *visuality of Muslimness* through the practices of *halal media* in online spaces. Besides negotiating with “Thainess”, the findings also show that Muslims in Bangkok are aligning with the Thai state and using Islam to help the state solve conflicts in the three southern border provinces, a long-term violent situation that the Thai state seem unable to solve. Amid the decades-long conflict in the south, *halal media* on YouTube produced by Malay-speaking Thai Muslims has emerged from online spaces. The three southern border provinces of Thailand are far away from the centre of “Thainess”, *both* culturally and economically, *and* has been portrayed as rural and uncivilised in mainstream audio-visual media (see also Chapter Three and Four). As well as being historically part of the Malay world and in one of the most impoverished regions of Thailand,⁶³ it is a conflict zone where violence has erupted almost every day for more than a decade. With these points in mind, a crucial question relates to the way in which Thai Muslims in the region employ this online space to represent themselves to the public within these socio-economic and political contexts. To further explore the *halal* online space created by Muslims in the southern border provinces, the next section examines YouTube channels run by Muslims in the south where data collected during fieldwork including YouTube channels will be analysed.

Making halal media from the three southern border provinces

Besides *White Channel* in Bangkok, there are a group of YouTube channels in the south which are trying to propagate a “correct” rather than a “distorted” image of Islam among both Muslims in/or outside the three southern border provinces as well as non-Muslims. This group

⁶³ The World Bank reports that Thai economic growth during 1960-1996 resulted in a decline in poverty. (This is especially from 1986-2015, a period when poverty declined significantly from 67% to 7.2%). However, an unequal distribution of resources remains a problem that has resulted in 7.1 million poor (as of 2014). Most of the poor live in rural areas especially in the North, Northeast and the three southern provinces (<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/thailand/overview>).

of YouTube video producers share the principle of *halal media* as a crucial tool to create an *ummah* community. They want to create an *ummah* community that embraces “pure” Islamic principles, and use YouTube channels to spread messages of these principles to stop practicing rituals, which is against *tawhid*⁶⁴ or a unity of God, and a return to Islamic principles.

In the context of the Malay-speaking Muslim region, it is important to note that the phenomenon of *halal media* and the *dakwah* movement, coinciding with an “Islamic revival” in Muslim communities, has resulted in a split of Islamic doctrines into the so-called *khana kao* (the old school) and *khana mai* (the new school) of Islam. While the “old school” of Islam embraces traditional culture in which Islam is accommodated to the local Malay culture, the “new school” aims to reform the practices of Islam in the region and *re-assert* a puritan Islam into the Muslim identity. The next section will provide a brief historical overview of this split and how it affects Malay identity in order to understand the context of the emergence of *halal media* in the three southernmost provinces.

Islamic revival vs Malayness

The *Patani* kingdom, which covers today’s three southern border provinces, was regarded as the centre of Islamic education in the region due to the strong *Patanian ulama* networks in Medina and Mecca (where several *Patanian Muslims* went to study Islam) and in the Malay Peninsula in the 18th and 19th centuries. However, the Islamisation of the region is characterised as the appropriation of Islam by the existing local culture. This resulted in the practice of *Sufism* which is a fused Buddhist-Hindu-based Malay culture. After 1925, Islamic teachings shifted from the teaching of *ulama* to teaching *wahabbiyyah*⁶⁵, which focuses on the

⁶⁴ Oxford Islam Studies Online define *tawhid* as “Tawhid is the defining doctrine of Islam. It declares absolute monotheism—the unity and uniqueness of God as creator and sustainer of the universe. Used by Islamic reformers and activists as an organising principle for human society and the basis of religious knowledge, history, metaphysics, aesthetics, and ethics, as well as social, economic and world order.” (<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2356>)

⁶⁵ The Oxford Dictionary describes *Wahabbi* as “A member of a strictly orthodox Sunni Muslim sect founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–92). It advocates a return to the early Islam of the Koran and Sunna, rejecting later innovations; the sect is still the predominant religious force in Saudi Arabia (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/wahhabi>)” *Wahabbi* teachings stresses on *tawhid* (absolute monotheism) as opposed to *shirk* (association of anyone or anything with God) call for a return to the Koran and

purity of belief and faith in God, and whose religious practices are based strictly on the *Koran* and the *Sunnah* (the way of the Prophet Muhammad) (Hayimasae, p.126). As a result of this reformist movement, centuries-old Malay Muslim culture, which is imbued with Hindu-Buddhist elements, is now being contested.

McCargo (2009) notes how this led to the establishment of two separate Islamic schools in the southern provinces: *khana kao* (the old school) and *khana mai* (the new school)⁶⁶. Whereas the old school is influenced by Malay cosmology practices such as using holy water to sprinkle on new cars, respecting the tombs of the passing *raja*, and women wearing loose scarves, the new school is strictly aligned with the teachings of the *Koran* and the Middle East and includes more rigid practices of Islam. In the 1920s Haji Sulong, an influential Islamic figure in *Patani*, spearheaded the new sets of practices, while the old school of Islam had dominated Muslims in the region for centuries. Umar Tayib, who was educated in Egypt, is considered a prominent figure of the second wave of the Islamic new school. Formal Islamic institutions predominantly adhered with the reformist school, including the Yala Islamic College, were established by the influential Lutfi Chapakia who was educated in Saudi Arabia. This “new school” is now referred to, albeit by outsiders, as “*wahabbi*”, and is popular among educated middle-class Muslims. While *halal media* producers and *dakwah* groups appear to follow the “new school” style, and are criticised as being “too strict” and are alleged as part of, or even funded by, Saudi-origin *wahabbism*, during interviews they all deny referring to themselves as such. They claim they simply want Muslims to “return” to the “correct” principles of Islam since it has been “distorted”. Moreover, according to these interviewees, there is only one Islam, there is no such thing as “old school” and “new school”.

In order to further explore another *halal media* space in the context of the three southern border provinces of Thailand, in the next sections, data collected from interviews of

Sunna (example of the Prophet) for interpretation (<http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0091.xml>).

⁶⁶ คณะเก่า (old school) คณะใหม่ (new school)

halal media Muslim YouTube video producers and their videos will be analysed in order to shed light on how this network of *ummah* community is constructed through the practices of *halal media* and also, to an extent, to how this online space is employed by Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces to negotiate with the *visuality of Muslimness*.

Making YouTube a dakwah space: emerging online visual spaces from the three southern border provinces of Thailand

During my fieldwork in the three southernmost provinces, I found that some video makers refer to their practices in propagating the Islamic way of life on YouTube either as part-time or full-time jobs, as *dakwah*. *Dakwah* or in Thai *ngan phoei -phrae satsana*⁶⁷ or *ngan satsana*⁶⁸ is the word that is used among Muslims who make or share YouTube videos to preach and propagate Islam as a way of life for all Muslims which stresses the *tawhid*. *Ummah* and *dakwah* are two related Islamic concepts that have tied Muslims from different parts of Thailand who are running YouTube channels, and other audio-visual media for *dakwah* together as a network.

Interestingly, during fieldwork interviews, YouTube producers in the three southern border provinces at times made reference to *White Channel* while they were discussing their videos and see the channel as the standard for running *halal media*. For them, it is a role model and very strict in terms of Islamic principles. Moreover, simultaneously the channel makes them believe that it is possible to apply Islam to the media and also to use it effectively and so *White Channel* has become the marker for *halal* visual media in several Muslim media production groups in Thailand and the three southern border provinces. This section will examine how a network among producers in Bangkok and the south, comes into play via shared *halal media* practices on YouTube.

⁶⁷ งานเผยแพร่อิสลาม

⁶⁸ งานศาสนา

I shall first analyse a network of YouTube channels in the three southern border provinces that contain videos with Islamic teachings. Besides videos pertaining to Islam that were uploaded by individual users, during the data collection process I found a cluster of videos that are gathered and uploaded on YouTube channels. This is due to a function of YouTube that allows users to register, log on and create their own channels. To be able to get online notification about new videos added to a channel, a YouTube user is required to subscribe to the channel. This suggests that YouTube is designed to remediate television in an online space and this convergence of mediums enables producers who can remediate television by creating their own “channels” to broadcast. Furthermore, these channels also function as a video archive where users can watch uploaded video clips any time and share these videos with their friends in other social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. During the data collection period in 2014-2015, I found three YouTube channels produced in the three southern border provinces that are still active and constantly producing videos to propagate Islam. These channels include *System Video*, *Islam Nara* and *Al Salam media* and the producers of these channels are based in the three southernmost provinces.

White Channel, *System Video*, *Islam Nara*, *Al Salam media* as a network of *halal media* and *dakwah workers*

As noted in Chapter One, out of approximately 3,000 Islamic mosques situated throughout Thailand, 2,441 are located in the south (Gilquin, 2005). This suggests that in this Muslim majority region, communities are tightly knit due to the daily observances which occur in mosques and Islamic education. However, with online spaces, besides daily face-to-face communication, mediated-online communication is emerging as another space: as Castells (2007) argues “the ongoing transformation of communication technology in the digital age extends the reach of communication media to all domains of social life” (p.239). Muslim institutions including *dakwah* movements are existing social domains that now employ online

communication media to reach their audience. However, it is interesting to note that this online domain is a public space where non-Muslims and people from outside the three southern provinces can also watch their videos. Even though these YouTube channels are run and funded by Muslim organisations such as *Fatoni* University in Yala and *White Channel* networks,⁶⁹ the channels are related to each other like a network. In order to delve further into this online network, I shall start with an overview of three YouTube channels in the three southern border provinces. This will be followed by the characteristics of these YouTube channels obtained from data collected during fieldwork interviews.

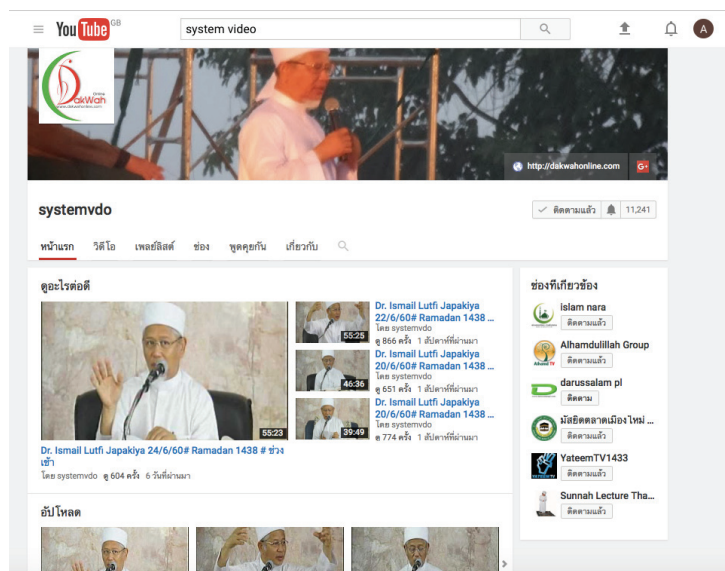


Figure 15: *System Video* YouTube homepage

*System Video*⁷⁰ (established in 2011, 11,256 subscribers, 4,276,127 views) contains recorded videos of Islamic teachers giving religious-related talks mostly in Malay. The video production is quite simple: it shows an *ulama* or Islamic teacher preaching in front of the camera or public from the beginning straight through to the end and they include more than 700 videos containing archives of sermon events by different *ulama*. The most prolific teacher appears to be Dr. Ismail Lutfi Japakiya who is also featured in a banner on its homepage. As

⁶⁹ *White Channel* has an office in *Narathiwat*. I met a group of *dakwah*-inspired young Muslims who are affiliated to *White Channel Narathiwat* branch after Friday prayer. These young Muslims have a close connection with people in *IslamNara Channel*.

⁷⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPYSLGUYuvV64t8cy3tr7Lg>

noted earlier, Dr. Ismail Lutfi Japakiya is a prominent figure in the reformist movement in Islam and is also the director of Fatoni University in Yala, the first Islamic University in Thailand. This suggests that this YouTube channel aims to propagate a version of Islam that stresses *tawhid* or absolute monotheism. In its description, there is a link to Islamnara.com which runs its own YouTube channel. It is unclear which organisation is running this channel and how it is funded, but from video archives it can be suggested that a network of Islamic teachers dominates the content of the channel.

*Islam Nara*⁷¹ (established in 2014, 3,192 subscribers, 3,013,423 views) is, as the channel name suggests, run by a religious-based network in Narathiwat province. It was established by members who also work for *System Video* and thus they share similar patterns.

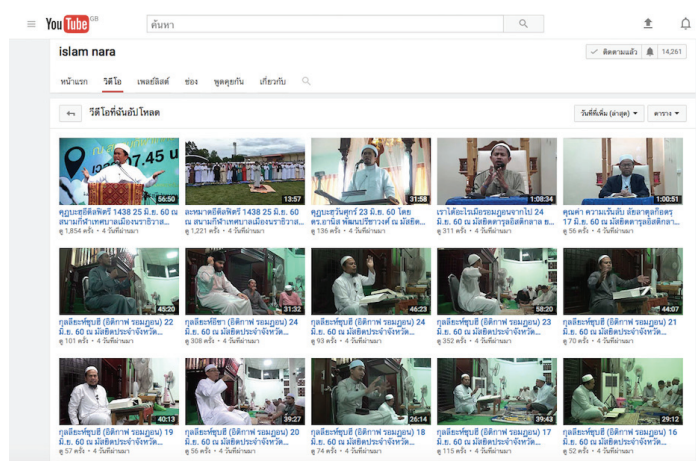


Figure 16: *IslamNara* YouTube homepage

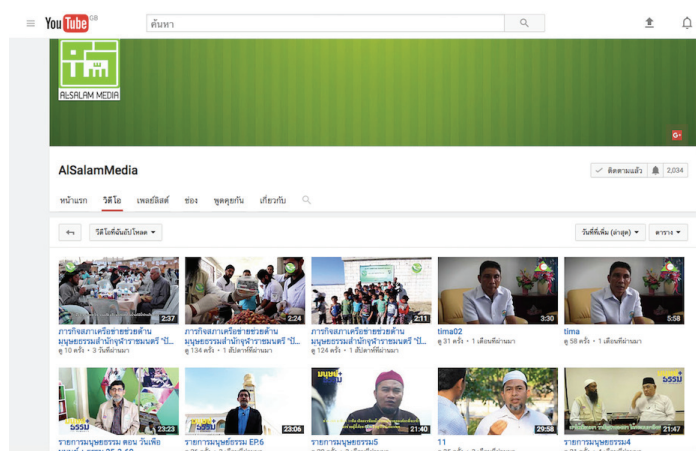
IslamNara media producers have close ties with *White Channel* Narathiwat and share the same view of their activities as *ngan satsana* (trans. religious work). The *IslamNara* staff consists of five professionals in their 30s and 40s including a banker, a university instructor and a department store salesperson, who gather together during their free time and devote themselves to “religious work”. Like *System Video*, their main audio-visual work is to record sermons of scholars in the area, both in Thai and Malay, especially the Friday Prayer at a major mosque in Narathiwat. Besides archiving sermon videos on their YouTube channel, they do live broadcasts on their website (islamnara.com).

⁷¹ https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvO_yPUN8Or1OwNAAhkhEhXg

During fieldwork in 2015, I attended the Prayer to observe their live broadcasting process and they were using live streaming equipment to broadcast the Friday sermon on their website, the recorded one being later uploaded into their YouTube channel. These archive videos are for Muslim men who did not attend the prayer but instead are able to watch it online or later on, and one of *IslamNara* staff pointed out that women who are not allowed to attend the Friday prayer can watch it online. However, by the time of writing I found that they do not do live broadcasts on the website anymore but they do it via Facebook Live instead.

By uploading these videos on YouTube as archives, *IslamNara* video producers see it as a way to “make merit” as well. The channel contains archive videos of religious talks done by several Islamic teachers in several places and mostly in Malay. Some teachers also appear in *System Video* channel as well. On a banner appearing on top of its homepage, it shows a bank account number to which people can donate their money. *IslamNara* channel also has its own website with the slogan *sue sangsan nai ngan itsalam*⁷² (trans. constructive media for Islam). This suggests that like *White Channel* in the previous section, they want to produce *sue sangsan* (constructive media) which connotes “good media” for Muslim people.

Based in Yala province, *Al Salam Media*⁷³ (established in 2013, 2,035 subscribers, 298,703 views) is run by Fatoni University and it features videos about the university, student activities and Islamic teachings.



⁷² สื่อสร้างสรรค์ในงานอิสลาม

⁷³ <https://www.youtube.com/user/AlSalamMedia/featured>

Figure 17: *AlSalam Media* YouTube homepage

Unlike *IslamNara*, which only broadcasts sermon videos, *Al Salam Media* also archives short films with religious content. It started as a special task unit recording audio and video of sermons of Islamic scholars in or from Fatoni University in Yala and began with only staff in the IT department and students who were enthusiastic about making media content on Islam. The channel also has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with *White Channel* and thus, *Al Salam Media* used to air its content on *White Channel*.

A survey of *halal media* that are run by Thai Muslims in the three southern provinces show that these channels are not discrete units but are related to each other by shared principles of *dakwah* and *ummah*. In terms of subscribers and view counts of videos, their numbers are relatively low when compared to *White Channel* because it produces a greater variety of content and more platforms. Furthermore, unlike *White Channel*, which can afford to employ full-time staff, those are working behind these YouTube channels are doing this *dakwah* as a part-time job and rely on public donations, which results in a more loosely organised media organisation. The lack of resources results in a type of audio-visual content that is not as diverse as *White Channel*. However, these YouTube channel producers are making use of available resources especially Islamic teachers who are prominent figures and well-respected among Muslims in the region, and they are tied to existing Muslim organisations such as universities, mosques and a network of *ulama*.

However, what type of Islam are these *halal media* trying to propagate? Networks of *ulama*, Islamic institutions, and other Muslim media have discussed the context of Islamic reform and the so-called “new school” of Islam above and have suggested that these channels are tied to one another by a shared principle on propagating Islam which stresses *tawhid*. By running YouTube channels as “good media”, Muslims in these provinces make themselves visible in turn as a community of “good Muslims” who embrace practices of “correct Islamic principles”.

It is interesting to note that “good Muslims” in this region are considered in the mainstream media as backward, uneducated, religious (see also Chapter Three and Four) and at times, especially in news reports, as culprits of the violence in the south. As a result, it seems that an active participation in the online visual spaces enables Thai Muslims to negotiate with the *visuality of Muslimness*. By stressing on the *visuality of Muslim piety* based on *tawhid* in their *halal media*, visual references of Islam such as skullcaps, *thobe* (Arab-styled Muslim clothes for men), *sarongs* and beards in this disruptive online space seem to be *redefined*. For *halal media*, these visual references to *Muslimness* do not conjure up the notion of *Muslim inferiority*, but rather of pious “good Thai Muslims” who embrace “correct” Islamic principles.

Apart from a negotiation of the *visuality of Muslimness*, networks of *dakwah* media producers are equally important and deserves attention especially in online spaces that allow such networks to exist. This *halal media* practice emerged out of an *online-networked society* among Muslims enabled by YouTube which suggests a new mode of communication that is a result of “media convergence” (Jenkins, 2006), “user-led content” (Bruns, 2008) and “YouTube’s participatory culture” (Burgess, 2008). While the Thai mainstream media is still controlled by the government and corporate powers, this emphasis on media users of new media allows a “bottom-up” approach in visual representation to occur in the Thai public domain. Against the backdrop of Thailand as an imagined community where communication is a top-down process via national media such as the printing press produced at the centres of power, this new form of communication is dispersed with several nodes and goes beyond national boundaries. Castells (2007) discusses the new type of society emerging from the Information Age, saying that the networked society is:

the construction of collective identities as they relate to social movements and power struggles in the network society. It also deals with the transformation of the state, politics, and democracy under the conditions of globalisation and new communication technologies. (Castells, 2007, p.238)

In this *halal media* network, *dakwah* movements and adhering to *tawhid*, or oneness with God, is a constructed collective identity of Thai Muslims. This online network of audio-visual media operates beyond national institutions and Thai state-appointed/established Muslim organisations⁷⁴ such as the mainstream media, *Chularatchamontri* (Sheikhul Office of Thailand), The National Council for Muslims and Provincial Council for Muslims, and suggests that new communication technology has enabled the construction of collective identities beyond government domains. While “Thainess”, the existing imagined community which underpins the Thai state, has not disappeared, the new form of networked online communication coupled with the *dakwah* movement appears to illustrate the dynamic of the *visuality of Muslimness* in the Thai public space. “[S]ocial movements and power struggles” in online public spaces seem to be at play at the margins of “Thainess”. To explore further the power struggles of collective identity that these online spaces have enabled, I will examine data collected from interviews concerning how these YouTube channel producers run their channels within socio-political and economic contexts in the three southernmost provinces.

During fieldwork, I interviewed Muslims in the three southern border provinces who produced and uploaded videos on these YouTube channels and came up with themes of the different characteristics of their channels. These include: 1. Uploading sermon videos on YouTube: negotiating modernity in an online disruptive space; and 2. doing online *dakwah* on YouTube: re-defining “good Muslims” from the three southern border provinces.

