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# Negotiating Thainess and Malayness

## Literary Hybridity, Sacred Geography, and Epistemic Resistance in Patani

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### Abstract

What happens when a people write their nation back into existence? In Thailand's southern border region of Patani, where Malay-Muslims have endured a century of assimilation under Thainess, literature functions as sovereignty by other means. This article examines how two classical Malay chronicles: Hikayat Patani and Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani operate as forces of epistemic resistance against the Thai state's homogenizing narrative. Drawing on postcolonial theory, cultural memory, and Indigenous studies, the analysis reveals four mechanisms of literary defiance: cultural memory as sovereign historiography, hybridity as a Third Space between Thainess and Malayness, script politics as symbolic capital (Jawi versus Thai), and sacred geography as indigenous belonging mapped onto tanah amanah (sacred trust). Patani's literature actively constructs identity through genealogies that bypass Bangkok, narrative framings that recast defeat as divine test, and the quiet persistence of Jawi script. Unlike security-focused scholarship that frames Patani's struggle through violence alone, this article argues that literature constitutes a more fundamental battleground: the struggle over meaning, memory, and the right to narrate one's own past.

**Keywords:** Southeast Asia, Indigenous People, Patani, cultural memory, literary hybridity, epistemic resistance



## Introduction

The struggle for identity and belonging in southern Thailand, particularly in the historically contested region of Patani, represents a profound collision between competing narratives of nationhood, culture, and sovereignty (Aini, 2025; Winichakul, 1994). While the Thai state has long promoted a homogenised vision of Thainess, rooted in the triumvirate of nation, religion, and monarchy, the Malay-Muslim communities of Patani have preserved a distinct Malayness anchored in Islamic civilisation, Indigenous memory, and the legacy of the Patani Sultanate (Aini, 2024; Syukri, 2005). This tension is not merely political but epistemic, as it involves fundamentally different ways of understanding history, space, and legitimacy (Satha-Anand, 2019). Literature, particularly classical texts such as *Hikayat Patani* and *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani*, serves as a crucial site where these contestations unfold, offering a counter-narrative to state historiography while sustaining cultural memory (Assmann, 2011; Syukri, 2005; Teeuw & Wyatt, 1970).

The Thai nationalist project, constructed through centralised education, language policies, and symbolic rituals, has systematically marginalised alternative identities, rendering Malay-Muslim narratives either invisible or deviant (Connors, 2003; McCargo, 2008). In contrast, Patani's literary traditions assert an autonomous moral and political order, where legitimacy derives from Islamic ethics, royal lineage, and sacred geography rather than state recognition (Bradley, 2016). This divergence underscores a deeper conflict between Thainess as an imposed ideological framework and Malayness as an enduring cultural and epistemic identity (Askew, 2007). The resilience of these texts, whether through oral recitation, Jawi script, or performative storytelling, demonstrates how marginalised communities resist erasure not only through overt defiance but through the quiet persistence of memory (Scott, 1990; S.H. Haji Salleh, 2010b).

Central to this study is the concept of cultural memory, which Assmann (2011) defines as the institutionalised forms through which communities preserve and transmit their past. In Patani, literature functions as both archive and act of remembrance, bridging pre-colonial sovereignty with contemporary struggles for recognition (Syukri, 2005; Teeuw & Wyatt, 1970). The *Hikayat Patani*, for instance, does not merely chronicle rulers but embeds them within an Islamic cosmology where governance and spirituality are inseparable (Marohabutr, 2008). Similarly, *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani* reconfigures land as *tanah amanah* (a sacred trust), challenging the Thai state's cartographic and bureaucratic domination (Winichakul, 1994). These texts do more than record history; they enact an Indigenous epistemology that refuses assimilation (Smith, 1999).

Yet identity in Patani is not static, nor is resistance purely oppositional. Drawing on Bhabha's (1994) notion of hybridity, this research explores how Malay-Muslim writers navigate the interstices of Thainess and Malayness, crafting a Third Space where belonging is negotiated rather than imposed. Modern Patani literature often blends Thai linguistic elements with Malay-Islamic symbolism, creating layered expressions of identity that neither fully reject nor submit to the nation-state (Islahuddin et al., 2021). This strategic hybridity

complicates binary portrayals of loyalty versus rebellion, revealing instead a dynamic process of adaptation and reinterpretation (Pitsuwan, 1985; Thanet, 2004).

Language itself becomes a battleground in this struggle, where script choices, Jawi, Thai, or Rumi, carry political and spiritual weight (Bourdieu, 1991). The persistence of Jawi in religious and literary texts defies state monolingualism, asserting an alternative linguistic sovereignty tied to Islamic and Malay heritage (Liow, 2009). Even as Thai script is appropriated for local narratives, its usage often subverts state intentions, transforming the dominant language into a vessel for Indigenous meaning (Horstmann, 2011). These textual practices exemplify what Scott (1990) terms *infrapolitics*: the subtle, everyday acts of defiance that sustain resistance under conditions of marginalisation.

