Concept and Theory of Identity Politics and the Representation of Melayu Muslims in the Deep South of Thailand

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Abstract

The qualitative research titled "Dynamics of Melayu Muslim Politicians' Movements amidst the Violence in the Southern Border Provinces" has applied the concept of identity politics to attempt to discover the connections between identity politics, representatives, and Melayu Muslims in the movement of Melayu-Muslim politicians in the Deep South of Thailand. This article is part of the research paper that brought up the idea of identity politics in connection with the movements in the Deep South. It argued that the access to the power structure of identity representation is one of the approaches to aid in the preservation of an individual's own identity. The research argues that if the identities are respected equally, it is likely that the motivation to ignite oppressive violence could be reduced. On the one hand, identity politics may further lead to the construction of "others" versus "us". On the other hand, it could lead to the reduction of violent conditions if identity is protected in the political space. In relation to Muslim identity, the concepts of 'political Islam', 'post-Islamism' or 'post-secularism' have been brought up to explain the visibility of Muslim identity in the political domain. The Melayu Muslims in the Deep South of Thailand have a unique identity and one of the main causes of the ongoing conflict in the area is the historical invisibility and suppression of their identity. The solution to the conflict of identity politics and marginalization is to revive and create legitimate power of the people living there by supporting conflict management authority at local, national and international levels. Therefore, it could be stated that the parliamentary system is the hope that people can attempt to build political bargaining space to promote the full representation of Muslim or Melayu identity which will, eventually, reduce the conditions leading to violence.

Keywords: Identity politics, Melayu, Muslim, Politicians, Deep South

Introduction

The research titled "Dynamics of Melayu Muslim Politicians' Movements amidst the Violence in the Southern Border Provinces", conducted between 2018 and 2019, has studied the movements of Melayu-Muslim politicians in the Deep South and has attempted to push for identity politics to be the main concept used to understand the movement. Qualitative

methodology had been applied for this research through document analysis, in-depth interviews and non-participant observation. This article represents parts of this research that was conducted to explore the connections between identity politics, representatives, and Muslims to understand the movements of Melayu-Muslim politicians in the Deep South.

Identity has become one of the debatable issues in most of the social sciences including political science. The meaning of identity could be formed by either personal views or the social category of a person or a group of people. Identity could refer to a person's language, religion, race, nationality, gender, class, etc. One person could identify oneself with multiple identities. When identity was seen to be impacted and constructed in the political sphere, the politics of identity started to be discussed. Identity politics is a concept based on the connection of politics with the identity of people in a society. The essence of this concept is that members of particular social groups like women, tribes, people of color, and minorities are the target of oppression and living under cultural imperialism. For example, there may be stereotypes, the erasure of traditions, and resources being preserved for the superior identity resulting in a lack of resources for the identities seen as inferior. These identities may often live under conditions of violence, exploitation, marginalization, or lack of power (Young, 1990 as cited in Standford University, 2016). Although identity is always involved in politics, this does not necessarily mean that there will always be the involvement of politics in identity. On the one hand, not every identity is revolved around the issues of politics and society; in many cases, it is about personal matters. On the other hand, politics is often dealing with the issue of identity (Younge, 2019).

Identity politics has its root from the needs of transforming social injustice, claiming the entitled rights of particular groups in society, and denying the scripts offered by a superior culture through the realization of one's own sense of self and community. However, "Identity politics" is still a broad term that describes political movements of identity groups undertaken by their representatives in different locations (Stanford University, 2016).

Kruks (2001) points out that the crucial aspect of identity politics is to accept a person's identity and respect the differences of his/her identity. This is why it is about the experience of individuals, especially when oppression is felt. If the presence of a person's identity is understood only in a single axis and it is the most important identity that a person will represent himself/herself, such as an Asian-American identity is more important than a woman, it is then likely that people will be forced to identify with their most essential identity despite the fact that they may not be able to choose any specific one but rather an integrated identity (Spelman, 1988 as cited in Standford University, 2016). Furthermore, generalizations made about particular social groups may result in dictating the self-understanding that its members should have.

Many scholars stated that identity politics had been applied simultaneously with the concept of multiculturalism in some places during the 1960s and 1970s and it has been employed to create a sense of awareness and empowerment to marginalized groups in society. In American politics, for example, these groups could be the people of color, LGBT, feminists, Marxists, the American Indians and many other indigenous groups. Identity politics have also spread to Latin American countries where there have been new social group movements created by women, laborers, and indigenous people. This has eventually led to the eruption of

revolutionary movements in various parts of the world. Therefore, it could be argued that identity politics has emerged from groups of people who demand the increase of power and alleviation of social oppression. However, due to the extension of its scope, identity is usually brought into politics. This has led American people and people in other parts of the world to be more likely to elect candidates who share similar identities to their own. (Wiarda, 2016).