Uploading sermon videos on YouTube: negotiating modernity in an online space

Since Islam is a way of life, as interviewees would say in Thai *itsalam pen withee cheewit*, all one’s acts in everyday life are codified according to Islamic principles. As a result, *ulama* or Islamic teachers, as people who are knowledgeable about Islam, are responsible for reiterating

⁷⁴ After 1932, the Thai state introduced an administrative system for Thai Muslims with the monarch as the top of the hierarchy. This includes, in hierarchical order, *Chularatchamontri* (Sheikhul Islam Office of Thailand), National Council for Muslims, Provincial Council for Muslims and councils for mosques (Ishii, 1994).

and reinforcing Islam through summons, which are a crucial element in propagating Islam. In the past, Muslims had to go to a mosque to gain knowledge of Islam. However, with the advent of communication technology, summons can be recorded and disseminated online. This paves the way for groups of Muslims to use this online visual space for their *dakwah* movement because they realise that the Thai mainstream media cannot serve their religious communities.

Interviewees from *System Video*, *IslamNara* and *Al Salam* media channels say that the impetus for creating or producing their own media on YouTube began with recording the audio of sermons of Islamic teachers or *ulama* and sharing them online with other Muslims. However, it is now considered as 'old style' media for them. With the rise of Islamic TV produced in Bangkok by such as *Yateem TV* or *White Channel*, Muslims in the three southern border provinces, especially younger ones who are more media savvy educated in information technology from local universities, began to record video clips and later uploaded them onto YouTube.

The driving force behind this video practice is to share them with other Muslims because they see the act of recording and sharing sermon videos as the responsibility of all Muslims. Kem⁷⁵, a member of *IslamNara* whom I interviewed during my fieldwork says that apart from being a salesperson in a department store in Narathiwat, he usually attends sermons in local mosques and records audio for his own use. Later, he got to know Zigna, a person who uploads audio clips online on the website and this connection made him interested in sharing his recorded sermon videos with other Muslims. They decided to combine their interests and soon had a large amount of video archives and sermons and eventually created their own YouTube channel. Similarly, Riyadh⁷⁶ from *Al Salam* media and his colleagues from Fatoni University began recording the sermons of prominent Muslim scholars from the three southernmost provinces who preached regularly such as Dr. Lutfе Japakiya

⁷⁵ Personal interview in June 2015 in Narathiwat

⁷⁶ Personal interview in June 2015 in Yala

(according to Riyadh, Dr. Lutfe, considered a well-known scholar and a resource of *Al Salam media*, appears in these three channels). However, these recorded sermons were only archived on CDs and had never been distributed outside the university until four years ago when they began using YouTube. Riyadh notes that there is no television channel in Thailand that can serve Thai Muslims, especially Malay-speaking Muslims, so having their own YouTube programmes will bring benefits to Muslims. This suggests that these Muslim videomakers in the southern regions employ their YouTube channels as spaces for Muslim communities, a role never considered by the Thai mainstream television channels.

Even though the content of these YouTube channels is about Islamic principles, especially sermons, the people who actually produced these videos are groups of university students or educated Muslims with professional careers and who are tied together as a network. The network of *dakwah* YouTube producers sheds light on how Muslims *negotiate* with Thai mainstream values. While they still keep their “mainstream” jobs as university instructors, bankers and salespersons, those who attended modern educational institutions exploit their “worldly skills” in such areas as media technology, fundraising and networking, to create a space for Islamic teachers who are not technologically literate.

Shola⁷⁷, a banker with a bachelor degree from the Prince of Songkhla University and one of the members of *IslamNara* whom I interviewed during fieldwork says that the channel was established by people who had experience of both formal and religious education environments. By possessing these two skills, they collaborated to make the YouTube channel possible. As Shola notes, “people who have an opportunity to attend both normal and Islamic schools who know about technology bring a good thing to the channel. We have to be able to do both, especially younger generations.”⁷⁸ Similarly, Riyadh from *Al Salam Media*, who is working for the IT department in Fatoni University says that Islamic scholars are not keen on using new media but they have staff, students and colleagues from IT departments who are

⁷⁷ Personal interview in June 2015 in Narathiwat

⁷⁸ “คนที่มีโอกาสที่เรียนทั้งด้านสายสามัญและศาสนา ที่มีความรู้เรื่องเทคโนโลยี มีการจับสิ่งที่ดีมาใส่ เราต้องสามารถโต้กันได้ คนรุ่นใหม่จับมาใส่”

interested in producing video content to promote Islam. As a result, they set up a special unit for producing videos for YouTube⁷⁹. This suggests that Muslims who are running YouTube channels are the products of both modern education environments such as government universities and Islamic Universities such as Fatoni university where the students are educated in both a religious and worldly way.

It also appears that these educated Muslims in the southern border provinces have an outward-looking attitude when it comes to representing Islam. They try to exploit YouTube and to propagate Islam *beyond* their own community. However, it is interesting to note that a group of these YouTube producers are from a certain type of background that allows them access to a network of *dakwah*, money, image production equipment, the internet and *ulama*. As they are doing “modern” jobs, they are also employing online visual spaces, new communication technology such as a camera and its functions, to archive sermons and public preaching, which normally occurs only within a mosque or a Muslim community. With these YouTube spaces, these channels can make their piety in Islam *visible* to the public as well by negotiating with modernity by incorporating YouTube into their *dakwah* movement.

Doing online dakwah on YouTube: re-defining “good Muslims” from the three southern border provinces

Besides using YouTube as a space for *dakwah*, the channels are employed as a tool to correct the “distorted image” of Islam. Interviewees say that they create videos in response to what is currently going on in the society, and even though YouTube is primarily full of entertainment, they believe that they can also use the same platform to show Muslims and non-Muslims the Islamic way of life in a positive light. Having channels and uploading videos are thus intertwined with *the religious work*. A member of *AlSalam Media* posited that, “the main purpose of the channel is to make people understand about Islamic principles and have a good

⁷⁹ “เป็นเฉพาะกิจ ที่มอบหมายให้ al salam ดูแลไม่ได้ตั้งใจจะไปยูทูบ หลังจากที่เรามีอุปการณ์ มีน้อง ๆ มาช่วย มีน้อง ๆ มาจากไอที มาผลิตรายการ ไว้หลาย ๆ รายการ นอกจากที่จะส่ง white channel ก็ส่งยูทูบด้วย”

attitude towards Islam”.⁸⁰ He further notes that according to one Islamic principle, if someone is trying to say something bad about you which is not the truth, you should respond with something which is better, rather than throwing bad words back to that person. It is “a response with a better thing”.⁸¹ Similarly, Shola from *IslamNara* asserted that his *halal media* can create a clearer understanding of Islam: “the Prophet is a role model for the *ummah* and this not just for Muslims but can be an example for Buddhist Thais. Our videos include sermons by *ulama* both in Thai and Malay. When we uploaded these videos on YouTube, audience who are not Muslim might get to listen to them. And they learn about Islamic principles. We want them to know about Islamic principles. We do not aim all of non-Muslim audiences to convert to Islam but we want them to study Islam”.⁸²

This suggests that these *halal media* producers are aware that an image of Islam has been distorted which creates misunderstandings for outsiders. As noted in earlier sections, conflicts in the south of Thailand have been framed as a religious conflict between Buddhists and Muslims. By labelling violence in the south as “Islam”, it contributes to a frightful image of Muslims all over Thailand (Harish, 2006). Consequently, these Muslim video producers also apply an Islamic principle in “responding to bad things with a better thing” in their *halal media* work. Rather than attacking people who are trying to distort Islam, they use YouTube as an *online disruptive space* to educate people about the “real Islam”. During this process of self-representation in this user-led content milieu, their visual practice can be characterised as “produsage” (Bruns, 2008) in which they not only create audio-visual products in the online space but also use it to serve their purpose. This also shows that by recording sermon videos and uploading these videos onto YouTube, Muslim minorities are not just represented but they *see themselves* and the action of uploading the videos to YouTube suggests what they want to

⁸⁰ “หลัก ๆ คือความเข้าใจเรื่องอิสลามที่ถูกบิดงอ ทศนคติที่ดีเกี่ยวกับอิสลาม”

⁸¹ “เป็นการตอบโต้ด้วยสิ่งที่ดีกว่าด้วยสิ่งที่ดีกว่า”

⁸² “นี่เป็นแบบอย่างที่ดีกับประชาชนชาติทั้งหมด ไม่ใช่แค่พี่น้องมุสลิม เป็นตัวอย่างแก่คนไทยพุทธ สิ่งที่เราอยากได้บรรยายเพราะเรามีทั้งภาษามลายู ภาษาไทย ถ้า

เราปล่อยในยูทูป บางทีคนที่ไม่ใช่มุสลิมก็ได้เข้ามาฟัง อิสลาม เขามีหลักการแบบนี้ เราไม่ได้ให้ทุกคนที่ฟังเข้ารับอิสลาม แต่เราอยากให้ทุกคนได้ศึกษาในเรื่องของศาสนา”

be seen. This resonates with Nakamura's study of internet visual culture, arguing that an approach in internet visual culture should illustrate "how this group of users *sees*, rather than how they are seen or represented, what they are making as well as what they are using, what they are doing as well as what they are being" (Nakamura, 2008, p.208).

Besides aiming to correct a distorted image of Islam in the eyes of outsiders, *halal media* also aims to provide "correct" knowledge of Islam among Muslims themselves in the region. Shola⁸³, one of the interviewees, asserted that, "Malay is not Islam. We have to separate between the two". This suggests that *halal media*, which aims to provide "correct" knowledge of Islam in order to create "good Muslims" in the three southern provinces, may be the result of the reformist movement who stress bringing Muslims back to *tawhid* or oneness with God.

This construction of "good Muslims" in the forms of audio-visual media is aimed at making the construct *visible* for outsiders who may have been exposed to a "distorted" image of Islam and Muslims in the region who do not embrace "correct" Islamic principles. In the case of the Muslim audience, this *reconstruction* of "good Muslims" may result in tension because, as noted earlier, they aim to get rid of Malay ritual practices which are against *tawhid*.

Riyad, from Al Salam *Media* informed me that sometimes their *dakwah* works create tension with villagers. He recalls that when he was trying to convince a Muslim who was still practicing rituals which are against *tawhid*, that person replied saying, "if what they have practiced for a hundred years is sinful, this means that their ancestors are now all in hell".⁸⁴ This suggests that Muslim communities in the three southernmost regions are not monolithic and conflict within the Muslim community itself in terms of the interpretation of Islam attests to this fact. In reality, Malay-speaking Muslims in the three southern border regions are diverse and adhere to different interpretations of Islam. However, these findings from the

⁸³ Personal interview in June 2015 in Narathiwat

⁸⁴ Personal interview in June 2015 in Yala

interviews suggest that *halal media* in these online spaces is a site of *contestation* which results in different types of negotiation through different encounters with power. Examining the *actual practices* of visual representation among media producers is therefore crucial.

Nuances of online visual spaces: different shades of halal media in different encounters with “the matrix of power”

The previous sections have illustrated different practices of *halal media* from *White Channel* in Bangkok to *dakwah* YouTube in the three southern border provinces. Even though these Muslim video producers share the same goal of doing *dakwah* and redefining “good Muslims”, their practices are far from monolithic. Gauntlet (2013) succinctly argues that new media cannot be perceived as a single and monolithic entity, but in a constant state of flux and uncertainty. As result, a binary opposition between the mainstream media and new media, and broadcast media vs. YouTube channel is insufficient to explain the complexities in new media spaces where everyday practices of “remediating” mainstream visual genres intersect with “the matrix of power” (Nakamura, 2008). Constructions of “good Muslims” through remediation in different *halal media* from different locations illustrates points of interaction among cultures and religions (e.g. “Thainess”, “Malayness”, Islam and Buddhism), mediated spaces (e.g. Thai mainstream media, online spaces), Internet and global media, government policies (e.g. the computer crime act, martial law in the three southern provinces) and economic factors.

Because *White Channel* has more access to resources in terms of funding and human resources in the professional media environment, they can use this online space to create *halal media* and *halal entertainment* which appropriate popular audio-visual forms to Islamic principles. As a result of “dogmatic inflexibility” (Gilquin, 2005) in the *re-appropriation* of identity of Thai Muslims, *halal* and *haram* have become prominent visual codes employed by *White Channel* to differentiate between *halal media* which connotes “good media” from the

Thai mainstream media which is profit-oriented and controlled by the Buddhist Thai state. By doing so, they also employ this space to negotiate with the *visuality of Muslimness* by portraying “good Thai Muslims” as Thai citizens who embrace Islam according to *tawhid* as a way of life. In this light, being a “good Muslim” does not mean being docile and inferior to Buddhist Thais. It can be suggested that active participation (through the remediation of mainstream audio-visual genres, for example) in this online discursive space enables Thai Muslims to *contest* with “Thainess” ideology.

In the three southern border provinces, Muslims who share the same principles of *dakwah* are using online spaces and remediate mainstream audio-visual genres slightly differently. Their visibility in online public spaces is to share “correct” Islamic principles for Muslims themselves and to correct the “distorted” images of Islam which is a result of global terrorism and the ongoing violence by Muslim separatists in the south. These video producers also have fewer resources compared to *White Channel*. As a result, points of encounter with matrix of power when producing and sharing visual images are different. With their lack of resources, they use the simple audio-visual technique of summons and use their space as a testimonial of “good Muslims”. While *White Channel* has several platforms to propagate Islam as well as having Internet TV and satellite television, these channels have to rely on only social media and YouTube. However, with a network of online *dakwah* enabled by YouTube and the Internet, they can create a “collective identity” by sharing resources such as recorded sermon video clips and sharing *dakwah* works.

It is crucial to note that *halal media* is not the only disruptive online space emerging from the context of the three southern border provinces. There are also other disruptive online visual spaces (e.g. YouTube channels run by local activists and journalists) emerging from practices of Muslims in the region after online media became more accessible and affordable. As noted in Chapter Five, there are more than 50,000 videos about Muslims in the southernmost provinces on YouTube which show how enthusiastic Muslims in the

southernmost region are when it comes to self-representation. This may be partly due to a lack of space for Muslims to represent themselves in the mainstream media, especially in the past decade that has seen a great deal of conflict and violence. However, this makes disruptive online spaces in the region vibrant.

The previous analyses have enunciated the function of *halal media* both in the three southern border provinces and in Bangkok in negotiating with the *visuality of Muslimness*. *Halal media*, which operates within online spaces has brought about *multiple* forms of negotiation at different points of encounter in the Thai public visual realm. Now I shall turn to the second part of this chapter which examines representations of Thai Muslims in different sub-genres of videos with references to Islam, videos made by Muslims from all over Thailand including the three southernmost provinces. Despite their differences in origin, these videos share the same goal, which is to propagate Islam as a way of life. Several practices in Thai mainstream culture that used to be taken for granted are now being challenged by the principle of *tawhid* or oneness with God, which prohibits Muslims from practicing any rituals that are against Islamic principles found in the *Koran* and *hadith*. Some of these videos are from YouTube channels mentioned above or from other users. It also examines what sort of discourses have emerged from these religious content videos on YouTube and what constraints a space like YouTube has in foreclosing other ways of legitimately portraying Thai Muslims.

There is a vast amount of YouTube videos in this genre and so, in this preliminary research, I narrowed them down into three sub-categories on the basis of their pervasiveness on YouTube. These videos include: 1. sermons or lectures by Islamic teachers, 2. television series and short films broadcast on YouTube, and 3. videos of *anasheed* or works of vocal music with references to Islamic beliefs. In the data analysis process, I watched videos in each category, took notes and came up with themes emerging from the data. I also compare these videos with other genres such as music-related content, mainstream films and television

adverts, in order to shed light on the differences and sometimes contradictory discourses that being on YouTube has entailed. Among the many themes found in these videos are:

- 1) having boyfriends/girlfriends is not allowed in Islam
- 2) Muslims do not celebrate “New Year”
3. Young Muslims should embrace an ‘Islamic way of life’ rather than being “misled” by mainstream culture
4. Music is *haram* for Muslims

Each of these themes will be analysed and will be followed by the conclusion section of this chapter.

Having boyfriends/girlfriends is not allowed in Islam

“There are no girlfriends/boyfriends in Islam” is a prevailing theme found in videos with religious references. The videos titled “*rabop faen mahantaphai haeng sangkhom 5/2/57* Bublee Abdurrohman” (trans. boyfriend/girlfriend relationship is a big threat to society)⁸⁵ show Bublee Abdurrohman, a well known Islamic scholar from Narathiwat, giving a question-and-answer talk about this controversial issue in Muslim communities.



⁸⁵ ระบบแฟนหั่นตักยแห่งสังคม 5/2/57 อ.บับลี อับดุลรอห์มาน (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebkqN1lx2SY> uploaded by Systemvdo on 5 February 2014, 41,941 views)

Figure 18: Bublee Abdurrohman in the video *rabop faen mahantaphai haeng sangkhom*

In the video, the setting is a lecture hall and conference room with a large audience in attendance. By noticing the language use and reactions to the audience questions, it is apparent that the talk is aimed at a young audience. Bublee is an Islamic lecturer who graduated from Fatoni University, Thailand's first Islamic University, in Yala where he has given talks to promote the Islamic way of life especially targeting younger Muslims in institutions such as hospitals, a universities and Muslim organisations.



Figure 19: Bublee Abdurrohman at the school of Communication Art, The Prince of Sonkla University located in Pattani province

In a video titled “*Wai roon” wai rian rue wai rak* (trans. “teenagers” is it your time to study or to love?),⁸⁶ eloquent *Bublee* is talking to a young audience and promoting the idea of ‘no boyfriend/girlfriend in Islam’. He admits that this type of relationship is prevalent in Muslim society nowadays but posits that the problem is that Thai Muslims are “used to it” and do not acknowledge that it is against Islam. As a result, these Muslims are “misled” and are not following *Allah* and once they realise that it is wrong, they should “return” to Islamic principles. This suggests an attempt to mark a difference between Muslims and non-Muslims in Thailand because in other religions, the practice of dating and becoming boyfriend and girlfriend is not prohibited. By calling for Muslims to stop practicing these non-Islamic activities suggests the way “good Muslims” should be is different from that put forward by the mainstream Thai media.

This discourse of “boyfriend/girlfriend” relationships is *haram* also appears in a short film made by Fatoni University students titled *nang sun ronnarong “itsalam mai mee rabop faen” ton long-luem EP1* (campaigning short films “there is not girlfriend/boyfriend relationship in Islam” misled-forgot).⁸⁷ This short film is the most watched video on *AlSalam Media* channel and is the story of two close friends, Umar and Yusuf where Umar is a good friend who always reminds Yusuf of any misconduct. In one scene, set in a university library, Umar is trying to convince Yusuf that “boyfriend/girlfriend (or *faen*) is not allowed in Islam, while Yusuf is simultaneously text messaging a girl whom he is supposedly wooing.

⁸⁶ “วัยรุ่น” วัยเรียนหรือวัยรัก? (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iltW4p0Oto0> Uploaded by *CommSciTV*, 23,217 views, uploaded 26 September 2014; *CommSciTV* is a channel run by the school of Communication Art, The Prince of Songkla University located in Pattani province).

⁸⁷ หนังสือธรรมะ “อิสลามไม่มีระบบแฟน” Ep1 ตอน “หลงลืม” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ydBrTJ06uM> uploaded on 13 March 2014, 28,241 views).



Figure 20: Yusuf and Umar in a university library in nang sun ronnarong “itsalam mai mee rabop faen” ton long-luem EP1

However, Yusuf responds by saying that he is not serious about it and it does it for fun.

A week later, the two boys meet again and Yusuf is heartbroken because he has found out that his girlfriend is also seeing someone else. Umar asks, “what made you be so sure in the first place that she would not see someone else, since she has been breaching a teaching of *Allah*?” However, there is a twist in the ending when Umar sees a sign on a wall saying “you must practice, do not just preach: *Ali Bin Alitolib*”, which prompts Umar to call to apologise to the girl. At the end, there is a text saying boyfriend/girlfriend relationships do not only hurt individuals but also destroys the whole Muslim society.⁸⁸ This is an example of how Muslim university students in the three southern border provinces produce short films to propagate Islam. In terms of visual references to Islam, these characters are wearing modern dress and are in a modern environment such as a library. However, even though both of them seem to embrace the modern world and being in a modern place, in this film they are “saved” by Islam after they have been misled by mainstream culture.

This film has attracted comments that praise the video as constructive for Islam. A YouTube user, Butti Abudaris commented, “I encourage you to produce this kind of media and

⁸⁸ “ระบบแฟน” ไม่เพียงทำร้ายใครคนใดคนหนึ่ง แต่มันจะทำลายโครงสร้างอิสลามทั้งสังคม

I am happy that Muslim youths have this kind of movement”;⁸⁹ and another YouTube user, Husna Ase also commented: “It is short but very clear”. Excellent! We have to get away with boyfriends/girlfriend practice from Islam. If Allah wills”.⁹⁰ This shows support from a sympathetic YouTube audience who want to get rid of boyfriend/girlfriend relationships among Thai Muslims.