Sacred geography further illuminates how Patani's literary imagination maps belonging onto land, resisting the state's territorial logic (Simpson, 2017). Mosques, royal tombs, and natural landmarks are not neutral spaces but nodes in a spiritual network that affirms Patani's historical and metaphysical autonomy (Al-Attas, 1979; Syukri, 2005). This Indigenous spatial consciousness, preserved through oral and written narratives, challenges the Thai state's efforts to fragment and bureaucratise the region (Winichakul, 1994). By embedding identity in sacred geography, Patani literature asserts a form of sovereignty that transcends political borders.

This study builds directly on the foundational work of Francis Bradley (2009, 2016), who has extensively analysed *Hikayat Patani* as a moral and political text within Islamic reform movements. Bradley argues that the chronicle constructs a 'moral order' that contests Siamese hegemony. However, Bradley's focus remains largely on historical and theological dimensions, with less attention to literary hybridity as a contemporary strategy of identity negotiation. Similarly, Chaiwat Satha-Anand (2019) and Duncan McCargo (2008) have explored political and security aspects of the Patani conflict, but they do not systematically analyse how literary texts function as sites of epistemic resistance. Islahuddin et al. (2021) examine diplomatic strategies within *Hikayat Patani* through a sociology of literature framework, highlighting how the text negotiates external power relations, yet their analysis does not extend to the internal identity dynamics of hybridity or the politics of script. Porath (2011) situates *Hikayat Patani* within the broader Malay and Thai political worlds, emphasising the kingdom's navigation between two civilisational spheres, but he does not fully explore how literary form, specifically narrative framing and sacred geography, constitutes a mode of nonviolent resistance. This research fills that gap by demonstrating that literary hybridity, the blending of scripts, genres, and cosmological frameworks, offers a distinct analytical lens that reveals how Patani's Malay-Muslim communities assert belonging without direct confrontation. Unlike previous scholarship that treats literature as a reflection of pre-existing identity, this study argues that literature is an active force in constructing, preserving, and reimagining that identity across generations.

This study employs a multidisciplinary framework, integrating literary analysis, postcolonial theory, and Indigenous studies to interrogate how Patani's texts function as sites of memory, resistance, and hybridity. Methodologically, it engages in close readings of *Hikayat*

*Patani* and *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani*, alongside contemporary Malay-Muslim writings, to trace continuities and ruptures in identity construction. By situating these texts within broader theoretical debates on nationalism, decolonisation, and cultural memory, the research reveals the enduring power of literature to sustain marginalised worldviews.

The significance of this research lies in its challenge to dominant narratives of the Thai nation-state, which often frame southern Thailand's conflict in terms of security or underdevelopment rather than epistemic justice (McCargo, 2008; Satha-Anand, 2019). By centring Patani's literary traditions, the study demonstrates how cultural production sustains alternative imaginaries of belonging, even under conditions of erasure. It also contributes to global discussions on indigeneity, hybridity, and resistance, showing how subaltern communities navigate hegemony without surrendering their distinct identities.

This research argues that Patani's literature is not merely a reflection of identity but an active force in its construction and preservation. Through storytelling, script, and sacred geography, Malay-Muslim communities continue to assert their place within and against the Thai national project (Bradley, 2016; Horstmann, 2011). In doing so, they redefine resistance beyond violence, embracing instead the enduring power of memory, language, and narrative. The struggle for Patani, then, is as much a battle over meaning as it is over territory, revealing the profound role of literature in shaping the past, present, and future of contested identities.

## Methods

This study employs a qualitative, text-based research design grounded in postcolonial literary criticism and Indigenous studies. The approach is interpretivist, aiming to understand how meaning, identity, and resistance are constructed within and through literary texts rather than measuring external variables. The research is therefore a form of critical literary analysis that integrates close reading with theoretical frameworks from cultural memory (Assmann, 2011), hybridity (Bhabha, 1994), symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991), and hidden transcripts (Scott, 1990). The primary data consist of two classical Malay chronicles. The first is *Hikayat Patani*, a seventeenth-century court chronicle that records the genealogy, political events, and Islamic traditions of the Patani Sultanate. This study uses the transliterated and translated edition by Teeuw and Wyatt (1970), supplemented by the Malay edition by S.H. Haji Salleh (2010a). The second is *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani*, a twentieth-century text by Ibrahim Syukri (2005), which reconstructs Patani's history from a local Malay-Muslim perspective, incorporating oral traditions and Islamic genealogies. Secondary data include modern Patani poetry and prose, especially works discussed by Islahuddin et al. (2021) and Marohabutr (2008), to trace continuity and change in hybridity strategies.