Identity politics emerged evidently after the end of the clash of political ideologies between liberal democracy and communism during the Cold War. Before the world turned towards the liberal economic society, the political discourse in the post-Cold War era appeared to create more divisions between "them" and "us". Thus, the diverse identities in this era have gradually been implemented in the political sphere. Samuel Huntington, in his book titled *The Clash of Civilizations*, explained that ideological conflict, political and economic regimes, and the building of rivalry camps, which were the main features of the Cold War, would no longer be able to explain the current international conflicts. Instead of identifying with liberal democratic or communist camps, people identified themselves according to their "civilization" and/or culture, such as a Muslim, Westerner, Chinese, Malay, etc, because in Huntington's perspective these two ideas could not be separated from each other. (Eoseewong, 2019).

Identity politics is usually applied to explain politics that involve people's collective identities, be they lingual, religious, ethnic, or tribal, in political implementation and decision-making processes. Some of these identities are constructed, deconstructed, or adjusted to meet the new era. As mentioned before, identity politics often creates a division between "us" and "them." While the former leads to the inclusion of people who share similar identity or different ones but have the objectives of maintaining their own unique identity, the latter is likely to create a bias against those who are different. In this sense, it could be argued that identity opens the space for individuals or groups to understand the differences and sameness of themselves. It is an undeniable fact that human identity is diverse, and societies are inevitably heterogeneous. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge that humans' identities and communities are always plural and diverse (Heredia, 2006). Winichakul (2017) stated that when we affiliate ourselves with any collective identity, there must always be the "others" as our opposition, and our understanding about them will help us construct our own identity. The construction of "others" often follows self-construction. In many cases, identity construction is also derived from the perception of other identities. However, the definition of "others" needs to be reconstructed regularly to contribute to the understanding of "them" and "us".

Parekh (2008), a well-known Indian scholar, has narrated in his book titled *A New Politics of Identity: Political Principles for an Interdependent World*, how identity politics led to the construction of national identity and the formation of a multicultural society as well as the convergence of diverse identities in the era of globalization. He also argued that, in many cases, states claim "sovereignty" as a discourse to oppress minorities, women, and LGBT. In this multi-identity society, democracy has become the universal regime with the potential to protect human rights and dignity because it provides space to allow the marginalized to raise their voices. However, the democratic regime will be legitimated only if its economic development and justice are for every group in society.

Amidst a period of uncertainty in terms of politics, society, and morality, the perception towards identity politics, especially towards ethnicities, is increasingly diverse. Many groups

of people employ it for the purposes of building confidence in their group's identity and some political legitimacy. For most subordinate groups, their primary bargaining tool is to create the threat of societal instability. Thus, identity politics of ethnic groups constitute a threat to established authorities, such as majority rule and homogeneous national identity. In this resistance, some groups assert their identity as a political strategy and a peaceful means to get access to formal politics. Although many people may view ethnic identity politics as causing violence, others view it as a means to form and maintain the political power of the majority and superior groups. Apart from being a bargaining tool of the minority groups, ethnic identity politics is also essential for the formation and maintenance of nation-states. Interestingly, some ethnicities have been consolidated into a national identity, while others have been excluded. As an example in some countries, the language of certain groups was adopted as the national language despite the fact that people in many locations speak different languages. Similarly, the identity of ethnic groups has become part of political efforts to establish authority by making states become more pluralistic (Leach et al., 2008).

Bernstein (2005 as cited in Leach et al., 2008) argues that identity is necessary for political movements as it gathers people around a common cause and mobilizes collective action. Therefore, a political movement will be effective not because of the rallying of the same-ethnic coalition but rather the alliance of cross-ethnicities that draw in a broader base of support. In many cases, the failure to form an overarching identity and related political agenda has led political movements to break apart (Leach et al., 2008).

Banpasirichote (2009) points out that the issues of ethnicity and language are important in the age of globalization as the free movement of people normalizes the differences in current society. Many states have started to pay great attention to the issue of ethnic diversity. Similarly, ethnic, linguistic, and religious identities of minorities and the oppressed groups appeared to have reacted to these changes. In relation to this, the issue of identity politics has a significant effect on the causes and the existence of violence in many parts of the world. People often raise this issue to justify the preservation of their own identity while, at the same time, the oppression of others is likely to be the cause of conflict. Thus, it is necessary to pay attention to the issue of identity when it comes to the process of conflict resolution (Wigmore-Shepherd, 2013). According to a UN Human Development Report (as cited in Tuansiri, 2004), when the struggle over cultural identity is left unmanaged and negatively results in the existence of people's identity, it can quickly become one of the most significant sources of polarization, distrust and hatred amongst the people, causing instability both within and between states. Rong (2010) has demonstrated that if states cannot respond to the need of diverse groups of people, this can lead to violence. In this condition, quick response to the needs of those people is highly necessary, and it is likely to occur within a democratic state as previously argued by Parekh. Brown (1995) has similarly stated that identity politics will flourish well under a democratic political regime because it gives political space for people to mobilize and raise their voices freely to maintain the existence of their identity either through political movements, lobbying, forming a political party, conducting elections, or other mechanisms provided by the regime (Stanford, 2016). In other words, people may employ different strategies, both outside and inside the system, to mobilize under a democratic regime

either by using weapons and violence or participating in various political processes such as elections, lobby efforts, peaceful demonstrations, etc. (Eoseewong, 2007).