Muslims do not celebrate “New Year”

“Muslims do not celebrate New Year” is another theme found in an *anasheed* video called *White anasheed...wan Eid* (sub Thai) [full Version HD]⁹¹ (trans. White anasheed...Eid day). This video is made by the Muslim Youth of the *Talubun* mosque (in cooperation with *White Channel*) in Saiburi district of Pattani province.



Figure 21: A shot from “Muslim do not celebrate New Year”

⁸⁹ “ขอให้สร้างสรรค์ผลงานต่อไป เป็นกำลังใจให้ (รู้สึกดีที่มีเยาวชนเคลื่อนไหวแบบนี้)”

⁹⁰ อัลฮัมดุลิลลาฮ ..ทำได้สั้นๆ แต่ชัดเจนกะ เก่งมากกะ เราต้องช่วยกัน ให้อิสลามปราศจากระบบแฟน อินชาอัลลอฮ ^_^)

⁹¹ อนาซิด White...วันอีด (ซับไทย) [full Version HD] (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcUHYphC9Mo> uploaded by บัตติ อาบูดาวิส in 27 March 2014, 19,892 views)

It shows a montage video of Muslim youths attending a Muslim camp with an *anasheed* as the background music saying “all societies have their own special day, but ours (Islam) is different. We do not have New Year. We only have two *Eid* days (*Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*) according to Nabi Muhummud.” It is a celebration in an Islamic way with no music nor other *haram* practices on New Year in the first of January, which is widely celebrated in modern Thailand as well as *Songkran*, the traditional Thai New Year in mid-April, and Chinese New Year. However, this video suggests that celebrating New Year is “un-Islamic.” Moreover, to celebrate *Eid* days, only *halal* practices are allowed. Similar to “there are no boyfriend/girlfriend relationships in Islam”, this call for Thai Muslims to stop celebrating the modern “New Year” or *wan pee mai* and to instead celebrate *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha* represents a way to re-draw the boundary between Thai Muslims and mainstream Thai culture. By doing so, Muslims follows the Prophet and are thus seen as “good Muslims”.

Young Muslims should embrace an ‘Islamic way of life,’ rather than being misled by a secular one

“Young Muslims should return to an Islamic way of life” is another recurring theme found in these YouTube videos. The film titled *nang san Ameen*⁹² (trans. *Ameen the short film*) is a story about a Muslim university student from the three southern border provinces, Ameen, who is studying in Bangkok. In the film is a scene showing him chatting with his friend on his computer notebook about football matches and *Hormones*, a popular Thai series which contains *haram* activities. One day, Ameen hears news about Thai students who died during a political crisis in Egypt and he thinks one of the casualties might be one of his friends. In the following scene, he changes his outfit from that of university student to a *thobe* wearing skullcap.

⁹² พนันขัน"อาเหม็น" AMEEN Shortfilm (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otS5zh4BHic> uploaded 13 October 2013 45,806 views was made by a Muslim club in Rangsit University in Bangkok and *Muslimlimited*)



Figure 22: Ameen while waiting for his friend at the airport



Figure 23: Ameen in *thobe* wearing skullcap, praying

While Ameen is praying, there is a video of Muslims in the Middle East crying and suffering from war. However, he later finds that his friend is still alive. The description of the film points out that it is aimed at reflecting on and relating to the turbulence in the three southern provinces of Thailand, as well as Egypt and Palestine. The short film juxtaposes an

“Islamic way of life” with the modern lifestyle of Muslim youths and thus suggests that these young Muslims should not be “lured” into a modern and secular life. However, this ‘non-Muslim’ way of life is not totally rejected, in that it appears that the boundaries between Muslims and Thai mainstream culture, which also connotes “Thainess”, has been again *redrawn* through self-produced media in this online visual space.

Similarly, the short film *nang san son jai ro ball rue romadon*⁹³ (trans. *Instructive short film, waiting for football results or Ramadan?*) is about two male friends who are university students: one is practicing an ‘Islamic way of life’ and thus is ‘a good Muslim’; and the other one is addicted to football gambling.

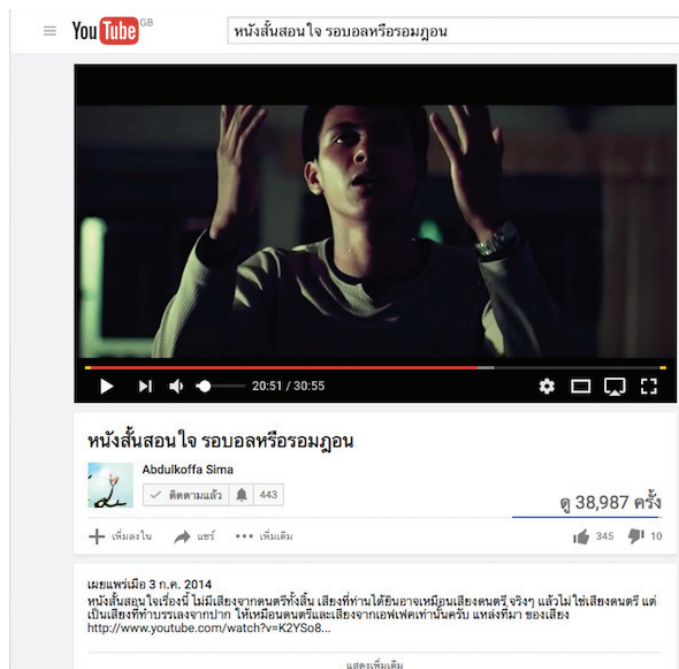


Figure 24: A good Muslim character is praying from the short film *nang san son jai ro ball rue romadon*

The religious character tries to stop his friend from being involved in football gambling because it is almost *romadon* (fasting period) and the story ends in tragedy when another character, who is addicted to football gambling, cannot pay his debts back to a mafia group and while a gunman is trying to kill the gambling addict, his good friend attempts to intervene and is shot instead.

⁹³ หนังสั้นสอนใจ รอบอลหรือรอมฎอน (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzMKKw9uU8E> uploaded in 3 July 2014 by Abdulkoffa Sima, 18,912 views, the film made by Muslim students from Rajabhat Institute of Phuket)



Figure 25: the two friends in university uniform from the short film *nang san son jai ro ball rue romadon*

This short film ends with the text saying “a person who has been longing for *romadan* is dead, who the one who is still alive has never longed for it (*romadan*) how about you?”⁹⁴

This suggests that this film functions as a *dakwah*, or religious work, that tries to convince Muslim youths to embrace an Islamic way of life. Consequently, like the previous short films, the characters who are “misled” against Islamic principles are considered “bad Muslims” and what can “save” them is by embracing those principles. By looking at the end credits, I noticed that Malay names are used which indicates that not all short films made by Malay-speaking Muslims are produced in the three southernmost provinces but have been produced by Muslim students studying outside the area.

In the video *lakhon drama kaejae nayu “sing thee phom yak hen theesut”*⁹⁵ (trans. Malayu drama “what I want to see the most”), a boy takes his friend to a large field next to a mountain and his friend is extremely excited at what he sees because three months earlier he was blind. The story ends with a scene of the boy who used to be blind taking the *Koran* out of his school bag and reading some text saying, “I do not only want to see mountains and trees

⁹⁴ คนรอกลับไม่ได้ อยู่ คนอยู่กลับไม่ได้ รอ แล้วคุณล่ะ

⁹⁵ ละครครมาแแก่จะนาญ “สิ่งที่ผม...อยากเห็นที่สุด” (ขับไทย) Melayu Filem (uploaded by MUSLIMITED <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J38dy5rhEZU>)

but I want to see and read *al Koran*".⁹⁶ This short film is in Malay with Thai subtitles. Up to this point, there are two points that need to be taken into account after analysing these short films. Firstly, by using Thai language or using Malay with Thai subtitles in short films made by Thai Muslims, there is a suggestion that the Muslims can speak about the proper Islamic way of life *on behalf* of other Muslims in other provinces. Secondly, because all these characters are male, it appears that *only males* are legitimately allowed to talk about Islam.

It is also interesting to note that the way in which music is selected and added to these short films also becomes an issue of whether or not it is *haram*. Here are some comments on the film *Ameen*: a YouTube user named en de writes, "What a shame! The film is great except that there is music. The other parts are good though. I hope you get better next time"⁹⁷; and another YouTube user called Abdulkoffa Sima considered its content to be good but writes, "What a shame, there should have been no music in the movie." Some short films mention that they do not use any music at all, such as the short film *nang san son jai ro ball rue romadon*, in which there is a description under the video saying "this film does not use any musical instruments, what you hear may sound like music, but actually they are produced by human voices"; or in the short film *The Chronicle nang san chomrom Muslim club '56*⁹⁸ (trans. *The Chronicle: a Muslim club short film of the year 2013*) in which its description comments that they use 'acapella' as music. It is interesting to note that to be *halal media*, these videos do not just produce *halal* content relating to Islam, but also have to use *halal* audio. The next section examines how a discourse of *halal* (*halal* = *allowed by Islamic law*) *anasheed* and *haram* music emerges out of the YouTube space.

⁹⁶ สิ่งที่ผมอยากเห็นมากที่สุด ไม่ใช่แค่ภูเขา ต้นไม้ แต่ผม อยากเห็น อยากอ่าน.. อัลกุรอาน

⁹⁷ เสียหายที่มี เสียจนคนศรี คัดตรงนี้ออย่างเดียว ส่วนอื่นๆ ถือว่าทำได้ดีครับ ขอให้พัฒนาขึ้นเรื่อย ๆ นะครับ เป็นกำลังใจให้ครับ

⁹⁸ The Chronicle : หนังสือชมรมมุสลิม '56 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGE21S4NQD0> uploaded by Muslim society PSU, 8 July 2013, 8,131 views).

Music is haram for Muslims

To develop a sense of what is going on in YouTube discussion about music and Islam, I shall start with an analysis of two videos showing two Thai popular singers: Toh, an ex-singer from Bangkok; and a current singer, Matee, from the three southernmost provinces. These two videos attracted more than 50,000 view counts and yielded several heated comments about the two singers. They are both nationally recognised performers and used to be with GMM Grammy, the largest and most influential music corporation in the Thai music industry for several decades. Toh used to be the lead singer for the rock band *Silly Fools* but gave up singing in order to embrace a “missionary style” of Islam.



Figure 26: Toh before giving up his singing career



Figure 27: Toh (on the left) wearing skullcap and beard while doing a talk to Muslim teens

Toh has travelled all over Thailand giving talks to Muslims, and in this video *Toh-Tal Rajabhat Yala*⁹⁹ (trans. *Toh and Tal in the Rajabhat Institute of Yala*), he is giving a talk about Islam to university students at the Rajabhat Institute in Yala where he is wearing a black polo t-shirt as well as a long beard and skullcap. The main topic of his talk concerns drug prevention among young Muslims and Toh and his friend Tal are sitting on a sofa on-stage describing an “Islamic way of life”. A video titled *Maetee Labanoon Ma Yala*¹⁰⁰ (trans. *Maetee of Labanoon band is visiting Yala*) shows Maetee (*aka.* Maetee Labanoon), the lead singer of the rock band *Labanoon* who were a popular band in the early 2000s and had several hit songs. All the band members are from Yala and came to Bangkok for a music contest that won them a contract with GMM Grammy. Maetee gives an inspiring talk to school pupils at an *anasheed* contest event at Satree Islam Witthaya Mulanithi school. He starts by telling his story before he came to be a country-wide famous singer and includes how to be good child for his parents while also pursuing his music career. He appears on the stage wearing an Arabic-style *thobe* and skullcap.

⁹⁹ โต-ตาล ราชภัฏยะลา (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nx5mvvXrgVA> uploaded on *System Video* channel)

¹⁰⁰ เมธี ลาบานูน มายะลา (uploaded by *abularub sulong* in August 2012, 124,620 views)



Figure 28: Maethee wearing *thabe* and skullcap at an *anasheed* contest event at Satree Islam Witthaya Mulanithi school.



Figure 29: Maethee playing guitar and singing in his popular music video

However, this video has attracted diverse comments on how one should behave as a Muslim. Some users question his piety towards Islam because he still keeps singing popular music. A YouTube user, Nsee dumm (sein) says, “the only good thing about his speech is that he is convincing these pupils to be good to their parents but the rest is all about encouraging them to sing. Should he be an ‘idol’ for Muslim youths?”¹⁰¹ Similarly, another YouTube user,

¹⁰¹ มีดีนิดนึงตรงที่อ๊ชวาน พูดให้เป็นคนดีของพ่อแม่ นอกล้นไปรโมท และสนับสนุนการร้องเพลง ส่วน ๆ นี่หรือ ไอ้ดื้อเด็กและเขาวงมมูสลิม ...

San M.r san makes a comment with reference to Toh, that “all people in Narathiwat hate you [Maetee]. You should return to Islam. Even Toh, who is much more popular than you, decided to change his way of life and embrace Islam”.¹⁰² However, others do not think it is wrong for Maetee to sing (their names suggest they are not Muslim). As a YouTube user, Thinnakorn Kesonchan, for example, opines: “I don’t understand why singing is not allowed in Islam. Singing makes people happy. It does not harm anyone”.¹⁰³ Another YouTube user, Vespamantion also observes that, “if you want him to give up singing, why are you here on YouTube. Isn’t it a kind of entertainment? Do not blame him. He does not kill anyone”.¹⁰⁴

These videos and discussions suggest that music is *haram* while *anasheed* is *halal*. As a result, Muslims should not be “misled” by music entertainment that deprives Muslims from an Islamic way of life. “What to hear” is thus also codified. However, diverse comments about Maetee Labanoon suggest that while music and singing for entertainment purposes are *haram* and cross the line between “good Muslims” and non-Muslim, for non-Muslim audiences this should not have been a problem and is considered “too strict” (or *khreng* in Thai, which is the word that Buddhists usually use to describe Muslims). It is interesting to note that while a movement of making music *haram* can be found in this online disruptive space, the discourse of *music being haram* does not appear in the mainstream broadcast media and other mainstream spaces.

My findings based on analyses of YouTube videos made by Thai Muslims affirm that mainstream Thai culture, ranging from youth culture, music, boyfriend/girlfriend relationships, and Thai New Year celebrations, are being contested by *halal/haram* principles which are tied to an emphasis on *tawhid* in everyday life. This is illustrated in the representation of Thai Muslim characters in the short films analysed who face dilemmas in relation to how to be “good Muslims” as well as being Thai. Thai secular mainstream culture in these short films and

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คน นราธิวาส เขาเกลียดมึงกันทุกคนแหละไอ้ เมธี กลับตัว ห่าฟองงมึงงหรือ เมธี คอยชช ขนาดที่ได้ sillyfool! ที่ดั่งกว่ามึง เขายังรู้จักกลับตัวกลับใจและเดินในแนวทางของ ศาสนา

103 คนไม่เข้าใจทำไมคนอิสลามจึงห้ามร้องเพลง การร้องเพลงมีแต่สร้างความสุข ไม่ได้สร้างความเดือดร้อนให้ใคร

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ถ้าพวกคุณที่เม้นว่าเค้า ละทิ้งบ้านเกิดมึง...แล้วมาเล่น เน็ตทำไม ดู youtube ทำไม มันเป็นบันเทิงไม่ใช่หรือ? นั่นก็ยั่วว่าที่เค้าละ ที่เค้าไม่ได้ไปฆ่าใครตายหรอกครับ

talks is portrayed as something forbidden to Muslims and the assumption is that Muslims who still practice these activities are being apparently “misled” by “mainstream culture”. The existence of these videos made by Muslim minorities suggests that there is a need for the re-appropriation of a Muslim identity as Thai citizens: “Muslim Others within” *re-assert* Islam in their identity as a way of negotiating with the *visuality of Muslimness*. This also echoes findings from in the analysis of *White Channel* and other *halal media* in the three southern border provinces.

From these findings, in terms of self-representation in online spaces, it can be argued that their *otherness* is *re-constructed* in the online public space. Through the remediation of mainstream visual genres e.g. short films and music videos, Thai Muslims negotiate with the mainstream discourse of “good Muslims” by re-asserting Islam into their identity. By making themselves *visible*, their visual practices suggest that they want to participate in the Thai public sphere, *but* as “good Muslims” according to Islam and not “Thainess”.

The remediation of mainstream audio-visual genres on YouTube also re-define visual references of Islam. Visual references of Islam such as skullcaps, beards, *thobe* dress and Islamic observances are employed in these audio-visual texts to suggest their piety and thus the way of being “good Muslims”. However, these Islamic visual references are not necessarily tied to “backwardness” nor being “rural” and, moreover, Muslim characters in short films or in other videos are in modern settings such as universities. It is also interesting to note that they do not have to wear Muslim outfits all the time to be “good Muslims”. Unlike the portrayal of Thai Muslims discussed in Chapter Three and Four, which place emphasis on *sarongs* and skullcaps, Muslims in these videos are portrayed wearing various types of dress, sometimes T-shirts, jeans or school uniform or a hybrid mix of clothes where a skullcap can accompany T-shirt and jeans.

This reinforces the argument noted above, that online spaces have enabled *halal media* to bring about multiple types of spaces and visual representations. This also rings true in

terms of visual representations in these videos. Signifiers such as Islamic visual references and modern dress such as T-shirts, jeans and university student uniforms are not *fixed*. These can be used in different spaces and entail different meanings, which are at times contradictory to each other. For example, the rock singer Maetee Labanoon is wearing *thobe* and a skullcap while visiting the southernmost provinces and giving talks to inspire Muslim youths, while as a singer he wears shirt and jeans, playing the guitar and singing which are all considered *haram*. It appears that he is using visual references to negotiate living in-between the two cultures. Conversely, Toh who used to be a popular singer and has since devoted himself to *dakwah*, changed his look by wearing a beard and skullcap while also wearing a polo shirt with jeans. Another example is Ameen, the lead actor in the short film *Ameen*. In everyday life, he wears a uniform or T-shirt and jeans. However, in the scene where he practices Islamic observances, he is portrayed wearing *thobe* and a skullcap. This again suggests a *negotiation* with being a “good Muslim” in modern Thai society to which they belong. Consequently, visual references of *Muslimsness* as found in these analyses are not *fixed* but in a constant flux and visual references of *Muslimness* re-employed in different contexts, space and time during a process of negotiation between being “good Muslims” and being a part of Thai society.

Multiplicity of “good Muslims” in online visual spaces

Through the practices of *halal media*, Muslim minorities employ Islamic principles to *re-assert* Islam as part of their identity in order to be “good Muslims”. The findings in the previous sections have extended Gilquin’s (2005) argument on the re-assertion of Islam in the Thai Muslim identity by showing that during this process, “Thainess”, mainstream Thai culture and mainstream media, are employed by Thai Muslims as a “Thainess” *Other* to *negotiate* with and thus *re-create a Thai Muslim Self*. As a result, the category of “good Thai Muslims” as constructed in *halal media* by Muslims themselves relies heavily on “Thainess”, which is the essence of mainstream culture.

Mainstream Thai media is depicted as containing *haram* activities that will create *fitna* (temptation) and *khwa-m-pan-puan* (unrest) and are run with *haram* money. Thai (mainstream) cultural practices such as having boyfriends/girlfriends, popular music, and New Year celebrations are portrayed as practices that “mislead” Muslims away from *tawhid* or being at one with God. Moreover, Thai Muslims are represented in mainstream Thai media as *inferior Others* who are backward and need to be “civilised” and “saved” from “bad Muslims” by Buddhist Thais. As a result, self-produced *halal media* in these online spaces is used as a marker to negotiate with “good Muslims” as *defined* by “Thainess” and operates through the Thai mainstream media. However, besides the negotiations noted above, what does this process of identity formation in these online disruptive spaces tell us?

New media practices, such as participatory culture, produsage, convergence media, and collective power, along with emerging online spaces, have enabled visual media practices outside the mainstream media realm. These practices including remediation intersect with “the matrix of power” (Nakamura, 2008) in various domains in society. Through analyses undertaken in previous sections, these dichotomies - i.e. “Thainess”/“Muslimness”, Islam/Buddhism, mainstream media/online media, rural Muslims/modern Buddhist Thais, public space/private space - are crucial elements in understanding the construction of “good Muslims”. But in what way do these different domains interact with each other?

The findings noted above suggest that the boundaries between these binaries are far from being clear-cut. To unpick these binaries, I shall apply an approach in postcolonial Thai cultural studies to inform my analysis. Harrison (2010) argues that contemporary “Thainess” is a result of interaction with the West; but the results of the encounters engender various results (“multiplicity”). Harrison undermines the notion of the dichotomy between East/West, Coloniser/Colonised by showing that “Thainess” is the fusion of preexisting and Western culture and that, moreover, this cultural borrowing is not static but ambivalent and at times ambiguous. As a result, “simple binaries collapse and fall short of functioning as an effective

framework to illuminate the multiple meanings at play” (p. 35). In the case of this research, online spaces have resulted in a “multiplicity” of encounters between Thai coloniser/colonised Muslims, “Thainess”/Thai Muslim minorities, globalisation (through online spaces)/local Muslim practices, reformist Islam/traditional Islam, and the mainstream media/online media. These encounters have also placed “multiple meanings at play” (Harrison 2010, p.35) with each other, and for this chapter the meaning of “good Muslims” as represented through visuals is central to these encounters.