After close reading of the primary texts, a two-stage analytical procedure was followed. The first stage was close reading: each text was read multiple times in English and romanised Malay translation. Marginal annotations identified recurring motifs: references

to Islamic cosmology, descriptions of sacred spaces, script choices, narrative framing of rulers, and moments of direct or indirect engagement with Siamese/Thai authority. The second stage was thematic and discourse analysis. Following Braun and Clarke (2006), the annotated data were coded into emergent themes. Four major themes were identified: (a) cultural memory as sovereignty; (b) hybridity in identity negotiation; (c) script politics and linguistic resistance; (d) sacred geography as Indigenous belonging. Subsequently, a discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992) examined how these themes construct particular power relations: how the texts position Patani vis-à-vis Siamese/Thai authority, how they legitimise local rule, and how they imagine belonging. This involved analysing lexical choices (e.g., use of Arabic-derived terms for legitimacy), narrative structures (e.g., framing defeats as trials rather than ends), and intertextual references (e.g., allusions to Qur’anic narratives of just rule). To enhance transparency, findings are presented in two ways: narrative exposition with direct quotations, and a summary table that maps each major theme onto specific textual evidence and theoretical interpretation, as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1:**  
**Thematic Mapping of Literary Resistance in Patani Texts**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Textual Evidence (Hikayat Patani / Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani)</b>	<b>Theoretical Frame</b>	<b>Expression of Resistance</b>
Cultural Memory as Sovereignty	Genealogies of rulers; miraculous births; links to prophets; opening basmala	Assmann (2011)	Constructs autonomous political history outside Thai narrative; asserts divine legitimacy
Hybridity & Third Space	Blending of Malay, Thai, and Arabic lexicon; dual allegiances of characters; use of Thai script for local Islamic stories	Bhabha (1994)	Negotiates belonging without full assimilation; creates “quiet defiance”
Script Politics	Use of Jawi in religious contexts; Thai script for local narratives; Rumi for global Muslim audience	Bourdieu (1991)	Defies state linguistic monopoly; asserts symbolic capital of Malay-Islamic identity
Sacred Geography	Descriptions of royal tombs, mosques, Kolam Kerajaan (royal pond); land as tanah amanah (sacred trust)	Simpson (2017); Smith (1999)	Maps indigenous sovereignty onto land; resists state cartography and bureaucratic control

Three limitations are acknowledged. First, the study focuses exclusively on written literary texts, which may neglect the perspectives of illiterate Malay-Muslim communities or those who rely purely on non-textual oral traditions (e.g., folk tales, nasihat [advice] transmitted verbally in surau or family settings). As S.H. Haji Salleh (2010b) notes, orality remains a vital but under-documented domain of resistance.

## Understanding Thainess and Malayness: Nationhood, Culture, and the Struggle Over Meaning

Malayness, particularly in the context of Patani, is not merely an ethnic or linguistic marker but a cultural and epistemic identity shaped by centuries of Islamic civilisation, royal legacy, and Indigenous narratives (Syukri, 2005). It is historically grounded in the memory of the Patani Sultanate, which functioned as both a spiritual and political centre, integrating Islamic jurisprudence, Sufi traditions, and Malay court culture (Aini, 2024). This identity is preserved and expressed through classical texts such as *Hikayat Patani* and *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani*, which serve as repositories of historical memory, ethical norms, and community legitimacy (Syukri, 2005; Teeuw & Wyatt, 1970).

In *Hikayat Patani*, Malayness emerges through the ceremonial structure of kingship, the use of Jawi script, and the embedding of Islamic cosmology into historical narrative (Teeuw & Wyatt, 1970). The text narrates not only the political succession of rulers but also their piety, charisma, and moral authority, thus fusing political legitimacy with divine guidance (Marohabutr, 2008). These elements demonstrate how Malayness is intimately linked to Islam as a worldview and ethical framework, with the ruler portrayed as *zillullah fil-ard* (God's shadow on earth), a notion rooted in classical Islamic political thought (Al-Attas, 1979).

*Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani* reinforces this construction by presenting Patani as both a *tanah air* (homeland) and *tanah amanah* (sacred trust), where land, governance, and religion are inseparable (Syukri, 2005). The chroniclers record not only political events but also spiritual occurrences, miraculous births, and sanctified spaces such as mosques and royal tombs, which are treated as sacred geography (Bradley, 2016). This sacralisation of space reflects an Indigenous epistemology where land is not merely territory but an extension of spiritual and ancestral presence (Simpson, 2017).

Malayness in Patani also relies heavily on oral tradition and intergenerational storytelling, which transmit values, language, and cosmology in forms that often escape state surveillance (S.H. Haji Salleh, 2010b). As M. Haji Salleh (2018) argues, Malay literature, especially in its oral forms, has long functioned as a site of memory and resistance, allowing the community to narrate its own identity outside the dominant frameworks imposed by the state. These stories are often recited in communal gatherings, linking individual memory to collective belonging, and reinforcing a sense of sacred continuity.

Contrastingly, Thainess (*khwampen Thai*) is a modern nationalist construction developed during the centralisation of the Thai state, especially under the rule of King Rama V and later codified during the premiership of Phibun Songkhram (Winichakul, 1994). Thainess is defined through the 'three pillars' of nation (*chat*), religion (*satsana*), and monarchy (*phramahakasat*), with the Thai language and Theravāda Buddhism serving as core markers of legitimate national identity (Connors, 2003). This formulation, while framed as inclusive, often renders minority communities either invisible or deviant (Satha-Anand, 2019).

Winichakul (1994) conceptualises the Thai nation as a 'geo-body', a spatial and symbolic construct made coherent through cartography, education, and cultural policy. Through the mapping of territory and the promotion of a singular identity, Thainess becomes both a spatial and epistemological project, seeking to domesticate diversity under the guise of unity. In this vision, regions such as Patani are incorporated into the national narrative only insofar as they conform to the ideological constructs of the centre (McCargo, 2008).

This hegemonic model of Thainess has been critiqued by Thai scholars such as Thanet (2004), who notes that the central state's insistence on uniformity undermines local identities and creates enduring tensions. Satha-Anand (2019) argues that the imposition of Thainess erodes the moral agency of Malay-Muslim communities by denying them the epistemological space to define themselves. Instead of fostering a pluralistic national identity, the Thai state often demands symbolic loyalty that erases Indigenous cultural expression (Askew, 2007).

Literature provides a unique lens to observe these tensions, as it reveals both the violence of erasure and the creativity of survival. While state-approved texts depict the south through the lens of underdevelopment or extremism, Patani literature narrates dignity, piety, and political complexity, often in forms that subtly contest the legitimacy of Thainess (Bradley, 2009). *Hikayat Patani* is particularly valuable in this regard, as it offers a pre-national historiography that affirms Patani's autonomous moral and political order (Teeuw & Wyatt, 1970).

Thus, the tension between Malayness and Thainess is not simply one of cultural difference but of competing worldviews. Malayness, anchored in Islamic ethics and Indigenous memory, offers an alternative imagination of belonging that resists assimilation. Thainess, while claiming universality, often enforces particular norms of language, religion, and loyalty that exclude plural expressions of identity (McCargo, 2008). The interaction between these frameworks through literature, policy, and everyday practice constitutes a dynamic and contested space where the struggle for recognition, sovereignty, and dignity continues.

## Literature as Cultural Memory: Reclaiming a Patani Past

Classical Malay literature, particularly *Hikayat Patani* and *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani*, serves not merely as historical record but as a powerful medium of cultural memory for the Malay-Muslim communities of southern Thailand (Aini, 2024). These texts transmit a distinct collective memory that asserts Patani's political and spiritual sovereignty, independent from the Thai state's nationalist historiography. Assmann's (2011) theory of cultural memory explains how literature functions as a repository of shared pasts, carrying forward the symbolic frameworks that define a community's identity across generations. In the case of Patani, literature embodies the memory of an autonomous Malay-Islamic polity, with its own kings, scholars, and sacred traditions, resisting the hegemonic narrative of a unified Thai nation-state.

*Hikayat Patani*, a court chronicle written in the seventeenth century, weaves together

royal genealogies, mythologies, and historical episodes that frame Patani as a centre of Malay civilisation and Islamic learning (Teeuw & Wyatt, 1970). The text enshrines figures such as Raja Hijau (the Green Queen) and other monarchs not just as political leaders but as moral exemplars rooted in Indigenous and Islamic values (Marohabutr, 2008; S.H. Haji Salleh, 2010a). These stories construct an alternative political ontology where legitimacy derives from divine sanction, ethical rule, and lineage rather than state recognition. According to Bradley (2009), such texts perform a 'sovereign memory work' that contests the imposed historical amnesia cultivated by central Thai historiography.

Likewise, Ibrahim Syukri's *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani* (2005) can be read as a modern literary effort to reclaim and consolidate Patani's historical narrative from a local Malay-Muslim perspective. Written during a time of increasing Thai assimilationist pressures, Syukri's text foregrounds oral traditions, family lineages, and the Islamic heritage of the region. It stands as a counter-archive that privileges local voices over official accounts. As Horstmann (2004) notes, such literature reflects a 'decolonial consciousness' that resists epistemic violence through narrative affirmation of local identity, spirituality, and belonging.

Assmann (2011) distinguishes cultural memory from communicative memory in its ability to transcend immediate lived experience and sustain meaning across centuries. Through rituals of reading, recitation, and communal storytelling, texts such as *Hikayat Patani* and *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani* become part of a performative tradition that continually reconstructs the identity of the Patani Malays. The memory preserved in these texts is not inert; it is constantly reinterpreted in light of contemporary struggles for cultural survival, spiritual continuity, and political recognition. As Milner (2008) argues, such historiographical practices are crucial to the Malay world's broader attempt to define itself against both colonial and postcolonial forces.

Crucially, these texts also encode a particular spatial imagination. Patani is not portrayed as a peripheral backwater but as the heartland of a sacred Malay-Islamic civilisation. This challenges the Thai nationalist cartography that renders the Deep South as a fringe region in need of integration or development (Winichakul, 1994). Through detailed descriptions of royal courts, religious festivals, and scholarly achievements, classical literature inscribes Patani onto the cultural map of the Malay world, asserting its centrality rather than its marginality. This literary spatiality, as Liow (2009) suggests, is a crucial form of cultural resistance, maintaining a sense of place and rootedness amid political erasure.

Thus, literature serves as an act of remembering that is at once emotional, political, and epistemological. It bridges the temporal gap between past and present, enabling a form of Indigenous continuity that state narratives often deny. By affirming Patani's sovereign past and spiritual legacy, these literary texts empower contemporary Malay-Muslim communities to reclaim a narrative agency in defining who they are and where they belong. According to Smith (1999), for Indigenous peoples, reclaiming memory is a radical act of decolonisation that challenges both material and symbolic domination. This analysis extends Assmann's (2011) framework by demonstrating that cultural memory in Patani is

not merely preserved but performatively mobilised as active resistance within a contemporary nation-state context: each recitation or reading of *Hikayat Patani* re-enacts the claim to divine legitimacy against Thai nationalist historiography.