By using the approach noted above as a framework, the findings from the analysis of the self-representation of Muslims through the work of *halal media* would appear to suggest multiplicity, ambivalence and even ambiguity and contradictions in these encounters. Firstly, through *halal media*, Thai Muslims offer an “Islamic model” of running broadcast media in a relational online space to provide *halal* content for the audience. The construction of *halal media* hinges on juxtaposing *Islamic mediated spaces* with the mainstream Thai media. While mainstream media is market-oriented and contains *haram* activities, *halal media* positions itself as “media for good deeds” that will create “a new type of a society”. (This suggests that the Thai society we are now living in is not “good” and so we need a “new type” of society.) However, through the production process as described in the section of interviews of *White Channel* producers, we can see the efforts made in adopting popular audio-visual forms such as drama, animation, short films, and music videos to make them *halal*. These findings show a process of negotiation between staff who are trained or experienced in mainstream media/institutions and the *shariah* board that oversees *halal* visual codes. It appears that “mainstream knowledge” in video production is inevitable during the process of construction of *halal media*. On the other hand, the *shariah* board was established because of a need to negotiate with “mainstream audio-visual media practices”. *Halal media* at the point of encounter between the mainstream and online media should thus be seen as *a process*, rather than *a product*. The “constructed” categories of *halal media* and mainstream media exist since

they are relational to each other in terms of space (mainstream vs online) and practices (*haram* activities vs *halal* activities). This process has resulted in the *ambivalent* character of Muslim-made audio-visual media such as *halal* entertainment, *halal* drama, and *halal* films. However, this also means that the *re-appropriation* of Thai Muslims by re-affirming Islam to re-define “good Muslims” is fused with elements of modernised “Thainess”.

Secondly, *halal media* puts Islamic principles at the forefront of a reconstruction of the identity of “good Muslims”. This is another point of encounter within this online space:

“Thainess” “good Muslim” and *halalised* “good Muslims”. *Dakwah* movements are employed to propagate Islam in Thai Muslims by convincing them to follow *tawhid*. This is in contrast with the representation of *inferior* “good Muslims” according to “Thainess” values found in the mainstream media (see also Chapter Three and Four). As a result, the construction of “good Muslims” as found in *halal media* and *dakwah* movements hinges on “good Muslims” as defined by “Thainess”. Results from *halal media* analyses suggest that “good Muslims” in this globalised and media-saturated world can embrace the permissibility principles in Islam or *halal* while, simultaneously consume *halal* entertainment forms of visual media and incorporate new technology such as YouTube in their daily lives. This *visibility* and practices of *visuality* in an online public space can be seen as a *reassertion* of Islam in the Thai Muslim identity in modern capitalist Thai society. However, this *reassertion* of Islam relies heavily on the presence of mainstream practices. As findings in the last section illustrate, by representing “good Muslims”, Thai mainstream practices such as listening to popular music, having boyfriends/girlfriends and gambling have to first be employed as a marker of “non-Islamic” practices. At the results, the re-definition of “good Muslims” that *dakwah* and *halal media* are trying to construct is actually *Thai-ised* “good Muslims” since it is imbued with “Thainess”.

The results also show that the construction of “good Muslims” in *halal media* in the three southern border provinces is a different kind of “good Muslim”, which is the result of the different points of contact. Besides being considered to be “backward” and “rural Others

within", Malay-speaking Muslims' representation in Thai mainstream media regarding violence in the region is framed as "Islamic radicalism". As a result, their reappropriation of their identity emphasises "correcting" the distorted images of Islam and Muslims. By emphasising their piety in audio-visual texts, they reconstruct "good Muslims" as Thai citizens and perform a role in excluding "bad Muslims" from "good Muslims". As a result, categories of "Thai Muslims" in a constant flux, which also shows that the "good Muslim" is not a static category. *Halal media* practices carried out by different groups of Muslims which intersect with different "the matrix of power" have yielded a dynamic multiplicity of "good Muslims".

Thirdly, "goodness" (*khwan-dee*) in Thai seems to be the central theme in the identity construction of Thai Muslims within Thai society. Beside *halal* being used as a marker of good Muslims, the word *dee* (trans. good) occurs in many phrases suggesting "good Muslims" or "good media". For example, *White Channel* positions itself as a *sathanee khwan dee yee sip see chua mong* (trans. 24-hour television station of goodness). The channel also produced *Amin*, a *halal film*, to honour the Prophet and encourage Muslims to "follow good deeds that the Prophet did". Nidhi Eowseewong (2015) speculates that the new trend among Muslim communities in studying Islamic principles rigorously might be the result of the need to negotiate with the Thai state under the hegemony of "good persons". This argument resonates greatly in the results found in this chapter where *halal*, including *halal* audio-visuals, are emphasised and *re-affirmed* in the Thai Muslim identity. Muslim visual references of piety thus connote "good" Muslims.

This may also suggest that an emphasis on the "goodness" of being Muslims in this online space is *mimicry*: a repetition with difference. It is a way that the colonised imitate the coloniser but in a way that is not quite the same. Huddart (2006) notes that for Bhabha's concept of *stereotypes*, in order to get this colonial discourse functioning, they have to be used and disseminated. This process of dissemination thus paves the way for the colonised to "play" with stereotypes in a comical way. Huddart (2006) further notes that mimicry is a way of

imitating something, but not being totally the same, while the previous two chapters (Three and Four) show that the *visuality of Muslimness* is constructed with stereotypes. Though different periods, Muslims are portrayed as the Other where the gap between being Other and Self is kept in place. However, the practices of *halal media* in online spaces suggests that *halal media* is a way of “mimicking” because it emphasises the representation of “good Muslim”. The re-appropriation of the “Muslim Self” appears to rely on an imitation of “Thainess” - “but still not quite.” “Goodness” is employed through *halal* practices in order to construct Thai Muslims/Malay-speaking Muslims who are “good” Thai citizens but not completely Thai.

So far, this chapter has illustrated how *halal media* functions to redefine “good Muslims” as Thai citizens in online spaces. Visual productions enabled by new media practices such as produsage, remediation, participatory media, network communication, media convergence and others are employed to negotiate with the *visuality of Muslimness*. Rather than being the object of the gaze and being represented, now more Thai Muslims make themselves visible as “visual subjects” (Mirzoeff, 1999) in online public spaces. The results suggest that encounters between Muslim minorities and other domains in the Thai society under “the matrix of power” (Nakamura, 2008) has brought about a multiplicity of spaces and representation.

The next chapter further explores YouTube channels and videos made by younger generations of Muslims in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat. Unlike videos in the current chapter, videos made by Muslim pupils and university students tend to be less serious and more of an entertainment. The purpose of this is to offer a wider picture of how Muslim minorities represent themselves in the self-produced media on YouTube.

Chapter Six

The self-representation of Thai Muslims in the southern border provinces: negotiating “good Muslims” from the edge of “Thainess”

The previous chapter shed light on the *halalisation* of audio-visual practices among Thai Muslims in Bangkok and Malay-speaking Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces. Against the backdrop of the secular and corporate-run mainstream Thai media which arguably represent Thai Muslims as “Others within”, *halal media* has emerged as Muslim-produced audio-visual media guided by Islamic principles. The previous chapter shows how a group of Muslims in Bangkok set up their own audio-visual codes and organisational practices of *halal media* through an interpretation of the *Koran* and *hadith*, the two sacred Islamic texts. These Islamic codes, which include an emphasis on Islamic visual references such as skullcaps and *hijabs* and the Islamic way of life, are employed to constitute “good media” for “good Muslims” whose everyday life practices are guided by Islamic principles rather than mainstream Thai culture. To put this into context, this emerging trend of *halal* visual discourse operates under *dakwah* movements in 21st century Thailand wherein Thai Muslims are encouraged to become “good Muslims” by returning to Islam (*klap pai soo withee itsalam*¹⁰⁵). Through this re-assertion of Islam into the Thai Muslim identity, the way of life of Muslims has become more codified. Some Thai mainstream practices which had been accommodated by many Thai Muslims for decades, such as listening to music, participating in Buddhist-related activities, and not wearing *hijabs*, became forbidden (*haram*) and these “non-Muslim” practices are employed as a line to demarcate boundaries between “good Muslims” and “bad Muslims”. It is argued that this *re-appropriation* of a Muslim identity as minorities in Thailand via self-representation in *non-mainstream* online visual spaces functions as an apparatus to

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negotiate with the mainstream version of the *visuality of Muslimness* – visual tropes of Thai Muslims who are backward and inferior (see also Chapter Three and Four).

Nonetheless, besides the construction of “good Muslim” subjectivity, the results in the previous chapter also illustrate nuances of visual representations in *halal media*. The representations of “good Muslims” are not monolithic but a construction of Thai Muslim identity in different spaces. This attests to the fact that different groups of Thai Muslims are constrained by different socio-political and economic conditions. By examining the intersection between everyday practices of *halal* visual production of the minorities and “the matrix of power” (Nakamura, 2008), the findings show that these encounters have brought about multiple meanings (e.g. “good Muslims”, Islamic visual references) which lie beyond the binary oppositions of coloniser/colonised, “Thainess”/“Muslimness”, oppressor (Thai state)/oppressed (Muslim minorities), or even mainstream media/non-mainstream media. An interplay between Self and Other which retains a construction of identity as an unsettled, ambivalence and contradictory process is apparent.

A good example is when *White Channel* which is run by Thai Muslims in Bangkok (who can be considered as a group of middle-class, urban, educated Muslims) employed non-mainstream media spaces and *halal media* to educate Malay-speaking Muslims about the “correct principles of Islam” and this, as the station manager of *White Channel* said, would help the Thai government tackle violence in the three southern border provinces. By doing so, *White Channel* as Thai Muslims from Bangkok, who portray themselves as “not quite Thai”, positions itself as “more Muslim” than the others while simultaneously proposing Islamic principles as a way to solve the ongoing conflict in the Muslim majority region that the Buddhist Thai state has failed to resolve. This also suggests an ambitious move to *re-position* Islam and re-define themselves as “good Muslims” in a so-called Buddhist country. The construction of “good Muslims” in this context is thus not a discrete practice but is always

relational as it hinges on the existence of the Other, and it is also not static as it is always *in-process* in terms of construction and re-construction.

To extend the arguments made above and to give a fuller picture of this relational and always *in-process* identity construction and *subjectification* through the active participation of online visual media, this chapter will delve further into a construction of Thai Muslim identity on YouTube. By doing so, I shall investigate YouTube channels produced by Thai Muslims in the three southern provinces in particular. I choose to focus on videos made by Thai Muslims in the region for three reasons.

Firstly, there is an emerging trend among young Muslims in the region to acquire video production skills, make audio-visual content about themselves and their region and post these videos on their YouTube channels. This trend has caused changes in the visibility of Muslims from the region. While previously the ways in which people from outside the region learned about these Muslims were limited to representations in mainstream media such as cinema and the press, now they are able represent themselves through online media platforms. Secondly, these “border provinces” and their Muslim population have been portrayed in the Thai mainstream visual media as the *Other within* who are also backward. As a result, by representing themselves as video-makers who participate in online activities, these Muslims appear to make an effort in *intervening in* long-held tropes about Muslims and this deserves attention. Thirdly, after the eruption of violence in 2004, more and more “knowledge” about Malay-speaking Thai Muslims in the southern border provinces has been produced in various public domains such as the press, television and academia. However, the knowledge is mainly constructed from *outside* the region. Therefore, by analysing local media professionals and amateur video producers, this will help us understand the process of how “local Muslims” negotiate knowledge about the southern border provinces which usually conjures up stereotypes of violence. The last reason is that, as part of a community of faith, Malay-

speaking Muslims are, more or less, affected by the current of the re-appropriation of the Thai Muslim identity, and as audio-visual media producers, *halal media* could potentially play a role in shaping the way they construct their identity in their audio-visual texts.

Due to the vast amount of YouTube videos produced by Malay-speaking Thai Muslims, I have narrowed down video samples to self-produced videos, which portray Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces in a playful manner. The playful character of these videos is crucial when they are juxtaposed with the practices of *halal media* which are discussed in the previous chapter. As noted earlier, *halal media* were initiated by Bangkok Thai Muslims and later adopted by a group of Muslims in the southernmost provinces who wanted to use online audio-visual media to propagate Islam and *tawhid* (to be at one with God) as a way of life. As a result, sermons, short films and television series pertaining to Islamic principles are at the forefront of these channels. However, besides *halal media*, YouTube also appears to be a space for young Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces, who now have access to visual equipment and online spaces, to represent themselves as “fun (สนุก)” “cool (ทันสมัย)” and “playful (ขี้เล่น)” Muslims to the Thai online public realm. By analysing non-*dakwah* YouTube videos, I will be able to compare and contrast them with the representation of “good Muslims” in *halal media* and also the “Thainess” version of “good Muslims” in mainstream media.

The following sections will examine self-produced YouTube channels run by Thai Muslims in the southernmost provinces in order to shed light on what these encounters have brought about in the realm of self-representation on YouTube.

Muslims YouTube channels: “broadcasting back” from the “southernmost margin” of “Thainess”

Applying the concept of *writing back* by the colonised to the coloniser, this section examines YouTube channels made by Muslims in the three southern border provinces of Thailand and poses the question: to what extent do the user-led content, participatory,

networked characteristics of “new media” like YouTube enable Muslims in the three southern border provinces *broadcast back* to powers overarching their construction of identity? If identity is not monolithic and stable, how does their visual media practices, when intersecting with the matrix of power, bring about the multiple meanings at play through media representations in different media spaces?

Their YouTube channels’ main pages and data collected during fieldwork in 2015 (interviews of Muslim video producers) will be analysed in order to shed light on how these Muslim video producers construct their identity through the representation of their YouTube pages and the purpose of their channels.

A survey of how Muslim video producers choose visual references to portray themselves in these YouTube channel pages shows that a camera/video camera, which is visual equipment, has been widely employed by these Muslim video producers. What is at stake when Thai Muslims in the southernmost region use this visual equipment as a visual reference to construct their identity as media producers from the margins of “Thainess”? The use of visual equipment as part of their visual representation offers a crucial point of departure before analysing audio-visual texts themselves as it is argued in the previous chapters that since the colonial period, Muslims in the old Patani kingdom have been “observed” and “recorded” by Bangkok elites who employed Western knowledge such as anthropology to categorise their subjects during the wake of the creation of the nation-state.

Nonetheless, due to the availability of cameras and YouTube channels, Muslims in the three southern border provinces now possess the power to represent themselves to the public. However, it is important to consider that YouTube is not a neutral space and thus, the power to create their own audio-visual media is also shaped by cultural and socio-economic constraints. Moreover, these channels were produced by younger generations of educated

Thai Muslims (in their teens, 20s and early 30s). Therefore, a position where the self-representation that Thai Muslims are “speaking from” also has to be taken into account.

Abdul Hafis Maeyoh or Big¹⁰⁶(his nickname) is the founder of the YouTube channel *Muslimited*¹⁰⁷. According to Big, *Muslimited* is a group of young Muslims who “think outside the box but do not violate the principles (of Islam)”¹⁰⁸. Big says during the interview that I conducted with him that the main goal of his YouTube channel is to educate Muslim teens in the southernmost provinces about Islam and how to be “a good person”. He further explicates that there are social problems among Muslim teens in the area, especially with drugs. As a result, he wants to use his short films and television series to attract these young teens rather than using traditional sermons of Islamic *ulama* or Islamic teachers that can be perceived as being “too boring” for a teen audience. Moreover, Malay is the main language used in *Muslimited* videos so as to attract a local audience.

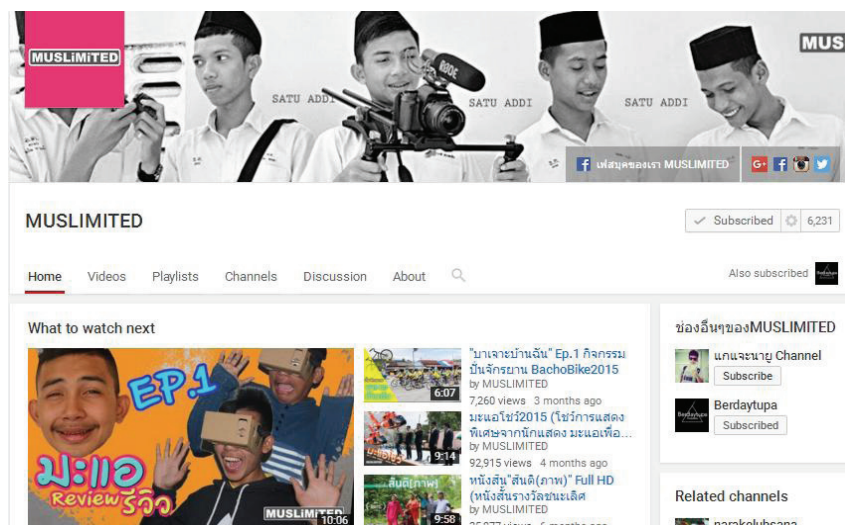


Figure 1: YouTube page of *Muslimited*

Even though Big is from Pattani, he trained as a computer programmer in Bangkok and was educated at Rangsit University in Bangkok. At the University, as a film enthusiast, he

¹⁰⁶ Personal interview in Narathiwat in July 2015

¹⁰⁷ with (<https://www.youtube.com/user/Muslimited/about>, 6,231 subscribers , 2,026,748 views, started the channel on 6 Aug 2011).

¹⁰⁸ “*Muslimited* คือ กลุ่มวัยรุ่นมุสลิมที่คิดนอกกรอบแต่ไม่หลุดกรอบ”

collaborated with other Muslim students in a Muslim club who were studying for a degree in communication arts and possessed skills in filming and editing. In 2012, Big and these students, who were also members of the Muslim club, initiated the film production house *Burdaytupa*¹⁰⁹ at the university and began producing short films aimed at propagating Islam. It is no surprise that he has incorporated the experience he gained in Bangkok into his work in the far-flung district where his school is located.

Big's parents are the owners of Addiniatul Islamiah School, a private Islamic school in Bajoh district, Narathiwat where some of the students are involved in YouTube video-making. Bojoh itself is considered a "red zone" among locals in Pattani since there have been major gun attacks and bombs in the district.

In Yala province, two Muslim siblings Tuan Yusree Seræ and Tuan Yazdan Seræ¹¹⁰ are running the YouTube channel *Putra Media*¹¹¹. *Putra* in the Malay language means "prince", the name being chosen since they are descendants of Yala's sultans. Tuan Yusree, the 23-year-old elder brother was studying for a master's degree in Linguistics at Thammasart University in Bangkok, and before that he had studied at Mae Fah Luang University in Chiang Rai (the northernmost province of Thailand) where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in English.

¹⁰⁹ (<https://www.youtube.com/user/Berdaytupa/about>, 365 subscribers • 94,472 views, started the channel in 15 Jul 2013)

¹¹⁰ Personal interview in Pattani in June 2015

¹¹¹ (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGwA-mhtT019b6cmzassiRw>, 372 subscribers, 72,260 views started the channel in 2 Dec 2011)

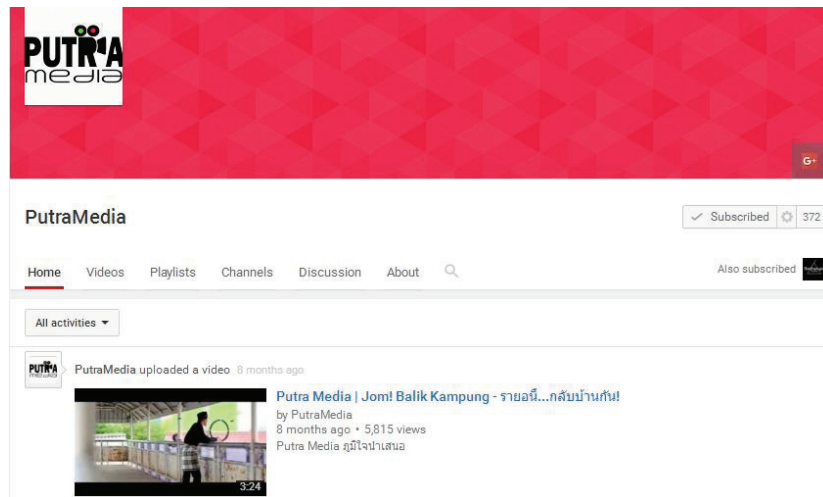


Figure 2: YouTube page of Putra Media

Tuan Yazdan, the younger brother, is studying in Grade 10 at Thammavittaya Yala (an Islamic private school in Yala province). He is still a high school student and is the leader of an ITC club¹¹² at the school (this club also has its proprietary YouTube channel). As a result, some video clips appear on both channels. It should be noted that Thammavittaya Yala is a prestigious Islamic private school in the southernmost region, yet it became notorious after some teachers and students were arrested as alleged separatists (Administrators of Thammavittaya, 2012).