## Hybridity and the Third Space: Identity Between the Thai State and Malay-Islamic Roots

Malay-Muslim identity in southern Thailand is frequently framed in binary terms, either as loyal to the Thai state or as part of a resistant Malay-Islamic nationalism. However, this framing fails to capture the layered and dynamic ways in which identity is negotiated within literary expression. Drawing on Bhabha's (1994) concept of the 'Third Space', this section argues that literary narratives emerging from the Patani region often inhabit a space of hybridity, where Malayness and Thainess intersect, conflict, and co-produce meaning. Bhabha's theory suggests that identity is not simply a matter of fixed cultural essences but emerges through negotiation, translation, and ambivalence in spaces shaped by colonial or national domination. In this view, literature becomes a critical site where new forms of belonging are articulated, not in opposition to dominant structures, but in their very interstices.

In literary works such as *Hikayat Patani* and other modern narratives by Malay writers (Islahuddin et al., 2021; M. Haji Salleh, 2018; Marohabutr, 2008; S.H. Haji Salleh, 2010a), characters often demonstrate dual allegiances: to the Islamic cosmology and linguistic heritage of the Malay world, and simultaneously to the national space they inhabit as Thai citizens. According to Thanet (2004), Malay-Muslim identity in the Deep South emerged not in opposition to the Thai state, but through layers of religious-cultural continuity within shifting political frames. Similarly, Pitsuwan (1985) observes that Malay-Muslim communities navigate multiple identity frameworks not through wholesale rejection of Thainess, but through selective engagement, adaptation, and cultural translation. This hybridity does not indicate confusion or loss, but a strategic and creative response to structural tensions, allowing space for both resistance and accommodation.

The Third Space in Patani literature is particularly evident in the use of language, symbols, and character development that draw from both Thai and Malay-Islamic semiotic fields. For instance, some modern Patani poets write bilingually or incorporate Thai vocabulary and references into Malay poetic forms, creating what Bhabha (1994) calls 'the enunciation of a new cultural identity'. Such acts are not neutral but deliberate engagements with power, where literary hybridity becomes a subtle critique of assimilation while also asserting the right to belong differently. Joll (2010; 2013) identifies these strategies as forms of 'quiet defiance', where Malay writers use hybridity as a tool for maintaining cultural distinction without direct confrontation. In these in-between spaces, identity becomes performative, situational, and deeply political.

Crucially, hybridity in literature does not necessarily erase the pain of marginalisation but allows for its articulation in more nuanced ways. As Bradley (2016) points out, Patani

writers often narrate a sense of cultural loss, surveillance, and displacement, but do so through symbolic forms that blend national narratives with Indigenous worldviews. This hybrid expression reclaims space within the national imagination while asserting the legitimacy of local memory and values. Rather than simply opposing the state's narrative, these texts often mimic, subvert, or reframe it, embodying the 'mocking mimicry' that unsettles dominant meanings (Bhabha, 1994). The result is a literary identity that is irreducibly local yet nationally entangled, rooted in both Islamic tradition and Thai modernity.

Through the lens of hybridity, Malay-Muslim literature in southern Thailand offers a complex and layered articulation of identity that resists simplification. These narratives exemplify how cultural identity is not formed in isolation but emerges in relation to multiple, often conflicting discourses of belonging and exclusion. By situating Patani literary expression within Bhabha's framework of the Third Space, we see not only the resilience of Malay cultural identity but also its capacity for negotiation, adaptation, and redefinition. This understanding aligns with the research aim of exploring how literature becomes a mediating space in the tension between Malayness and Thainess, offering a pathway for coexistence that neither denies difference nor demands assimilation. This study extends Bhabha's (1994) framework by identifying what may be termed *cosmological hybridity*: in Patani's deeply religious context, hybridity involves not only linguistic and cultural blending but the fusion of different cosmological orders, Islamic, pre-Islamic Malay, and Thai Buddhist frameworks, collapsed into a continuous sacred temporality that Bhabha's original colonial/postcolonial model does not fully anticipate.

## **Language as Resistance: Jawi, Thai, and the Politics of Script**

Language is not merely a communicative tool but a bearer of power, identity, and legitimacy. In southern Thailand, the simultaneous use of Jawi (Arabic-Malay), Thai, and Rumi (Latinised Malay) scripts in literary texts reflects a deeply embedded struggle over linguistic sovereignty and cultural representation (Samoh & Premsrirat, 2021). Drawing on Bourdieu's (1991) theory of symbolic capital, script usage can be understood as a contested field where different languages and writing systems carry varying degrees of prestige, authority, and access to power. Jawi, often marginalised by the state and associated with religious or ethnic separatism, retains profound symbolic value for Malay-Muslim communities, who use it to assert cultural continuity, spiritual lineage, and resistance to assimilation.

The survival of Jawi script in contemporary literature, particularly in poetry, school textbooks, and religious narratives, represents a form of symbolic resistance to the Thai state's linguistic nationalism. As Liow (2009) notes, the Thai government's emphasis on monolingual Thai education and its suspicion of non-Thai scripts reveals a broader attempt to homogenise identity through language policy. However, the use of Jawi in literary expression functions as a quiet act of refusal, a way to preserve not only a linguistic system but also the religious and cultural worldview embedded within it. According to Bradley (2016), Jawi's continued presence in everyday and literary contexts affirms a spiritual ge-

ography of Patani that precedes and resists the bureaucratic rationality of Thai secularism.

Multilingualism in Patani literature, especially the intentional interplay between Jawi, Thai, and Rumi, becomes a narrative strategy that reveals the complexities of identity negotiation. Writers often shift between scripts to signal shifts in audience, emotion, or epistemological stance. As Joll (2013) observes, these textual decisions are not neutral but highly political, allowing authors to simultaneously engage with state structures (through Thai), connect to the global Muslim *ummah* (through Rumi and Arabic), and reinforce local heritage (through Jawi). This layered script usage reflects what Bourdieu (1991) would call the 'struggle for legitimate language', in which minority communities seek to elevate the value of their own linguistic forms against dominant norms.

At the same time, the Thai script is not wholly rejected in Patani literary production; rather, it is appropriated and reframed. For instance, some writers such as Marohabutr (2008) use Thai script to tell stories about local Islamic practices, blending the national language with Indigenous content. This practice aligns with Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity but also illustrates Bourdieu's idea that even within hegemonic structures, subaltern actors can manoeuvre symbolically to redefine meanings. The co-existence of scripts becomes not a symptom of divided identity but a conscious assertion of plural belonging, Malay, Muslim, and Thai. It shows that language, far from being a passive medium, is central to the politics of recognition and exclusion.

The circulation of texts that integrate Jawi, Thai, and Rumi scripts demonstrates the way Malay-Muslim writers consciously navigate the cultural terrain imposed by the state while retaining their own linguistic agency. These scripts are more than technical choices; they are cultural markers that convey authority, belonging, and memory. As Horstmann (2011) argues, script selection in southern Thai Muslim communities often reflects complex social negotiations, especially under conditions of marginalisation and surveillance. Whether through school publications, personal memoirs, or poetic anthologies, the very act of writing in or about Jawi becomes a statement of continuity and difference. The use of multiple scripts in literature illustrates a community that neither isolates itself from the national framework nor submits entirely to it, but instead crafts a space where layered identities can be expressed, preserved, and reimagined. Unlike the cases of linguistic resistance Bourdieu (1991) analysed in European contexts, Jawi script in Patani carries a unique dual symbolic capital: religious authority derived from its Arabic base and ethnic identity marker as Malay. This irreducible combination means that writing in Jawi is simultaneously an act of Islamic piety and ethno-national assertion, a form of symbolic power that cannot be reduced to either category alone.

## **Sacred Geography and Indigenous Belonging**

In the literary imagination of Patani, the landscape is more than physical terrain; it is imbued with spiritual significance and historical memory. Drawing from Indigenous studies, particularly the work of Simpson (2017), land is not just a resource or backdrop but a

living entity bound with community identity, ethics, and knowledge systems. In this view, literature does not merely describe geography, it enacts a relationship with it. Similarly, *Hikayat Patani* portrays Patani as a sacred realm where royal authority, Islamic teachings, and natural elements form an interwoven cosmology, embedding belonging in both the soil and the soul (Teeuw & Wyatt, 1970). The naming of rivers, palaces, and tombs in the Malay text operates as a mnemonic device, linking identity to specific places of power and sanctity (Salleh, 1977).

This sacralised vision of Patani is reinforced through place-based storytelling that marks territory not in colonial or administrative terms, but through narratives of origin, spiritual lineage, and resistance. Smith (1999) emphasises that Indigenous literatures often assert sovereignty through storytelling that maps the land with memory and meaning. In *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani* (Syukri, 2005), the chronicling of rulers, spiritual guides, and miraculous events tied to particular sites, such as the royal tombs of Kampung Pintu Gerbang or the pond where the first Sultan performed ablutions, functions as an Indigenous cartography, establishing Patani as more than a political unit but as a moral and sacred homeland (Teeuw & Wyatt, 1970). These place-stories are not nostalgic; they are part of a continuing claim to place that predates and contests Thai state narratives.

The sacredness of geography in Patani literature is deeply informed by Islamic cosmology. In both *Hikayat Patani* and *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani*, the land is often described as a gift entrusted by God, a place where the Islamic way of life must be upheld to maintain divine balance and social harmony (Syukri, 2005; Teeuw & Wyatt, 1970). As Bradley (2016) and Al-Attas (1979) explain, the integration of Islamic values into territorial narratives creates a dual framework: Patani as both *tanah air* (homeland) and *tanah amanah* (sacred trust). Through this lens, literary depictions of mosques, madrasahs, and tombs are not simply religious references but signify a deeper metaphysical presence that anchors Malay-Muslim identity to land (Marohabutr, 2008).