The content of videos in *Putra Media* ranges from a short video encouraging people to go back home during the *hari raya* (in Malay, it means New Year) to short videos with references to Islam. All videos have references to Islam and Malay to differing degrees. There is also a travel programme series, *Muslim sut khua Mae Sai Betong* (trans. Extreme Muslim travellers: from Mae Sai to Betong). Mae Sai is the northernmost district and Betong in the southernmost district for his hometown of Yala. Tuan Yusree says that he heard people in his hometown saying that it is difficult for Muslims to live outside the three southernmost provinces and, as a result, he would like to show people that other Muslims are similar to those in the southernmost provinces.

¹¹² <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCELIGBxLPLmyymE8l0Fb2A> 322 subscribers, 43,850 views started the channel in 15 Nov 2013

There is another active YouTube channel run by a school in Pattani, *PIS Studio*¹¹³, which is the official YouTube channel of Pattana Islam School (an Islamic private school). The project of running the YouTube channel was created by Sofuwun Marudin¹¹⁴, a school teacher/administrator who holds a degree in Information Technology from Prince of Songkhla University in, a major university in Pattani and Yahaya Pokha, a teacher who holds a degree in art education from the same university who, besides teaching, is supervising the student's photography and video projects. Members of *PIS Studio* consist of both male and female students in their senior years and although the channel is used mainly to broadcast student activities such as sports day, it is also used as a place to share documentaries and short films made by the students.

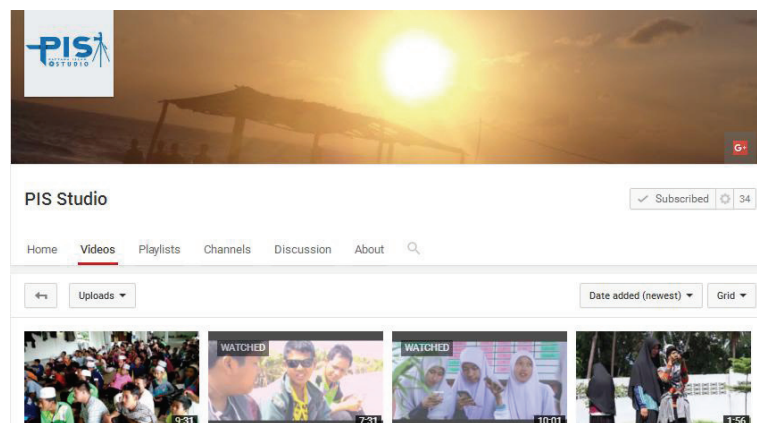


Figure 3: *PIS Studio* YouTube channel

Sunnusee Kareeji and Mayusof Kadong, two of its leading members, who were the photographer and video editor respectively, also have their own YouTube channels. It is interesting to note that these two *PIS studio* students selectively upload some of their videos to their own channel (e.g. Sunnusee Kareeji runs *Sunnusee Studio* YouTube channel¹¹⁵) but only

¹¹³ https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCV_sokW9jH2UZLfBMULnr6Q 34 subscribers, 4,600 views, started the channel in 8 Jan 2015)

¹¹⁴ Personal interview in Pattani in July 2015

¹¹⁵ *Sannusee Studio* <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKJch-6uWWNL7rCMMq2cYJA> 26 subscribers, 2,917 views, started the channel in 17 Aug 2012)

those such as lip-sync videos showing male teenagers singing to popular music or other playful activities.

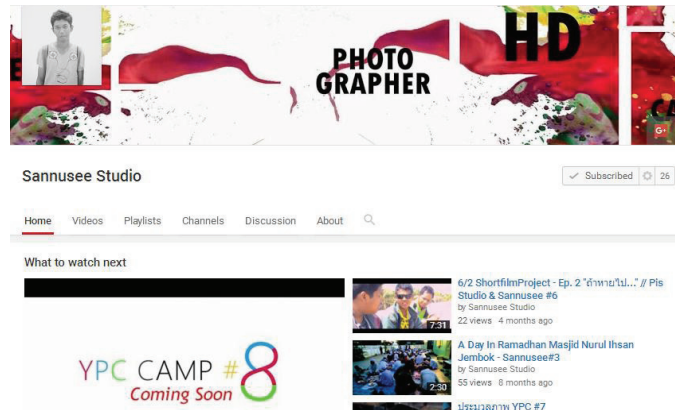


Figure 4: Sannusee Studio YouTube channel

Unlike previous channels, which are embedded in educational institutions, *Social Fatoni*¹¹⁶ consists of university students from different faculties of Prince of Songkhla University who are interested in filming local events, both inside and outside the university. Even though all its members are university students they do not produce videos on behalf of the university.

¹¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3tkVNReSksoSI1tKnbnEnPA> (2,786 subscribers, 1,173,090 views, started the channel in 20 Jan 2012)



Figure 4: Social Fatoni YouTube channel

They consider themselves a production house that produces “peace media for southern border provinces”¹¹⁷ and they run it as a business. By doing so, they use the income they gain for purchasing and maintaining their video equipment.

Similar to *Social Fatoni*, *IdioCinematography*¹¹⁸ is a production house business based in Pattani where Abdulromae Talae, founder of the production house and the YouTube channel, began his film career by working for a local cable television and holds a bachelor’s degree in English from Prince of Songkhla University. He has used YouTube as a showcase for his previous work, ranging from a video presentation for an academic conference to a wedding video presentation and has also produced a documentary about the three southern border provinces for the Thai Public Broadcasting System (TPBS).

¹¹⁷ สื่อยุติความขัดแย้งชายแดนใต้

¹¹⁸ (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWjiPoy9nzJq7tjB8Xalrg> 139,661 views started the channel in 26 Mar 2012)

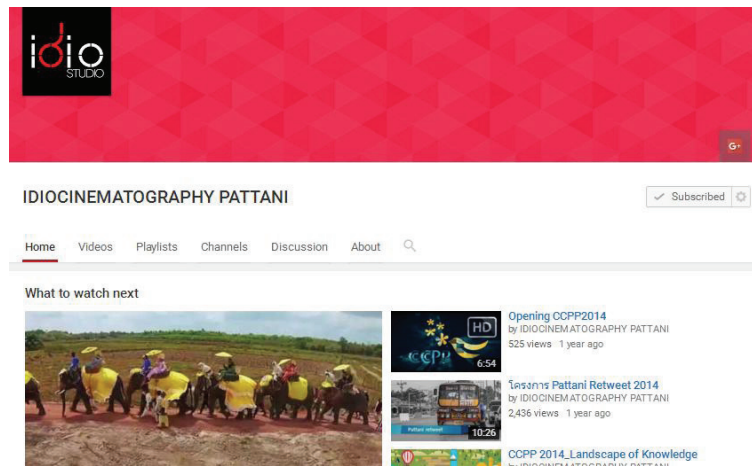


Figure 5: *Idiocinematography* YouTube channel

Anas Pongprasert, *Saiburi Looker*¹¹⁹ founded in 2013 is aimed to promote multiculturalism and understanding between different ethnic groups including Thai, Chinese and Malay in Saiburi district, Pattani. It should also be noted that Saiburi is another 'red zone' in the far south where there has been major violence. Anas graduated from Ramkhamhaeng University in Bangkok and has lived in the capital for more than ten years. However, he would like to bring some degree of normality back to his hometown.

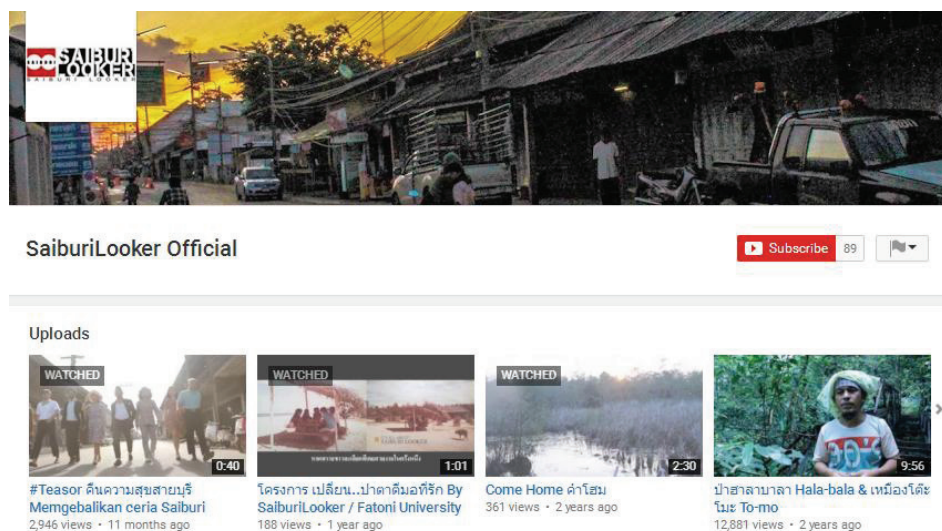


Figure 6: *Saiburi Looker* YouTube channel

¹¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/user/saiburilooker/videos>

Emerging Thai Muslim online video producers: from an object for the “Thainess gaze” to a creator of knowledge about the southernmost provinces

By examining Malay-speaking Thai Muslims’ YouTube pages and logos, results suggest that visual equipment such as still- and video-cameras, and terms pertaining to visual production such as *looker*, *studio* and *cinematography* have been employed as tools of identity construction for these Muslim video-makers. Besides analyses of the self-representation of Malay-speaking Thai Muslims on YouTube (which will be discussed in full length in the next section), their self-portrayal as a group of “local” Muslims who are actively participating in the construction of knowledge on the region noted above is equally important.

Against the backdrop of stereotypes of Thai Muslims in the mainstream Thai media or the *visuality of Muslimness* noted in Chapters Three and Four, these YouTube video producers portray themselves in a different light. Images appearing on YouTube pages, ranging from a photo of students holding cameras with text describing them as “cinematographer”, “photographer”, “studio” and “looker”, suggest that now they, as people from the three provinces themselves, can *actively* construct visual knowledge about their hometown. Rather than just being a passive audience watching what others produce to represent them, they are now the producers of their image and YouTube enables this visual content to go public.

Consequently, they are not just the object of the gaze, as they are when appearing in cinema and popular music videos, but the act of being “the cameraman” has turned them into “the bearer of the look”, a role that is normally played by the Bangkok Thai elites and owners of the “Thainess” gaze. This act has brought about a *projection* of their own Imaginary onto the screen as part of an identity construction. Hall (1999) argues in his visual culture volume that the subject “is not a completed entity but something which is produced through complex and unfinished process which are both social and psychic, a subject-in-process” (p.311). Therefore, I argue that Muslim video producers, as a subject-in-process, are exploiting YouTube spaces

and online participatory culture to enable them to use self-produced images in a *re-construction* of Thai Muslim subjectivity in a system of representation.

At a social level, their practices suggest a negotiation with the notion of “Others within”. Visuals and text, such as a Muslim teen holding a camera, on the YouTube pages analysed above suggest that Muslims can also do “modern things” such as running a media production company or operating video cameras, seems to undermine the long-standing image of Thai Muslims in the region.

On the other hand, at the psychic level, the Muslim Self is anxiously constructed through “the gaze” of their own self-produced *Imaginary* projection on YouTube screens. This Imaginary hinges on an image of the Other which, in this context, is “Thainess”. If “Thainess” connotes something more “civilized” than being *ban-nok* (trans. rural), these visual references and practices suggest that Thai Muslims in the three southern border provinces are capable of engaging with something “cool” and “modern” like other teens in Thailand and elsewhere, such as wearing T-shirts with English letters/names. However, they still need to keep the *gap* by not getting “too close” to “Thainess”. Several “non-Thai” references such as the name *Muslimited*, skullcaps and Malay names such as *Putra Media*, and *Social Fatoni* have also been used in order to differentiate between Muslims and “non-Muslims.” This resonates with what Homer (2005) posits about Lacan’s Imaginary that “for Lacan, the ego emerges at this moment of alienation and fascination with one’s own image” (p.24).

It is especially interesting when Thai Muslims in the region have been living amidst conflict and violence for more than 10 years. The Self has therefore been in a process of construction and re-construction vis-à-vis the Others: “Thainess” that has been imposed upon them through social institutions such as educational establishments and the mainstream media; *Muslimness* through the *dakwah* movement of embracing *halal* life, Islamic schools and

halal media movements and *other* currents that flow beyond national boundaries such as Western music and the Korean wave.

These media practices among the minorities are thus not operating in a vacuum but in a site of “the matrix of power”. Nakamura (2008) argues that “visual culture critiques are concerned with tracing the genealogies of media use in new media, identifying specificities of genre or kinds of production and imaging practices, and producing readings of images that gesture toward identity formation in the matrix of power” (pp.10-11). As a result, other factors that might play a role in influencing the construction of Muslims in the three southern border provinces should be taken into account. The first chapter has laid bare the historical background of the relationship between the Thai state and Muslims. Moreover, historically speaking, broadcast media in Thailand have been in the tight grip of the state and corporate business interests. Furthermore, the prolonged violence and conflict that began in 2004 has, to a large extent, affected the way mainstream media depicts Muslims in the news and the way outsiders see the three southern border provinces. Furthermore, as discussed in chapter Two, 9/11 has affected the way Muslims are portrayed (see also Chapter Two). Also noted in the previous chapter, *halalisation* has become a discourse in audio-visual media in Thailand and it has appeared to gain more momentum.

In order to further explore results from the intersection between the everyday practices of these Muslim media producers and the matrix of power, data collected during fieldwork in the three southern provinces coupled with sampling videos was analysed and there emerged three themes: 1. Speaking back to outsiders on YouTube: correcting negative images and showing the beauty of the three southern border provinces. 2. Negotiating between being *halal* and being aesthetically attractive; and 3. Negotiating the appearance of *Muslimah* (Muslim women).

Speaking back to outsiders on YouTube: correcting negative images and showing “the beauty” of the three southern border provinces

Ever since violence erupted in the region in 2004, “bad news” about the region has been covered extensively in the mainstream Thai media; but with cameras in their hands and YouTube as a free platform, video-makers in the south are employing these tools to *speak back* to outsiders.

The video-makers engage with the violence in their hometown and are aware that outsiders have limited knowledge about their hometown because of the sparse news coverage. However, they think that there are other good aspects and beauty inherent within the region and they want to use the tools they have to hand to correct this wrong impression. Big¹²⁰ from *Muslimited* affirms that: “A film can play a role in changing the way people think and their attitude. People may see the South as a scary place. There are bombs and *southern bandits*”.¹²¹ One of *Muslimited*’s members also added: “I would like the outsiders to know about interesting things in Narathiwat”.¹²² Another member said: “There are bombs in our district. Therefore, we want to make a documentary showing the beauty of our hometown. To show that we also have something beautiful and we have more tourism sites”.¹²³

¹²⁰ Personal Interview in Patani in July 2015

¹²¹ “หนึ่งมีส่วนในการเปลี่ยนความคิด เปลี่ยนทัศนคติของคนได้” คนอาจจะมองว่าภาคใต้ น่ากลัว มีระเบิด มีโจรได้.

¹²² อยากให้คนนอกพื้นที่ได้รู้จักสิ่งที่น่าสนใจในจังหวัดนราธิวาส

¹²³ “แถวบ้านเรามีระเบิด พวกผมถึงได้จัดทำสื่อ ผมอยากรนำเสนอเกี่ยวกับความสวยงามของบ้านเรา ว่าบ้านเราก็มีความสวยงาม มีที่ท่องเที่ยวอีกเยอะ”



Figure 7: Documentary “Amazing Budo” on *Muslimited* YouTube channel



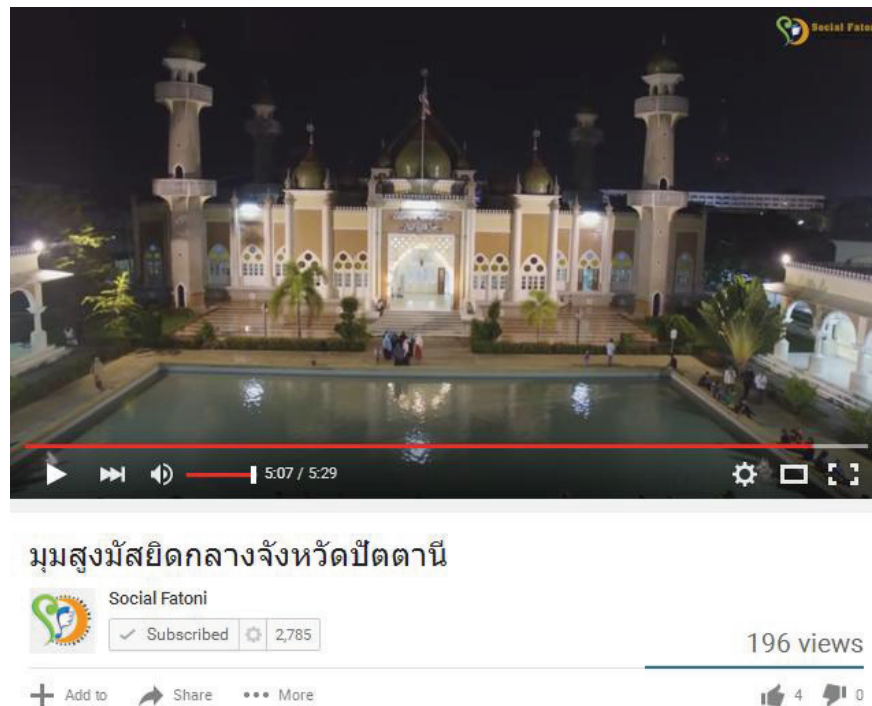


Figure 8-9: videos showing the beauty of *Rusamilae* seaside (figure 8) and Patani central mosque (figure 9) on Social Fotani YouTube channel

Similar to *Muslimited* members, Amarin¹²⁴ from *Social Fatoni* states that there are still good things in the three southern border provinces: “Even though there is violence, there are some good things. It’s not totally bad. The media in Thailand presents only the violent aspects of the region. There are bombs here and there. We want to show people a different aspect of it. We have good culture. There are activities. We are in a multicultural society”.¹²⁵ Fukon Mahama¹²⁶ from *Social Fatoni* says that as people from the region, they try to present their hometown from the point of view of a local person: “We go to places where people don’t go, such as Pattani river where there are many good things¹²⁷”. The results suggest that they see themselves as people in the area who are responsible for telling the “truth” to outsiders who have been bombarded with only one aspect of information, namely the violence. Therefore, images in their videos function as testimonials to the wider truth of the region. They could also

¹²⁴ Personal interview in Pattani in July 2015

¹²⁵ “ในพื้นที่ที่มีความรุนแรงยังมีสิ่งที่ดีอยู่ ไม่ได้มีแต่สิ่งเลวร้าย สื่อหลายๆสื่อนำเสนอออกไปแต่ความรุนแรง วันนั้นเกิดเหตุตรงนี้ วันนั้นเกิดเหตุตรงนั้น แต่เราพยายามจะนำเสนอในมุมมองที่ต่างกันคือในพื้นที่มีวัฒนธรรมที่ดี มีการจัดกิจกรรม และก็มีที่อยู่ร่วมกันของสังคมพหุวัฒนธรรม”

¹²⁶ Personal interview in Pattani in July 2015

¹²⁷ ในมุมมองของคนในพื้นที่ “เราพยายามลงไปในที่ที่คนอื่นไม่ได้ลงไป เช่นแม่น้ำปัตตานี มีอะไรดี ๆ มาก ... ”

suggest that the “gaze” of outsiders itself has played a crucial part in the construction of the Muslim Self on YouTube video.

The above results suggest that video-making practices and YouTube provide a space for Muslims to *re-construct* the Self and to *recreate* their own subjectivity within religious, economic and cultural constraints. However, since these visual productions also operate within “the matrix of power”, these self-produced audio-visual texts are sometimes driven by Thai government projects. Therefore, another constraint that deserves attention is the effort by the Thai state to solve the problems in the three southern border provinces by providing funds for schools and Thai Muslim video-makers in the region. Several documentaries on these YouTube channels were funded by government institutions such as the Ministry of Culture, the Ramjitti Institute (an institute focusing on child and youth research under the umbrella of the Thai Research Fund), the Regional Public Relations Department, and the Southern Border Provinces Administration Centre (SBPAC). These organisations not only provide funding but also organise video-making training for young Muslims and their support has undeniably brought about a proliferation of Muslims with skills in operating cameras, editing and scriptwriting. However, to a certain extent this has also shaped the content of these videos because they always set up the agenda of a video-making project such as promoting multiculturalism or peace. Many Muslims are not equipped with the necessary skills to produce videos, however, as noted in Chapter Four, *halal* media movements have been penetrating the region as well. As Muslims, the video-makers are made aware of this movement and inevitably, because Islam is a way of life, embracing *halal*, including *halal* media, has become part of their production practice, although in varying degrees.

Negotiating audio-visual content between being halal and aesthetically attractive

The data from the fieldwork suggests that YouTube producers are aware of a number of audiences who watch their videos especially when they are first uploaded. As a result, several strategies have been employed in order to attract as many viewers as possible. Not adhering to any single identity appears to be a distinctive characteristic of these YouTube video-makers and so a hybrid identity thus comes into play.