Furthermore, the oral transmission of stories related to sacred figures such as Tok Kenali, whose tomb in Kelantan remains a pilgrimage site, reinforces this epistemology, where geography is imbued with spiritual and ancestral meaning. As noted by S.H. Haji Salleh (2010b), such narratives represent a form of Indigenous memory-keeping, passed through oral recitations and poetic expression. These stories, often shared in *surau*, family gatherings, or community ceremonies, maintain a collective consciousness that views land not only as physical territory but as a living archive of divine trust. Simpson (2017) suggests that in Indigenous worldviews, knowledge is relational and transmitted through lived connection to land. The survival of these place-based narratives in Patani, even under pressures of assimilation and militarisation, demonstrates a resilient Indigenous form of knowledge-making that resists erasure through quiet continuity.

What is particularly striking in these literary expressions is the temporal layering of belonging. Rather than portraying Patani solely in the past, these texts often collapse historical, spiritual, and present-day realities into a unified sacred geography. This reflects what Assmann (2011) calls ‘cultural memory’, a form of remembering that persists institutional-

ly and ritually over generations. *Hikayat Patani* begins with mythic origins, but its closing sections also recount real conflicts and alliances with Siamese powers, subtly placing Patani within a broader, contested history. The literature thus offers a counter-memory to state historiography, in which the Patani homeland is not lost or dormant, but continuously lived through story, prayer, and spatial reverence.

By embedding Islamic ethics, ancestral memory, and political defiance into the contours of the land, Patani literature enacts an Indigenous epistemology of place. This approach refuses the fragmentation of identity from territory, instead presenting geography as the very ground of identity. Sacred geography, as told through *Hikayat Patani* and *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani*, becomes a powerful medium through which the Malay-Muslim community asserts both continuity and sovereignty. In this way, literature serves not only as a mirror of cultural belonging but as a map of decolonial presence in the contested landscape of southern Thailand. This analysis confirms Simpson's (2017) Indigenous framework while adding a distinct Islamic dimension: in Patani, sacred geography is not merely ancestral but divinely ordained, with land conceptualised as *tanah amanah* (sacred trust) from God, thereby fusing Indigenous place-based sovereignty with Islamic political theology in ways that extend beyond Simpson's original model.

## **Resistance Beyond Violence: Literature as Political and Epistemic Defiance**

In the long-standing conflict in southern Thailand, public discourse has often centred on acts of physical violence, insurgency, and counterinsurgency as the primary markers of resistance. While these manifestations are undeniably real, they represent only one dimension of the broader spectrum of resistance enacted by the Malay-Muslim communities of Patani. Drawing on Scott's (1990) theory of 'hidden transcripts', resistance must also be understood as a cultural and epistemic process that takes place outside the formal arenas of political confrontation. Literary texts such as *Hikayat Patani* and *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani* exemplify such hidden transcripts: they encode dissent, assert Indigenous cosmologies, and construct parallel visions of identity and sovereignty without directly confronting the Thai state.

To demonstrate how narrative strategy functions as nonviolent resistance, we turn to direct quotations from *Hikayat Patani*. In the opening sections of the chronicle, the text does not begin with a political declaration of independence but with a *basmala* (invocation of God's name) and a genealogy linking Patani's rulers to prophetic figures: '*Dengan nama Allah Yang Maha Pemurah lagi Maha Penyayang. Inilah cerita asal raja-raja Melayu yang memerintah di negeri Patani. Adapun raja yang pertama, bernama Sultan Ismail Syah Zillullah fil-Ard...*' (In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. This is the story of the origin of the Malay kings who ruled in Patani. The first king was named Sultan Ismail Syah, Shadow of God on Earth...) (S.H. Haji Salleh, 2010a; Teeuw & Wyatt, 1970). The use of the *basmala* immediately frames the entire chronicle within Islamic sacred time,

not Siamese political time. The title *Zillullah fil-Ard* (Shadow of God on Earth) is a direct appropriation of classical Islamic political theology, asserting that legitimacy flows from God, not from any Thai king or Bangkok bureaucracy. This is a quiet but profound act of epistemic defiance: it re-centres authority away from the Thai state's secular-nationalist framework.

Another example occurs when the text describes the construction of a mosque by a Patani ruler: 'Maka baginda pun menyuruh membuat masjid di dalam kota Patani, dan baginda sendiri yang meletakkan batu pertama, sambil berdoa kepada Allah supaya negeri Patani selama-lamanya menjadi tempat Islam dan keadilan.' (Then the king ordered a mosque to be built inside the city of Patani, and the king himself laid the first stone, while praying to God that Patani would forever remain a place of Islam and justice) (S.H. Haji Salleh, 2010a; Teeuw & Wyatt, 1970). Here, resistance is enacted through spatial practice: the mosque is not merely a building but a claim that Patani's identity is Islamic and just, in implicit contrast to non-Islamic or unjust external powers. The act of laying the first stone personally by the ruler mimics the foundational acts of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina, thereby creating a sacred genealogy of place that cannot be erased by state cartography.

A further example of narrative strategy appears in the depiction of military defeat. Unlike modern nationalist texts that might lament loss, *Hikayat Patani* often reframes setbacks as tests of faith: 'Maka apabila Patani dikalahkan oleh Siam, bukanlah karena lemah iman, tetapi karena ujian dari Allah. Maka raja dan rakyat tetap menjalankan syariat.' (When Patani was defeated by Siam, it was not due to weak faith, but as a test from God. The king and the people continued to uphold the *syariat*.) (S.H. Haji Salleh, 2010a; Teeuw & Wyatt, 1970). This reframing is a classic hidden transcript: defeat becomes temporary, while moral and spiritual continuity remains eternal. The text thereby resists the Thai state's narrative of successful integration or assimilation. Instead, it constructs a parallel temporality in which Patani's essence persists regardless of political outcomes.