Tuan Yusree of *Putra Media* was struggling with how to attract an audience at the beginning saying, “at first, we did not know how to promote our channel. We just uploaded and then prayed for someone to share our video”.¹²⁸ He later found that putting the name of the video in both Thai and Malay was effective in attracting a larger audience: “Now we know how to create the title of a video. In the title, we use Malay at the beginning and then Thai. We select a name that can relate to all our audience”.¹²⁹

Big, the founder of *Muslimited*, uses uploaded videos on YouTube in order to make it easy to share in other platforms such as Facebook. He says: “We uploaded our videos to YouTube because it can be shared easily”.¹³⁰ When it comes to language choice, Big decided to use Malay to attract a teenage audience: “We are focusing on the teen audience in the three southern provinces because we know them. We use Malay in our short films because it is the language that teenagers use with their parents in everyday life”.¹³¹ Big’s strategy in using Malay language in his videos to attract Muslim teens appears successful in that the comedyละครมลายู มะแอเพื่อนฉัน “*Maair*” *Iklan Raya* Thailand 2015 has attracted more than 300,000 views and has been widely shared on other platforms.

¹²⁸ เราไม่รู้ว่าการโปรโมต เราปล่อยแล้วก็ภาวนาว่าเราจะแชร์กันเอง

¹²⁹ ตอนนั้นเราใช้วิธี ในการตั้งชื่อเรื่อง ใช้ชื่อมลายู แล้วต่อด้วยภาษาไทย ใช้ชื่อที่เกี่ยวข้องกับคน

¹³⁰ อัพยูทูปแล้วจะแชร์ได้ง่าย

¹³¹ เราเน้นวัยรุ่นสามจังหวัด เพราะเรารู้จักเด็กสามจังหวัด กลุ่มเป้าหมายของเราเน้นวัยรุ่นเราทำเป็นหนังสั้นภาษามลายูถิ่น “เพราะเป็นภาษาที่พูดกันบ่อยกับแม่ทุกวัน



Figure 10: The comedy Maair" Iklan Raya Thailand 2015 from *Muslimimited* YouTube channel

Even though producing videos to attract audiences has proven to be an achievement for these YouTube video-makers, they are also aware that they have to adhere to Islamic principles in making their YouTube channel and videos *halal*. This became especially important as the movement of making audio-visual media *halal* gained its momentum after *White Channel* became one of the most influential Muslim mediums. Even though all interviewees assert that Islam is a way of life that they, as Muslims, have to follow, *halal* has been applied as a principle to a varying degree.

The video-maker Tuan Yusree says that the name *Putra Media* obviously suggests that his YouTube channel is Malayu Muslim media and therefore adhering to Islamic principles is crucial: "The name *Putra Media* suggests that we are Malayu media and therefore Muslim. We cannot abandon Islam. We have to find a way to include it in a story, but we don't try to force our audience to watch".¹³² He further explains that it is not that he does not want to make his videos *haram*, but because there are only two of them working to produce the videos, and sometimes it is difficult to find *anasheed* that can go with a particular video. In the video *rayo ni klap ban kan*¹³³ (*Let's go home this New Year*), Malay music with musical instruments is used in the scene below. Tuan Yusree gives the reason for using this music in the scene is because it

¹³² "ชื่อปุตราวิเศษ เป็นชื่ออิสลาม เป็นชื่ออิสลาม เราจะทิ้งไม่ได้ ต้องสอดแทรก แต่เราก็ไม่ได้ยึดเยียด"

¹³³ รายนกกลับบ้านกัน

is about Malay-ness in terms of the Malay language appearing on a placard saying *kampung*, which means *home* in Malay, and the way the boy is dressed.



Figure 10: “Let’s go home this New Year” from *Putra Media* YouTube channel

However, in one scene in a video in the series *Putra on Tour*, showing a mosque in *Mae Sai* district, he opts to use *anasheed* with Arabic verses, while in other scenes music is used. This shows that for him, audio-visual codes are fluid and they can decide to use different audio-visual references that suggest “Thainess”, “Muslimness” or “Malayness”, depending on the context.

Tuan Yusree, who is the presenter of the travel series at the beginning of the programme, greets his audience by reciting Arabic phrases with reference to the *Koran*. Wearing a T-shirt, jeans and sunglasses, he says that he did this on purpose in order to attract a Muslim audience. He added music, but in scenes that are about Islam he uses *anasheed* because he knows that music is *haram* but, because there are only two of them working together, they could not find *anasheed* that fitted with the videos.

Similar to Tuan Yusree, Amran Yeeheng of *Social Fatoni* says that they will try to follow Islamic principles but admits that some elements of his videos might be *haram*: “What is *haram* is *haram* and we try to use it as little as possible. But if we want to send a message to the audience, they may not watch¹³⁴”. Furkon Mahama of *Social Fatoni* shares a similar point of view: “Nowadays we can avoid using music but if we look at our audiences’ needs we could add a little bit of music. It’s my personal point of view. We can hardly avoid music”.¹³⁵

Opinions of different *ulama* (even from outside the far south) can be employed as a tool to legitimise the use of music. Big of *Muslimited* adopted the opinion (ทรรศนะ) of Islamic scholars in Malaysia who argue that using music in the media is not *haram*. He states that it depends on whose opinion we follow: “We use our media to make a better society”; “some prominent Islamic teachers in Malaysia says it’s okay to use music. I thus adopted a model of media making in Malaysia”.¹³⁶ Big’s attitude towards using music in the media can be seen in his famous comedy *Maair Phuean Chan*.¹³⁷ In one scene Maair appears to lively and modern Malay music which is used to connote his cool persona in a suit and wearing sunglasses, one who is a *nak-rian nok* (a student who has studied abroad). As noted earlier, these YouTube video-makers put the number of viewers at the forefront. As a result, the *halal-ness*, especially with regard to audio content, appears to be negotiable.

134 “สิ่งต้องห้ามมันต้องห้ามอยู่แล้ว เราพยายามใช้ให้น้อยที่สุดแต่ถ้าสิ่งที่เราจะสื่อไป บางครั้งคนที่ดูอาจจะไม่ดู”

135 “ปัจจุบันเราหลีกเลี่ยงเสียงดนตรีเลยก็ได้ แต่ถ้าเราต้องการของคน ความสนใจเนี่ย มีดนตรีหนึ่งเข้าไป ความคิดส่วนตัวผมนะ”

136 ดนตรีที่ส่งเสริมให้ทำความดี” “แล้วแต่ทรรศนะของใคร” “เราใช้สื่อเพื่อเปลี่ยนสังคมให้ดีขึ้นมากกว่า” “บางทรรศนะ” อาจารย์ต่างๆที่มาเลเซียบอกว่าใช้ได้ ผมเลยไปดูโมเดลที่ มาเลเซีย

137 มะแอเพื่อนฉัน



Figure 11: *Maair Phuean Chan* from *Muslimited* YouTube channel

These Muslim YouTube producers came up with ideas of how to make their videos less *haram* and yet aesthetically pleasing for the viewer. Tuan Yusree of *Putra Media* was trying to accommodate *halal* into his videos by using music in scenes not related to Islam and *anasheed* in scenes addressing Islamic issues. Amran Yeeheng of *Social Fatoni* asserts: “If we use heavy music such as rock, it is not appropriate, but if it is soft music it is okay¹³⁸”.

The results above show that many Muslim video-makers do not abandon, but accommodate, the *halal* aspects of audio-visual media. However, some cases suggest that video-makers intentionally put music in their videos or even perform a lip-sync to a popular piece of music.

Anas Pongprasert, a member of *Saiburi Looker*, says that he prefers being a Muslim who accommodates Islam to local Malay culture and thus can live with other ethnic groups in the area more harmoniously. He even blames the movement of Islamisation in deepening the divide in society in the region. A teaser video to promote the event *khuen khwam-sook saiburi*

¹³⁸ เราใช้ดนตรีเชิงรุนแรงเกินอย่างร้องอก ไม่เหมาะสม แต่เป็นเสียงเบา ๆ โอเค

(trans. bringing happiness back to Saiburi) is a good example of how some Muslims do not wholeheartedly agree with avoiding music in a video. Not only is a 1960s rock and roll song part of the video but also members of *Saiburi Looker* dance to the song. Anas says during an interview that he considers his work in creating understanding between different Thai, Chinese and Muslim peoples in Saiburi is also religious work since the word Islam means peace. He further explains that since the rise in violence in the three southern border provinces, the relationship among different ethnic groups in his hometown has been torn apart and because of this he disagrees with the movement that emphasises rigid Islam (thus becoming more codified than before).





Figure 12-13 *khuen khwam-sook saiburi* from *Saiburi Looker* YouTube channel

Sometimes, different spaces on YouTube play an important role in allowing *haram* activities such as music to be present. For example, in the video for Lipsync การเดินทาง- Backpack - Sannusee#7¹³⁹ on *Sunnusee* Channel, a group of Muslim students from Pattana Islam School perform a lip-sync to a song while one of them plays the guitar. Also in another video titled *Castle Of Glass [Lipsync] - Sunnusee#5*¹⁴⁰ a Muslim boy wearing a hoodie performs a lip-sync to an English song. In both examples, they are not just using music in their videos but they also sing and play musical instruments, practices normally considered *haram*. However, these videos appear on *Sunnusee's* own channel not the school YouTube channel, which suggests that he is aware that the videos would not be considered proper. During interviews, these PIS members say that there are some videos that they share only among friends.

¹³⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JV5j8UsDM2U>

¹⁴⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lxHku_hOgWI&list=PLHfRSaWXXluWm2grDOt25CrB4m0DFhNjE&index=5

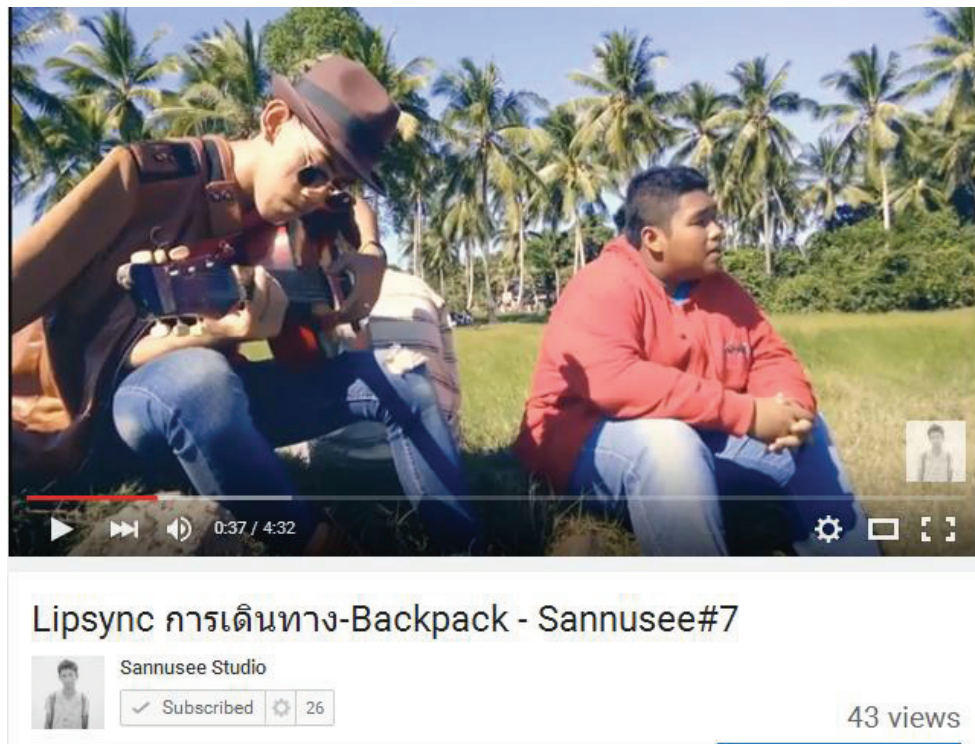


Figure 14-15: “Lipsync การเดินทาง-Backpack - Sannusee#7”(top) and Castle Of Glass [Lipsync] - Sannusee#5 (bottom) from *Sannusee* YouTube channel

The above results suggest that *halal* is a crucial consideration for Muslim YouTube video-makers. However, when it intersects with audio-visual media, which seeks to attract a wider audience, this principle seems to be taken less seriously when compared to YouTube videos produced by *dakwah*-styled video-makers as discussed in the previous chapter. While those YouTube channels employ *authentic Islam* (adhering to the Prophet and the *Koran*) and other religious elements essential to the construction of a Muslim Self that is religious, these more relaxed Muslim entertainment channels tend to absorb other non-Islamic cultural references such as “Malayness” (either *Patani* Malay or Malaysian), “Westernness” (music, dress, attitude) and “Thainess” (language and Thai pop culture) in the construction of the Self. Moreover, in one audio-visual text, these references, which appear to be *contradictory* from the vantage point of *halal* media as discussed in Chapter Five exist side by side. This suggests the hybrid identity of the Muslim Self constructed on YouTube.

YouTube is a space where media producers and consumers are bombarded with the flux and flow of visual references, from T-shirts and jeans to 1960s retro fashion and black suits with sunglasses. Instead of searching for unified visual codes of *Muslimness* and “authentic” Islam, these video-makers appear to *play* with the references and use them to create a hybrid identity in this relational space. While Islam became more codified for an offline life in the three southern border provinces (the line between *halal* and *haram* is made clearer than ever before), this relational space of YouTube seems to offer unorthodoxy as a way of constructing an image of the self for the greater public.

The next section will examine the gender aspect of audio-visual representations of Thai Muslims: an appearance of *Muslimah* (Muslim women) on YouTube.

Jetana (intention): negotiating appearances of Muslimah (Muslim women)

As noted in the previous chapter, one element of *halal-ness* in audio-visual media is avoiding showing women in videos unless they are pre-pubescent or elderly. This element of

halal audio-visual probity still plays an important role for these YouTube video-makers.

Nonetheless, the entertainment and aesthetic values of these videos are no less important.

Furthermore, these Muslim video-makers apply the concept of *jetana*¹⁴¹ (trans. intention) to their reasoning in including *Muslimah* in their videos.

They say that if including *Muslimah* in a video is done in order to bring about a good thing such as leading to an awareness of modesty in Muslim dress codes, it should be allowed. Big asserts that, “actually, women can perform but it has to be in a constructive way such as producing a drama to encourage women to wear headscarves¹⁴²”. Again, he is referring to an interpretation of this issue in Malaysia: “There is an Islamic scholar who declares *fatwa*¹⁴³ saying that women can perform in a television drama if it is done in a constructive way”.¹⁴⁴

Similarly, Amran Yeeheng of *Social Fatoni* asserts that, “It is not good. According to the principles, it is not good [to show women in videos] but it also depends on our goals”.¹⁴⁵

Another *Social Fatoni* member, Sulaiman Malee¹⁴⁶, agrees that in principle it is wrong but otherwise they could not tell any story about *Muslimah*:

“I think it is a level of faith. In principle it is wrong. It depends on appropriateness. *Awrah*¹⁴⁷ dictates it is forbidden to show certain parts of a woman’s body including voice, hair and the parts of the body beyond her hands. But we are not that strict, we are not that serious. We try to keep our good image but if we cut off all shots containing Muslim women, we cannot tell a story about *muslimah*. We are not going to cut it off, we are not that strict¹⁴⁸”

This resonates with certain videos on *Social Fatoni* showing *Muslimah* doing *anasheed*, which, for them, is considered worth showing and is also a *halal* activity.

¹⁴¹ เจตนา

¹⁴² “จริงๆเอาผู้หญิงแสดงได้ แต่ออกมาในเชิงสร้างสรรค์” เช่น ทำละครส่งเสริมให้ผู้หญิงสวมฮิญาบ”

¹⁴³ A *fatwa* is an Islamic religious ruling, a scholarly opinion on a matter of Islamic law. A *fatwa* is issued by a recognized religious authority in Islam

¹⁴⁴ “พรรคนี้ อย่างมาเลเซียมีอาจารย์ที่วินิจฉัยว่า ให้ผู้หญิงแสดงได้ ถ้าสร้างสรรค์”

¹⁴⁵ “มันก็ไม่ดีนะ ถ้าตามหลักก็ไม่ดี มันก็อยู่ที่จุดประสงค์ด้วย”

¹⁴⁶ Personal interview in Pattani in July 2015

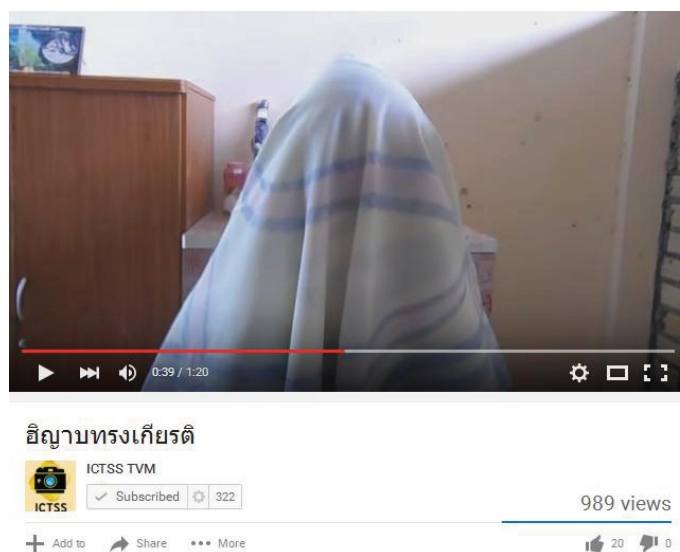
¹⁴⁷ *Awrah* is a term used within Islam to denote the intimate parts of the body, for both men and women, which must be covered with clothing. Exposing the *awrah* is unlawful in Islam and is regarded as a sin. The exact definition of *awrah* varies between different schools of Islamic thought.

¹⁴⁸ “มันเป็นระดับของ คำเรียกว่าอะไรอะ ความศรัทธา อย่างเงี้ยอะครับ คือ ถ้าพูดโดยหลักจริงๆมันก็จะผิดในที่นี้มันก็คือมันขึ้นอยู่กับความเหมาะสม อย่างผู้หญิง อย่าง เอารัด สิ่งที่ต้องห้ามของเขาเนี่ยคือเสียง ผม และอวัยวะตั้งแต่ข้อมือลงไป แต่ของเราไม่ได้ฟุ้งซ่านขนาดนั้น ไม่ได้ซีเรียสอะไรมากรักขภาพลักษณะเหมือนกัน แต่ถ้าตัดออกไปเลยมันก็จะไม่สามารถมองเห็น ภาพเล่าเรื่องราวของเด็กมุสลิมมะห์ เราก็ไม่ได้ตัด และไม่ได้เคร่งขนาดนั้น”



Figure 16: A video of female *anasheed* in *Social Fatoni* YouTube channel

Some video-makers manage to include *Muslimah* in their videos but with varying degrees of revealing a woman's body. Tuan Yazdan Serai from *Putra Media* also made videos for this school in Yala. In the short film *hijab an song kiat*¹⁴⁹ (trans. *hijab* of honour), which aims to promote wearing the *hijab* properly among *Muslimah*, he chooses not to reveal the faces of women at all, only their backs. It should be also noted that Tuan Yazdan opts to use *anasheed* in this video because he asserts it is about Islam.



¹⁴⁹ ฮิญาบชั้นทรงเกียรติ

Figure 17: *Hijab of honour* from *Putra Media* YouTube channel

However, in another video titled “VRTVM | *kho sam kham*¹⁵⁰ (trans. Give me three words) SUKANJAYA 2003”, appearing on the same YouTube channel, shows *Muslimah* students at a school sports day event where they are shouting and having fun in front of the camera. Moreover, music with a strong beat is used to make the video look entertaining. It is also interesting to note that by using a chicken-shaped microphone and asking a participant to say three words, this video mimics a famous Thai teen programme on YouTube channel called *VRZO*¹⁵¹.



Figure 18: from *Putra Media* YouTube channel

This suggests that for these Muslims, adhering to *awrah* when it comes to video-making is not fixed but varies according to the context. However, the bottom line is that *Muslimah* have to dress properly according to Islam.

Abdulromae Talae of *IdioCinematography* appears to encounter clients with different levels of strictness in revealing *Muslimah* faces. While some clients allow him to film the face of a bride, some chose not to do so. Abdulromae shares his experience of making a wedding video without a bride’s face: “I filmed a wedding video and the groom told me not to film the

¹⁵⁰ ๓คำสามคำ

¹⁵¹ <https://www.youtube.com/user/VrzoChannel/featured>

bride. I think it is okay, it is easy for me in terms of filming and at the same time I have to use my creativity to use camera angles to show only her hands and not her face”.¹⁵²

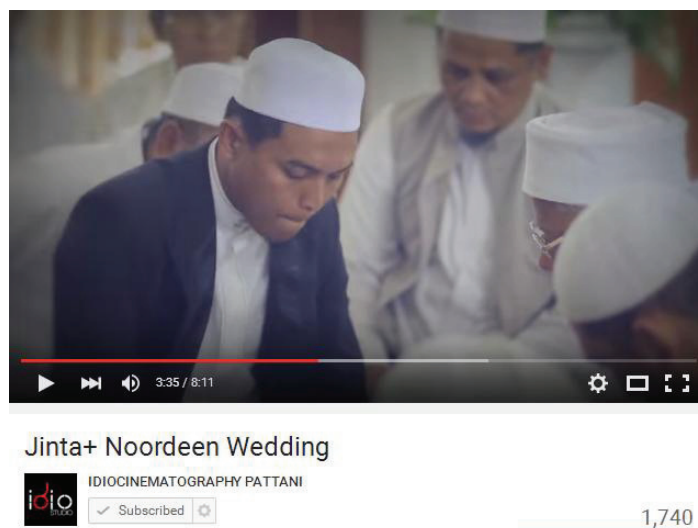
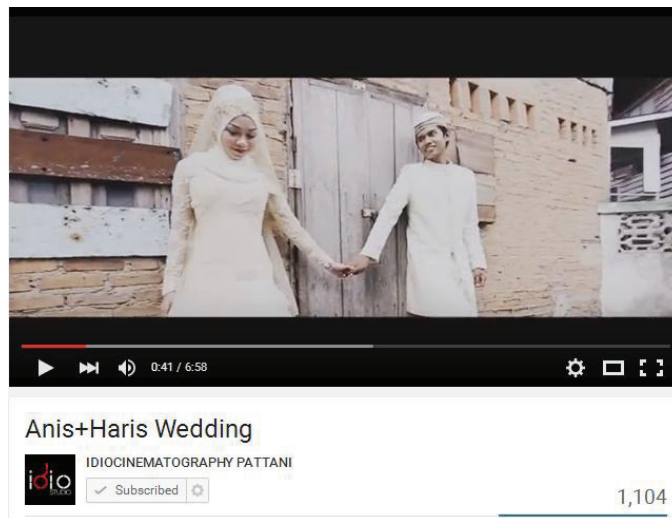


Figure 18-19: Wedding video presentation from *Idiocinematography* YouTube channel.

Similar to other video-makers, Abdulromae has to accommodate *halal* in his audio-visual practices and, as with other Islamic practices, it is still necessary. However, a continuum of *halalness* in these YouTube videos suggests that the platform offers a space for Muslim video-makers to experiment with their practices, albeit that it is not a neutral space but a site of power struggle.

¹⁵² เคยถ่ายงานหนึ่ง ให้ถ่ายงานแต่ง แต่เขาบอกว่าอย่าให้ถ่ายเจ้าสาวนะ ผมก็โอเคได้ เป็นเรื่องที่ยากสำหรับผมที่จะต้องถ่าย แต่ยากสำหรับผมที่จะต้องครีเอท มากกว่านั้น หนึ่งอะไร ก็จะไม่ถ่ายแค่มือ จะใช้มุมกล้องมาบังหน้าเขา”

Another interesting aspect is the role of *Muslimah*. From the analysis above, the same as *halal media* in Chapter Five, it is apparent that making videos on YouTube among Muslims in the three southern border provinces is a male-oriented business where Muslim women are not only restricted from being in front of the camera but where their roles in making these videos is also meagre.

Despite this, however, women do sometimes take a leading role in video production. *PIS Studio* not only allows Muslim female students to play a role as presenters in most of its documentaries, but also encourages some students to work behind the scenes as camera persons. One example is Hayati Jaedong¹⁵³ who says that she decided to join the team because of encouragement from her teacher. She began by watching YouTube videos before attempting filming herself, and gives the reason why women were chosen to be presenters as follows: “We use female as presenters in the documentary because male students are shy.”¹⁵⁴

Nasreeya Maming¹⁵⁵, another female member of *PIS Studio* further explains that, “actually male students recruited female students to be in the production group because they wanted us to be presenters”.¹⁵⁶ However, *Hayati* says, “It’s not good according to Islamic principles but it also depends on a goal”.¹⁵⁷

Sometimes, *Muslimah* play a role in supporting their male team members. As Nasreeya indicates: “Male students write the script and then we would have a look and see if there is something wrong with it”.¹⁵⁸ This suggests that *Muslimah* also use this audio-visual practice and the YouTube space in negotiating their role in Muslim society. By being camera persons, presenters or scriptwriters, they can manifest a capability that is perhaps lacking in male

¹⁵³ Personal interview in Pattani in July 2015

¹⁵⁴ ผู้หญิงเป็นพิธีกร เพราะผู้ชายอาย

¹⁵⁵ Personal interview in Pattani in July 2015

¹⁵⁶ “ที่เค้าหาผู้หญิงมาเข้าชมรมเพราะเขายากหาพิธีกรโดยเฉพาะเลย”

¹⁵⁷ “มันก็ไม่ดีนะ ถ้าตามหลักก็ไม่ดี มันก็อยู่ที่จุดประสงค์ด้วย”

¹⁵⁸ “ผู้ชายจะแต่งสคริปต์มาให้ และพวกหนูก็จะมาอ่านดูว่ามันเพี้ยนๆหรือเปล่า”

Muslims. However, again similar to *jetana* (in the previous section), *wattuprasong*¹⁵⁹ (trans. goals) are employed by *Muslimah* as a tool to negotiate with *halal-ness*. The findings suggest that this online visual space also enables *Muslimah* to negotiate with their gender role as female Muslims.



Figure 20-21: Female presenters in a documentary of *PIS Studio* YouTube channel

Therefore, this space also allows female Muslims to negotiate their gender role as “good *Muslimah*” in a Muslim society. As noted in Chapter Four, by interviewing *halal media*

¹⁵⁹ วัดตูปะระสังค์

producers during my fieldwork, it can be argued that Muslim media production is a male-dominated business. Almost all of the production staff I met and interviewed were male. Moreover, according to *halal media* principles, females are not allowed to appear on screen. What then does the visibility of Muslim females and their participation in online visual space suggest?

I argue that YouTube spaces and active participation in online visual productions pave ways for *Muslimah* to negotiate with their identity. In the previous chapter and previous sections in this chapter, I argue that online visual spaces like YouTube enable the construction of visual subjectivity of Thai Muslims. By doing so, Muslims employ this emerging and audio-visual practice (e.g. remediation of mainstream media genre) to define what it means to be a “good Muslim”. Nonetheless, what has been negotiated through the practice of *halal media* is actually related to being a “good Muslim male”: this “negotiation” speaks from the perspective of the positionality of “Muslim males”. Therefore, the visibility of *Muslimah* in this online public space also suggests the disruptive quality of YouTube space, which allows a negotiation of the *visuality of Muslimness* in terms of gender. These female Muslim pupils *use* this discursive online visual practice to define what it means to be a “good female Muslim”.

So far, the findings in this section illustrate the interplays that exist between different groups of Malay-speaking Thai Muslim media practices and visual texts enabled by online media platforms and socio-political, cultural and economic constraints which delimit self-representation. It can be argued that these interplays in online visual spaces have brought about a multiplicity and hybridity in terms of visual representation. We can see Thai Muslim pupils from a violence-stricken region, the “red zone” districts, and an allegedly-incubating separatist school/university¹⁶⁰ visually constructing the “beauty” of the three southern provinces. By using this disruptive online space to *negotiate* with the trope of violence as

¹⁶⁰ Similar to Thammavittaya school in Yala which has been tainted with separatist movements, some of the Buddhist locals and interviewees in Pattani also suspect that there is some kind of separatist activities in the Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani campus.

portrayed in the mainstream media, they present the beauty of their region which outsiders might never have seen before.

The findings also shed light on how these Thai Muslims *negotiate* being “good Muslims” in that while they are trying to show their ability in doing “modern” things just like other Thai teenagers, Islamic principles are still a part of their identity that has to be demonstrated visually (e.g. through the tropes of *hijabs*, skullcaps and beards). To some extent, *halal media* practices play an important role in shaping the way these video producers construct their audio-visual texts. However, some principles, such as using music and showing female faces in videos, are *negotiable* due to the notion of “intent” (*jettana*). On some occasions, the visual references and language of “Malayness” are employed in order to portray themselves as “good Muslims”.

This section also shows the interaction between male and female Muslims. The roles of males and females are also codified in Islam, however, it appears that in this online space *Muslimah* or female Muslims also negotiate with their roles as Muslim women in an audio-visual media environment. Again, the notion *jettana* or intent is employed as a way of negotiating with their visibility on screen, and this last interaction is about media spaces themselves. These findings demonstrate the nuances of representational practices in different spaces. While they portray themselves as “good Muslims” who follow Islamic principles in “official spaces” affiliated to their institutions such as schools, when it comes to more personal spaces, such as personal YouTube channels, being “good Muslims” is *negotiable*. Consequently, these results attest to the argument that within these representational spaces there is no single trope that can be used to describe what constitutes Thai Muslims and “good Muslims” as visual subjects. These multiple online spaces are filled with unfinished, in-process, multiple and sometimes contradictory constructions of the Muslim Self that relies on the Other.

The above analysis of the YouTube channels and videos shows that their practices are working under various constraints and they tend to institutionalise themselves as *channels* and perceive themselves as *professionals* who follow audio-visual media codes. However, there are also videos made by Thai Muslim pupils in the three southern border provinces with fewer skills in filmmaking and who are less institutionalised due to the lack of a clear identity as “media people” on YouTube. These video-makers have created a *disruptive space* whose unconventional practices will be explained in the next section.

Videos made by high school pupils: “new noise” in a Muslim disruptive space

First of all, it should be noted that the reason that this genre of self-produced videos is included in this chapter is because of a richness of visual representation that is quite rare in a public space. It is rare because, as noted earlier, the representation of Muslims in the region is bombarded with images of bomb blazes, gunfire, casualties and separatist movements. Furthermore, unlike other parts of Thailand, where both locals and foreign tourists are keen to be “on the ground” and “explore” the area, these Muslim-populated areas are not tourist spots because of the ongoing violence. Therefore, it is quite difficult to envisage the life of Malay-speaking Muslims outside the tropes found in the mainstream media and it is interesting to examine videos portraying private/mundane activities such as graduation parties, school activities, singing contests and excursions. At this point, it is also useful to acknowledge that there are other kinds of videos made by Muslims, including videos of Muslim clerics praying and teaching, separatist statements and songs, *hijab* tutorials and wedding ceremonies. However, I narrow down my data to videos showing private/mundane activities in schools that demonstrate the playfulness of Thai Muslims in hoping to examine how Muslim teens construct their identities in online visual platforms.

A growing number of videos has been made by Muslim pupils in the three southern border provinces of Thailand but most of their visual practices appear to be mundane and non-

professional and have been largely ignored by scholars. This section aims to shed light on how Muslim pupils depict themselves in this underexplored genre of videos on YouTube and to further investigate what is at stake when Muslim pupils, as minorities in Thailand, deliberately make their private realms visible to the public.

The genre of Muslim pupil-made videos has been selected because of its “playful” visual representations. Against the backdrop of the prevailing representation of Thai Muslims in the three southern provinces in the Thai media and my own preliminary results of examining other genres of YouTube video such as mainstream music videos made by music companies in Bangkok or mainstream films which portray Muslims as exotic, religious, demure or violent “Others within” the Thai state, the alternative “playfulness” of Muslim output is, thus, especially intriguing. In order to examine the self-representation of Thai Muslim teens, I have selected five videos made by three Islamic school pupils in the three southernmost provinces for analysis.

These videos were made as a remembrance for their classmates before being parted. In general, these montage videos show photos of pupils in classrooms, mingling and sometimes teasing their friends, and the video-makers have applied montage video techniques by putting together an array of photographs with Thai popular music. This simple video-making method, coupled with an availability of cameras, editing software and YouTube, have enabled non-professionals to participate in what Mirzoeff (1999) terms “a visual event” (p.13). Mirzoeff argues that a visual event is “an interaction of the visual sign, the technology that enables and sustains that sign, and the viewer” (Mirzoeff, 1999, p.13). Therefore, I shall begin with an examination of the visual aspect of these videos and how their visual signs intersect with technology and YouTube.

Since the photographs in these montage videos were taken in Islamic schools, all pupils are shown wearing Islamic school uniforms, boys wearing white shirts and trousers

(they sometimes also wear skullcaps) and girls wearing headscarves, long-sleeved white shirts and long skirts covering their feet. These visual references obviously pertain to Islam and it is not surprising since wearing headscarves and other Muslim outfits has become prevalent as a marker of “Muslimness” in Thailand in the past few decades (Gilquin, 2005). However, the aspect of “playfulness” that is added to these Muslim visual representations deserves further investigation. I shall begin with analyses of the visual representations and then audio aspects of these videos in the following section.

Being visually playful on YouTube: Muslim pupils in an online space

Being playful with Muslim headscarves and Muslim homosexuality are two sub-themes found in the first group of videos. Against the backdrop of a modest living and piousness, and Muslims encouraged by the *dakwah* movement (see Chapter Five) and “backward” and demure Muslims represented in the Thai mainstream media (see Chapters Three and Four), the YouTube videos made and uploaded by Muslim pupils appear to challenge these tropes of Muslims. Religious references such as headscarves, which mark modest dress among Muslims, can be “played with” and intimacy between males and females, which is *haram*, is made public.

In a series of two-part YouTube videos entitled *pattana islam-2553 1 (part one)*¹⁶¹ and *pattana islam-2553 2 (part two)*¹⁶², both show Muslim pupils at a school farewell party of Grade-Nine students of Pattana Islam School in Pattani province and there is text on the video saying that they were made as a tribute to their friendship.

¹⁶¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iY0m6qY-f5c> (uploaded by Sufyarn Kaseng in 9 Mar 2011)

¹⁶² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3FinKeokks> (uploaded by Sufyarn Kaseng in 9 Mar 2011)



Figure 22-23: a Muslim male pupil is playing with *hijab* from *pattana islam-2553 1 (part one)* and *pattana islam-2553 2 (part two)*

Like other school students elsewhere in Thailand, they write down their farewell phrases with a marker on their friends' white uniform shirt on the last day of the class as a symbol of their long-lasting friendship. However, it is interesting to note that there are some photos showing this kind of writing on white headscarves as well, even though the headscarf is a visual symbol of being a "good" Muslim woman. Wearing headscarves in schools has been a topic of heated debate in some countries, including Thailand. There was a conflict in the 1970s when the government of the time tried to ban headscarves from schools and government establishments, triggering a major protest in Bangkok. Chaiwat (2004) argues that the headscarf ban conflict sheds light on how Muslims in Thailand negotiate their identity in a Buddhist country. It can be suggested that headscarves have been an important aspect of Islam in Thailand for decades. However, Muslim pupils themselves "play" with this revered religious outfit.

Male pupils mockingly playing with homosexuality are also found in the first video.

This is especially interesting because in Islam behaving as such is considered *haram*. There are photos of two schoolboys acting as if they are a gay couple kissing. In one photograph, one boy covers his head just like a Muslim schoolgirl while hugging another boy with texts saying “Oh No!”. Again, a headscarf that is both part of the school uniform and also a symbol of being a “proper” Muslim woman can be “played with” by Muslim pupils in an Islamic school. However, it is interesting to note that from the videos, it appears that males are more playful.



Figure 24-25: Muslim boys mockingly play with homosexuality from *pattana islam-2553 1 (part 1)* and *pattana islam-2553 2 (part 2)*

As noted earlier, effeminate men and also boyish-looking women are considered *haram*. However, there are some videos showing the apparent *sissy-ness* of Muslim males on YouTube. Being gay is a sensitive issue for Islam and videos of Muslim clergies in Thailand saying that homosexuality is wrong can certainly be found on YouTube. This apparent “sissy-ness” of Muslim boys is found in photographs of the following videos. In two separate videos titled *Attan pit tamnan 3/13(53)*¹⁶³ (trans. *Attar Closing Chapter 3/13 class of 2010*) and *khwaam song -jam 6/6 (sing thee chan pen)*¹⁶⁴ (trans. *Memories 6/6 The Way I Am*) from the Attarkiah Islamiah Institute in Narathiwat, the playfulness of the montage videos also appears. In the first video, there are two boys who are distinguished from the others by their

¹⁶³ อัศตวัน ปิดตำนาน 3/13(53') <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sn0k-ft70h8> by 16arunee uploaded in 10 Aug 2011

¹⁶⁴ ความทรงจำ 6/6 (สิ่งที่ฉันเป็น) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_T7_RvqSDM Uploaded by Adil Rosa

effeminate characters, and in the photographs, they are usually surrounded by their female friends. In these photographs one boy is posing with an effeminate look with female friends and is smiling.



Figure 26-27: Sassy Muslims in *Attan pit tamnan* 3/13(53) and *Khwan song-jam* 6/6 (sing thee chan pen)

The act of showing and being in front of the camera with this gesture is thus challenging, especially for the Thai Muslim community in the three southernmost provinces where the Islamic movement in recent decades has geared Muslims to be more conservative and to believe that they are more Islamic than Muslims in other places in Thailand.



Figure 28: Muslim students with *Doraemon*

In another video, there is a photo of Muslim pupils posing with a *kawai* gesture with a person dressed as *Doraemon*, a Japanese cartoon character that is well known in Thailand. On the blackboard, the writing in Thai says “loving teacher Amanee forever”.

While these pupils grew up in a period when symbols of being Muslim, such as daily observances and outfits as a marker between Muslims and non-Muslims, became more widespread than in previous periods (Gilquin, 2005) and wearing headscarves could be a sign of respect (Wanni, 2010), by loosening themselves up and being playful with Muslimness, it is suggested that YouTube has enabled the *playful postcolonial visual discourse* of Muslims. I argue that playing with a Muslim headscarf is a process of mimicry in a postcolonial society, which Bhabha argues, is “the substitution along a vertical axis in terms of parts for whole, a never-ending substitution that cannot reach any point of full presence. In mimicry, identity is never identical with itself” (Huddart, 2005, p.65). Perceiving a Muslim headscarf as Bhabha’s *partial presence* in a postcolonial discourse about Muslim minorities in Thailand, this religious symbol has become a visual reference for Muslim pupils to mimic a stereotype but in a comical manner as against the stereotype of the “demure Muslim”. By representing themselves on YouTube in this manner, Muslim pupils are negotiating the boundaries between “Muslimness” and “Thainess”: they are ‘not quite’ Muslim and not quite Thai either because of their visual references to Islam. This also resonates with Nakamura’s argument on visual practices online where minorities are not just the viewer but they are the producer of their own images. Consequently, to examine racial discourse online, Nakamura contends that a “matrix of lived cultural practices, identities, geopolitics, and postcolonial, racial, and political positions”

(Nakamura 2008, p.204) has to be taken into account. This type of hybrid uniform that combines Western-style uniforms influenced by the Thai authorities and Muslim outfits (headscarves and skullcaps) influenced by Islam suggests that Muslim pupils are located in a matrix of two politico-cultural powers. Even though they are playful like other non-Muslim teens in Thailand, Muslim visual references are still indispensable as a cultural marker between being Muslim and being Other. While Muslim minorities are inferior in terms of cultural, political and economic powers, they can invest in available visual resources to reconstruct their racial formation, as will be seen in the following analyses:

In the second group of videos, visual references to Western, Japanese and Korean popular culture have played a crucial role in making Muslims more playful. Rather than being demure and embracing *halal*, these montage videos spell out unorthodox visual codes of Muslims in this relational space. In a video titled *Rormaniam 6/3 2554*¹⁶⁵ (trans. *Rormaniam* (name of a school) 6/3 2554), depicting pupils in Rormaniam Islamic school in Narathiwat province, there is a photo showing two boys



Figure 29-30: Rormaniam boys and girls in finger gun gesture and *kawai* gesture in the video *Rormaniam 6/3 2554*

¹⁶⁵ Rormaniam รอมมานีเยอ 6/3 2554 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2xNrpb9DjA> (uploaded by ruski kersa in 8 Mar 2013)

and one girl posing in a *finger gun gesture* close to one another (intimate position), while another photograph shows a group of pupils, both boys and girls, posing in front of the camera demonstrating a *kawai* or cute gesture (Japanese influence) and one of them is wearing a crash helmet.

Furthermore, the last photograph below shows two pairs of students (male and female in each pair) making the shape of a heart using their hands, a gesture that devolves from the Korean wave. By having these Western, Japanese and Korean-style gestures as visual references in these montage videos, it is suggested that wearing proper Muslim outfits as required by schools and Islam, and at the same time in the context of a school event, they do not need to be so demure, rural and “backward” as is usually depicted in videos and films about Muslims made by non-Muslims in Thailand. This sharp contrast of presentation is especially interesting when it appears on YouTube where they are not just the user but are also taking part in producing images. It is also noted that by being Muslim, as the way they dress and their appearance suggests, playfulness that is imported from outside, such as the *kawai* and *finger gun pose*, and gestures deemed as *haram* such as being too intimate among male and female friends, constantly occurs in this genre of videos. And importantly, they are not restricted to the domain of private consumption but have been made public on YouTube.



Figure 31-32: boys and girls from Rormanian school in the video *Rormanian 6/3 2554*

So far, we have seen the interaction and interplay between being young Thai Muslims from the three southern border provinces and other cultural elements shown on YouTube.

While I have found *halal media* showing Muslim clergies trying to persuade younger generations of Thai Muslims to return to Islam and *tawhid* (discussed in Chapter Five), videos of Muslim youths demonstrating these gestures suggest quite a different attitude.