Said's (1983) notion of 'resistance literature' similarly affirms the importance of textual practices in challenging imperial narratives. In the context of Patani, literary texts function as both memory and prophecy: they preserve the history of a sovereign Malay polity while also envisioning futures that resist assimilation. *Hikayat Patani*, in particular, records not only the genealogy of rulers and Islamic scholars but also chronicles miraculous events, spiritual legitimacy, and moral authority rooted in Indigenous and Islamic frameworks (Teeuw & Wyatt, 1970). These elements challenge the hegemonic Thai historiography that often erases or marginalises the region's distinct cultural lineage.

In *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani*, the text is not merely a historical account but a political act of remembering, a counter-archive that contests the national narrative promoted by the central Thai state (Syukri, 2005). By documenting the Islamic institutions, royal customs, and intellectual networks that shaped Patani's development, the text resists the homogenising discourse of Thai nationhood. As Said (1994) argues, 'to write about a place is to affirm its existence and meaning', and this is precisely what Malay-Muslim authors of Patani texts have done: they have kept Patani alive not through violence, but through

words.

The stylistic features of these texts, ranging from elevated prose and Arabic-influenced terminology to the deployment of Jawi script, further assert a distinct epistemic identity (Bradley, 2009). These are not neutral literary choices; they are acts of cultural positioning. As Bourdieu (1991) contends, language is not only a means of communication but also a form of symbolic capital that affirms one's place in a social and cultural hierarchy. The use of Jawi script in Patani texts, therefore, resists the dominant linguistic regime of the Thai state, which privileges the Thai language and script as markers of citizenship and loyalty.

Moreover, the narrative strategies employed in *Hikayat Patani*, including allegory, spiritual metaphor, and invocations of divine justice, allow the texts to articulate dissent in a veiled yet potent manner. Subordinate groups often use 'infrapolitics', or disguised forms of resistance, to avoid direct confrontation while still asserting agency (Scott, 1990). The repeated theme of moral legitimacy and divine favour in these texts implicitly critiques corrupt or foreign rulers, thereby creating a space for moral resistance.

Resistance in Patani literature also takes the form of epistemological defiance. By centring Islamic cosmology, genealogical memory, and spiritual geography, these texts challenge the secular, bureaucratic lens through which the Thai state views the region. Smith (1999), writing from an Indigenous studies perspective, reminds us that decolonisation is also about reclaiming knowledge systems. The Malay-Muslim authors of Patani texts perform precisely this task by writing histories that affirm their own spiritual and political worldviews rather than conforming to external frameworks.

It is crucial to recognise that the resistance embedded in these texts is intergenerational. They are recited, interpreted, and adapted in contemporary contexts, whether in religious schools, family gatherings, or community ceremonies. This ongoing circulation reinforces the texts' function as living documents of resistance, memory, and survival. As Scott (1990) argues, the power of hidden transcripts lies not only in what they say but in how they endure and adapt through time.

## Conclusion

The struggle for identity and belonging in southern Thailand, as reflected in Patani's literary traditions, reveals a profound contest between competing narratives of nationhood, culture, and sovereignty. Through texts such as *Hikayat Patani* and *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani*, Malay-Muslim communities assert an Indigenous epistemology that resists the homogenising forces of Thai nationalism. These works function not merely as historical records but as living acts of cultural memory, embedding Islamic ethics, sacred geography, and political defiance into the very fabric of identity. By preserving and transmitting alternative visions of legitimacy, belonging, and space, Patani literature sustains a counter-narrative that challenges both state erasure and simplistic portrayals of resistance.

The concept of hybridity further complicates this dynamic, demonstrating how Malay-Muslim writers navigate the interstices of Thainess and Malayness, crafting a 'Third

Space' where identity is negotiated rather than imposed. Through multilingualism, script politics, and adaptive storytelling, these texts reveal the fluidity of belonging in a contested region. Far from passive assimilation or outright rebellion, Patani's literary traditions exemplify a resilient form of cultural survival, one that merges Islamic tradition with local memory while engaging strategically with the structures of the Thai nation-state. This nuanced negotiation underscores literature's role not just as a reflection of identity but as an active force in shaping it.

Moving forward, future research should explore how contemporary digital and oral storytelling practices among Malay-Muslim communities continue to evolve amid shifting political landscapes. Specifically, ethnographic studies of *surau*-based storytelling and youth poetry on social media could capture hybridity in real time. Additionally, comparative studies with other marginalised regions in Southeast Asia (e.g., Aceh, Moro Philippines, West Papua) could illuminate broader patterns of literary resistance and cultural hybridity. Finally, interdisciplinary investigations into the role of women and youth in sustaining Patani's literary heritage would provide deeper insights into the generational transmission of identity and memory. By expanding these lines of inquiry, scholars can further uncover the enduring power of literature as a site of decolonial imagination and epistemic justice.

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