In order to construct their Muslim identity, the Muslim pupils strategically adopt and adapt the visual elements of Others that have been circulated in the popular media, and incorporate them to their own visual representation. However, they do not have to abandon their visual references of *Muslimsness* as a cultural marker: they adjust the boundaries of their “never fully grasped” and always “in-process” identities. This has expanded the boundaries of defining what Muslim is, as Bhabha suggests that this partial presence has to be constantly reproduced and identity is not at one with itself. By adopting and mimicking cultural references from Bangkok and elsewhere they still preserve Muslim cultural references to demarcate the Muslim Self (from the three southern border provinces) as opposed to the Other.

However, with this caveat in mind, it is important to note that cultural industries such as the music business are driven by capitalism. Whilst YouTube and popular culture from outside the three southernmost provinces enables this playful discourse, this “matrix of lived cultural practice” (Nakamura, 2008) is tied to big entertainment business that makes a great deal of money out of these young consumers and the internal politics of representation. The craze among Thai audiences for Korean series is a good example of this point. However, it also attests to the fact that a Korean pop gesture can be fused with Islamic school uniform and thus create a hybrid identity.

The Playfulness of Muslims in “self-mediated publicness”: the politics of “not quite good Muslims”

Against the backdrop of Thai Muslims usually being portrayed as Others who are “backward”, rural and less “civilized” compared to the more educated and modern Buddhists in Bangkok, the way these pupils deploy visual references and make them part of their social events in schools and then show them to the public, unfixes the pre-existing *visuality of Muslimness* as discussed in Chapters Three and Four. The results suggest that while wearing headscarves and skullcaps, they mark themselves as Muslim with their outfits, but they are also keen on being *playful* with it. This is in contrast to the representation of Muslims in the Thai mainstream media where Muslims are depicted as modest people who strictly embrace Islam. Furthermore, the elements of playfulness such as mingling between boys and girls, playing with *hijabs*, and being sassy Muslim boys go against the notion of *halal media* which has set up Islamic visual codes for Thai Muslims when they are in a public space.

This “swimming-against-the-tide” visual practice among Muslim pupils resonates with what Chouliaraki (2012) terms “self-mediated publicness” in an online space, which is a way for ordinary people to participate in the public sphere not in the form of rationality but in a more *playful* manner. Chouliaraki further argues, unlike the Habermasian public sphere, that: “[T]his radical proliferation of popular participation in public culture is hailed for blurring traditional boundaries between media producers and consumers and for leading to a hybrid form of civic participation” (Chouliaraki, 2012, p.1). It is apparent that their self-representation of playfulness (which at times is *haram*) is performed through *a self mediation* of the ordinary Muslims in an online public space which is in contrast to the representation of Muslims in Thai films and music videos noted in Chapter Three and Chapter Four. To use Chouliaraki’s (2012) term, they participate in “self-mediation publicness”¹⁶⁶ on YouTube. The findings show that,

¹⁶⁶ “Self-mediation publicness” departs from Habermasian public sphere and political participation in three regards - 1. Blurring the line between public and private – collectivism is downplayed while individual voices are more emphasised 2. Linguistic space - “space of appearance” instead of seeing public as a space of people gathering and

rather than representing themselves with stereotypes such as being demure and devout “good Muslims”, in the pupil videos manifesting their in-group school activities they are playful. For example, headscarves can be written on and two Muslim boys can act as though they are kissing each other. These *private* and *playful* activities of the ordinary become “public” on YouTube through self-mediation. Moreover, they choose to have the video title in Thai and use Thai music. This suggests that their videos are taking part in the online sphere of Thai language users. It is interesting to note that, contrary to videos made by pupils, videos made by separatists in the south are in the Malay language using *rumi* script (roman script adopted by Malay-speaking groups). Consequently, by putting Malay-speaking Thai Muslims who have been marginalised as “the Other within” into the context of “Thainess”, their *playfulness* is employed as “a hybrid form of civic participation (Chouliaraki, 2012, p.1)” to negotiate with “good Muslims” in two respects. They not only negotiate with the *visuality of Muslimness* imposed by the Thai state, but also “good Muslims” found in *halal media* imposed by Muslim authorities such as Islamic teachers and Islamic media like *White Channel*).

Unpacking “good Muslims” and YouTube: going towards multiplicity in online visual spaces

Throughout this chapter, I have investigated the self-representation of Muslims on YouTube where it appears that the construction of Muslim identity revolves around the notion of “good Muslims”. However, this discourse in itself, as noted in previous chapters and in the previous sections of the current chapter, is not self-contained and monolithic. The notion of “good Muslims” relies on the existence of the Other for itself to exist. “Good Muslims” in the version of Thai mainstream cultures hinges on the idea that Muslims are backward and inferior compared to Buddhist Bangkok Thais. To be “good Muslims” means to *submit to a hierarchy of “Thainess”*. Conversely, “good Muslims” for *halal media* are Muslims who embrace Islam as a

doing things to achieve the same goal, it argues that people are tied together by linguistic practices rather than goal-oriented action 3. Participation does not have to be in the form of rationality. Playfulness of self-mediation such as parody and satire has to be taken into account (Chouliaraki, 2012).

way of life. “Good Muslims” in this sense have to give up mainstream Buddhist Thai practices and *submit to God*. However, these are not just two versions of “good Muslims”.

Findings in this chapter illustrate that through visual representations in self-produced audio visual texts, through the practice of remediation (Nakamura, 2008), different groups of Muslims in the southern region exploit the discontinuities in visual production to *negotiate* with the way they define “good Muslims”. But with whom are they negotiating? If we see these online spaces as a postcolonial space, Muslims in the three-southernmost provinces themselves are diverse and “speak back” to Others from different locations of power. And as a result, the visual practices of Muslims from different backgrounds (class, gender, education etc.) intersect with the matrix of power (representations of Muslims in the mainstream media, Islamic principles, “Thainess”, capitalism, unrest etc.) in various online spaces (more institutionalised and more private).

Conclusions

Throughout this research project, the visual representation of Thai Muslims in mediated public spaces has been analysed through the lens of a cultural studies approach. This lens is characterised by “its openness, theoretical versatility, its reflexive even self-conscious mood, and especially, the importance of critique” (Johnson, 1986, p.38). This research is an interdisciplinary project informed by various academic disciplines: visual culture, Thai cultural studies, postcolonial studies, psychoanalysis, and new media studies among others. During analyses, these various, intersecting strands of theory were brought into engagement with audio-visual data ranging from mainstream Thai media such as cinema and music videos to Thai Muslims’ self-produced videos on YouTube and interview data collected during fieldwork. By doing so, a dialogue between academic disciplines has been created in order to shed light on the complexity of the visibility, representation and subjectivity of Thai Muslims. This research has therefore aimed to provide fresh insight into *both* the construction of the Thai Muslim identity through representation in traditional and emerging online visual spaces, and on how the researcher himself, who is inevitably in the representational system, engages with the data, fieldwork and critical theory.

Throughout Chapters Three to Six, the findings spell out *a process* of the construction of Thai Muslims in general and “good Muslims” in particular through what Mirzoeff (1999) terms as “visual events”. As a process, the findings suggest that the visual discourses of “good Muslims” are constructed, negotiated and at times opposed by Thai Muslims. Within the process of identity construction, which operates within the discourse of “Thainess”, Thai Muslim and Buddhist Thai audio-visual producers alike have to encounter what Nakamura (2008) terms “the matrix of power” through practices of media production, circulation and consumption. In order to investigate these encounters, this research employs Hall’s (1999) methodology in visual analysis as a point of departure. Therefore, audio-visual texts in this

research are analysed in both *social* and *psychic* levels in order to shed light on the subjectification of Thai Muslims through visual representation.

At a social level, the results in Chapters Three and Four shed light on what I term in this thesis as the *visuality of Muslimness* - a visual discourse employed by the Thai mainstream media to *fix* Thai Muslims in the position of inferior subjects. This representational practice resonates with the Thongchai's (2000a) notion of "the Other within" which has long been employed by the Buddhist Bangkok elites to preserve the social hierarchy and power-relations between Thai citizens within the Thai state. In the audio-visual texts in the mainstream media analysed in this thesis, Islamic visual references such as darker skin, *hijabs*, skullcaps, beards and *sarongs* are given the quality of object *to-be-looked-at-ness* for the "Thainess" gaze. Their otherness shown in the discursive practice of the visual conventions of *khaek* in Muslim characters are conflated with backwardness, ruralness, nature and obedience, while Buddhist Thai characters, who are from Bangkok, civilise these backward Muslim areas and local Muslims and sometimes "save" "good Muslims" from "bad Muslims." As a result of this trope of Thai Muslims, I argue that the gaze and narrative of "good Muslim" Others in Thai cinema and popular music videos *reproduces* the Bangkok elites' *siwilai* (civilising) project during the colonial period. Through the act of *seeing* and *recording* the characteristics of subjects "on the ground" in the newly-created Siamese geo-body in the early 20th century, the elites constructed "a system of truth" (Said, 1978, p.204) about *Muslim Others* through the gaze in order to legitimise and sustain their sense of superiority and domination over their Muslim subjects. Nevertheless, in the 21st century, new "visual events" brought about by imaging technology such as cameras and screens such as cinema, television and computers have become an apparatus employed to reproduce stereotypes of Muslim others in order to maintain the social hierarchy of "Thainess". Against the backdrop of the long-held belief that postcolonial theories are not compatible with Thailand as it has never been colonised, the findings undermine this notion and point out that actually the colonial condition of

Siam/Thailand has shaped the way Thai Muslim subjects, as minorities, are perceived and have related to others.

Having said that, attempts to fix the stereotypes are far from stable. At a psychic level, the results also show that the construction of a Muslim identity operates within “*productive ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse*” (Bhabha, 1983, p.96): a strategy employed by the coloniser to fix their subject with stereotypes while they have a desire for a plenitude of “Thainess”. This makes the colonial discourse contradictory and ambivalent. While Buddhist Thai characters in these audio-visual texts attempt to “civilise” Thai Muslims, Muslims’ visual tropes such as ruralness, backwardness and religiosity have to be reproduced in order to portray them as “not quite civilised.” Furthermore, as the visual category of *khaek* is fixed in order to maintain a “Thainess” Self, the findings discussed in Chapters Three and Four also illustrate that through different historical periods, changing socio-political and economic contexts also unsettle the ways stereotypes were produced. In films and music videos made after the year 2000, compared to the ones made in the 1980s and 1990s portraying Muslims as *distant others*, Thai Muslims are portrayed with *visual closeness*. Rather than being local Muslims who are “civilised” by Buddhist Thais, Muslims in *visual closeness* are friends and lovers who are objects of desire for Buddhist Thais. However, they are friends and lovers who are still, as suggested by the visual codes of *khaek*, ultimately foreign to “Thainess”. I argue that this could be the result of a multicultural discourse and the proliferation of violence in the south that caused anxiety and a *redefinition* of “Thainess” Self. Viewing this change through a postcolonial lens confirms the argument that colonial discourse “operates through metonymy: the substitution along a vertical axis in terms of parts for whole, a never-ending substitution that cannot reach any point of full presence” (Huddart, 2005, p.65). Therefore, stereotypes of Muslims illustrated in terms of visual representation are constantly produced in order to keep them as a social category, as Other, in order to maintain the dominance of the “Thainess” Self. Besides, changing social conditions, a process of the *construction* and *reconstruction* of the

Thai Muslim identity can also be found in visually mediated spaces outside the mainstream media.

When moving to the terrain of less-institutionalised and less-government/corporate controlled online audio-visual spaces in Chapters Five and Six, it becomes apparent that the visual discourse of *khaek* has been in a process of being contested. The results in these chapters suggest that the “good Muslim” is constructed through practices of Muslim-produced *halal media*. Increasing online infrastructure and increasing access rates in Thailand after the year 2000 are part of this changing media landscape. Nonetheless, as with the *visuality of Muslimness*, the portrayal of “good Muslims” spelled out in *halal media* is not monolithic. The results show that different intersections with different locations of the matrix of power has resulted in a *multiplicity* of interactions and visual representations in online visual spaces.

Findings in Chapter Five and Six suggests the complexity of the process of subject formation in online non-mainstream Muslim-produced visual spaces that are relational to other visual spaces especially the *visuality of Muslimness* rooted in the colonial period. I adopt Lindgren’s term of “online disruptive spaces” (Lindgren, 2013) to refer to that these visual spaces since they have emerged from interactions and power-relations with other mediated (cinema, television, internet) spaces as well as socio-economic and cultural spaces. These online spaces are also not *neutral* but are part of the power relations that pertain between different groups of Thais and even between Thai Muslims.

The findings show that, along with an increasing penetration of the Internet in Thai public life, *halal media* which emerged in early 21st century Thailand is employed by educated middle-class Thai Muslims in Bangkok to *redefine* what the notion of “good Muslims” means. Interestingly enough, the process of identity negotiation by *redefining* “good Muslims” hinges heavily on *a negation* of what appears in the Thai mainstream media. As a result, by remediating (Nakamura, 2008) mainstream media texts, *halal* visual codes which constitute “good media” for “good Muslims” are constructed through the selective negation of some

mainstream media practices (e.g. secular, profit-oriented) on the basis that these practices are *haram* (forbidden in Islam). Therefore, the narrative of “good Thai Muslims” in *halal media* does not submit to “Thainess” but rather to Allah and follows practices of the Prophet Muhammad. This functions as a way to negotiate the *visuality of Muslimness* which tries to fix Thai Muslims as inferior religious others. Redrawing boundaries between Thai Muslims and the Other echoes Gilquin’s (2005) argument regarding a reappropriation of Thai Muslims by exerting Islam into their identity and realigning themselves with the Thai state due to socio-economic changes both at local and international levels.

The results also show that YouTube as online visual spaces are not monolithic, and these spaces interact with each other. Thai Muslims from the three southern border provinces appropriate the concept of *halal media*, which originated in Bangkok, to their online *dakwah* movements. Since *dakwah* movement groups in the south are equipped with fewer economic resources, they have created a network of *halal media* (which includes *White Channel* in Bangkok) in order to share resources, such as recorded sermon videos, in order to get the message across in the public space (both Muslim and non-Muslim). I argue that this online *dakwah* movement echoes what Castells (2007) refers to as “the network society”: a network relationship enabled by online media such as YouTube brought about a negotiation. Being represented in the Thai mainstream press as violent, these Muslims employ this disruptive space to visually represent themselves as devout Muslims, suggested by Islamic visual references such as skullcaps, *thobes*, beards, who follow Islamic principles and thus are “good Muslims” in the three southern border provinces. These video producers employ YouTube channels and videos to “correct” distorted images of Islam for Thais from outside the region. Moreover, for Thai Muslims in the region themselves, *dakwah* online videos help “correct” knowledge among Muslims who are “not Muslim enough”. As a result, besides negotiating with “good Muslims” and the distorted images of “bad Muslims” portrayed in the Thai

mainstream media, these findings spell out how the practices of *halal media* bring about a hierarchy of “Muslimness” among Thai Muslims themselves.

However, within these online disruptive spaces, the findings in Chapter Six shed light on how Muslims, who are not themselves affiliated with *dakwah* movements but who are still part of *ummah* or the community of faith, negotiate being “good Muslims.” As Malay-speaking Thai Muslims who graduated from, or are studying in, Thai educational institutions or government-sponsored schools such as Islamic private schools, they appear to be caught up between being “good Muslims” in both the mainstream and the *halal media* sense. They employ online disruptive spaces to negotiate *halal media* practices in order to create *playful* (*kee len* ^{ขี้เล่น}), *fun* (*sanuk* สนุก) and *humorous* (*kam kun* ^{ขำขัน}) videos to capture the attention of a young audience. For these video producers, *halal media* practices are taken into account but are nevertheless negotiable. The notion of *jetana* (trans. intention) was employed as a tool by Thai Muslims to portray themselves as “modern” (e.g. through wearing T-shirts and jeans, using popular music and portraying themselves as Muslim video-makers): however, they are still “good Muslims” since they still embrace Islamic principles. This suggests that, yet again, the position of being “good Muslims” is being negotiated, in that even though they desire to be “as modern as” other Thais, they still keep Islamic and Malay visual references and practices in order not to be “fully Thai”.

This ambivalence of self-representation leads us to the second level of analysis – that relating to the psychological processes at play in visual practices on YouTube. The construction and negotiation of being “good Muslims” relies on the existence of *Others* to “Thainess”. “Thainess” connotes key terms such as Buddhism, capitalism, Bangkok and modern and, as a result, the interplay, ambivalence and contradictions between the interaction of *Muslim Self(s)* and *Other(s)* in different spaces becomes crucial in the self-produced media environment. *White Channel*, which spearheaded the practice of *halal media* and has access to economic resources, mimics the mainstream Thai media channels by boasting of itself as “meeting

professional standards”, yet employs *halal* visual codes to make it “not quite Thai” mainstream media. This results in hybrid genres of popular media such as *halal* entertainment, *halal* films and *halal* drama. For Thai Muslim video-makers in the three southern border provinces, they construct “good Muslims” from the “edge” of “Thainess” in both culture and geography. Even among younger Muslims in the region, self-representation is far from monolithic.

Their self-representation in these online spaces ranges from conforming to negotiating and opposing *halal media* principles. Some video producers portray themselves as “modern” Muslim video producers who can carry out “modern” activities (apart from being fishermen, street vendors or rubber plantation farmers). Muslim characters and presenters are portrayed as “cool (*tansamai* ทันสมัย)” and open to wearing Western-style clothes, and they make series, short films documentaries and music videos just like other Thai younger generations do. It appears that they also negotiate the stereotype of *backwardness* which is the main trope in the *visuality of Muslimness*. However, in more private spaces, such as private YouTube channels not affiliated with schools, Muslims appear to show their “coolness” in different ways. Popular music has been used in the videos, and Islamic principles such as mingling between boys and girls and homosexuality tends to be more relaxed. I argue that this perception of “not quite good Muslims” is political and it echoes Chouliaraki’s (2012) “self-mediated publicness” arguing that people participate in public in new media environment “are characterised by playful activism, narcissistic self-expression, critical discourse and fleeting solidarities that may or may not lead to the politicisation of public culture” (p.1). However, this group of video producers still follows Islamic dress codes and their desire to be Other (*modern* or *civilized*, as in “Thainess”) is ambivalent. Their construction still relies on visual references of Islam and *Malayness* in making themselves “not quite Thai”.

Throughout these chapters the findings show that the notion of “good Muslims” is constructed, negotiated and opposed by visual media producers in different visual spaces in Thailand. This helps unsettle key terms that are related to this study: “Thainess”,

“Muslimness”, *khaek*, “good Muslims”, online spaces. The findings show that these terms are dynamic and subject to power, that they are not self-contained but are socially *constructed* and *re-constructed* through time and space which has brought out different encounters with power. At the social level, visual discourses are employed to preserve the social hierarchy and the dominance of the elites. However, equally important is that findings at the psychological level suggest that “power” is not absolute. All visual subjects in this research, ranging from Thai filmmakers and music video producers to Thai Muslim video producers in Bangkok and in the three southern border provinces, are caught up within the interplay between Self and Other. However, it should be noted that, as the findings show, *spaces* of visual representation have, to a large extent, played a significant role in bringing about a multiplicity of identity construction of Thai Muslims. This especially rings true in the visual domains of Thai culture which historically employ a separation between public and private spaces to maintain elite power. The “play” of spaces as part of a power struggle is clearly illustrated in this research. As the findings suggest, the visibility of several groups of Thai Muslims in these disruptive spaces enables some groups of Thai Muslims, as “Others within” to negotiate “Thainess”; nevertheless, simultaneously these spaces also construct these Muslims as “more Muslim” than Other. Once again, a new hierarchy is reconfigured within YouTube.

Writing about Others is also my concern and this may shed light on the limitations of this research. Informed by critiques of previous works in anthropology (Abu-Lughod, 1991; Pratt, 1986), feminist studies (hook, 1984), cultural studies (Johnson, 2013), psychoanalysis (Doane and Hodges, 1992) and phenomenology (Drabinski, 2011) which deal with “Others” and “Otherness”. I am aware that my positionality - as a Buddhist Thai male who has conducted research on Thai Muslims in a British institution in London - has affected the way I wrote this dissertation. Consequently, I have taken critiques of the previous works such as romanticisation, homogeneity, generalisation, translation and “freezing” a group of people spatially and temporally in order, into account in order to avoid the preceding pitfalls. By

unpacking terms such as “Thainess”, “Muslimness” and online spaces, I see the construction of these notions as *a process*, rather than *a product*. The interplay between Self and Other occurs in a dynamic surrounded by changing socio-political and economic contexts. However, by reading through my own work again, I found that gender as an aspect of constructing “good Muslims” is largely overlooked even though this construction in most spaces is done by male Muslims. Chapter Six has shown, however, that there is an attempt by female Muslims to take part in this negotiation. Therefore, this interplay is the same for me as a researcher who has to “write” and is in a system of representation. Consequently, I perceive my position as a researcher in dealing with theories, data, interviewees and writing as a dynamic process of construction of knowledge as well.

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