Identity politics, representation, and politicians

One of the essential principles under a representative democracy is that sovereignty belongs to the people. Because everyone cannot be involved in politics directly due to the restriction of time, knowledge, skills, and other reasons, they agree to choose their representatives and give them the power to make decisions at the policy level and to run the country on their behalf. In this sense, the people still have the power to vote and participate in decision-making through the elected officials who will act on the people's behalf at the national level (Kiewiet & McCubbins, 1991). Therefore, the political representatives are likely to act based on the needs of the majority while respecting the voice of the minority. Conducting a free and fair election became one of the effective tools that this political system employs to get the legitimated representatives who are chosen by the people and act for the overall interests of the people. Although many representatives in the past established legitimacy through non-election means, such as the acceptance or approval of specific groups in society (Rehfeld, 2006). This can still be found in today's world, but it is more limited now than in the past.

"Political representation" is regarded as a mechanism of creating political figures. In each state, citizens delegate their rights and power to the representative, which in turn, exercise on their behalf. By virtue of political representation, different people can take part in the politics of the country, including ethnic groups. In our ethnically heterogeneous world, it is inevitable to give priority to the social, cultural, and political rights of different groups in society. While the cultural and social rights of ethnic groups are well protected in many cases, their participation in politics of a country is generally insufficient as a result of overrepresentation of some ethnic groups and the exclusion of others (Zhanarstanova & Nechayeva, 2016). This is the reason why many countries specify the number of quotas and reserved seats in the parliamentary system held for groups of ethnic minorities (Protsyk, 2010). Although the presence of these measures is correlated with higher levels of ethnic group representation, it is not a true long-lasting strategy as compared to encouraging acceptance and positive attitudes within society in general towards these marginalized people. The latter will be more effective in helping ethnic groups to have long-term seats at the national parliament (Ruedin, 2009).

The aforementioned ethnic representation in the political context is basically selected from the people called "politicians," who will be the target group of this research. Therefore, it is important to understand the preliminary meaning of the word "politician." This term has its root in "politics." Historically, the ancient Greek government, was the first to begin the creation of "states". People who were involved in the activities of the city-state in Athens were generally considered to be the politicians. They were responsible for the political activities of the state. Thus, the initial meaning of politicians is simply referred to as "those who are associated with politics at a higher level than ordinary citizens". In the current world of the modern state, society also consists of subjects who are interested and involved in politics and those who are not. The former group will usually follow the news, acknowledge the importance of politics, seek political interests either for themselves or for society in general, and may attempt to gain political power. (Serirangsan, 1989). Murray (2015) has explained in his paper

titled "What Makes a Good Politician? Reassessing the Criteria Used for Political Recruitment" that elected politicians are typically playing roles as a parliamentary, constituency, symbolic, electoral, or political party representative. The successful politician relies much on leadership and persuasive skills, negotiating compromises, listening to others and a commitment to being a trusted representative. Therefore, there are many factors that combine to define a "good politician", not only their level of education or economic status.

Theerawekin (2006) has declared that politicians or the people's representatives shall have the following principles: adherence to the rule of law, tolerance, open-mindedness, legality, legitimacy, decency, credibility, good governance, respect of rights and freedom, equality, and the democratic ethos. Similarly, Sompitak (2011) has argued that politicians need to have a political ideology, ethics, knowledge, common sense, and an understanding of the mood of the people.

Generally, in many countries today, the parliamentary representatives consist of the members from the House of Representatives and the Senate. The roles and numbers of each type of representative are varied depending on countries and times. In Thailand, the representative politicians are from both the House of Representatives and the Senate. The 2017 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, the latest version, has allocated 500 members of the House of Representatives; 350 members elected on a constituency basis, and 150 members from party lists. They have the power to submit and consider organic law bills and other bills, manage government administration including submission of inquiry, general debate, the appointment of committees, removal of the parliamentary members and private organizations' representatives, the appointment of the prime minister, and constitutional amendments (Srimuangkanchana, 2018). In 1997, the Senate consisted of 200 members entirely chosen by election, but the number slightly decreased to 150 members in 2007. The terms and conditions have changed in the 2017 constitution where the numbers and sources of the senators are divided into two separate periods. In the first period, the National Council for Peace and Order appointed 250 senators who are composed of 50 people selected by the Election Commission, 194 people chosen by the Senate Selection Committee, and the remaining six senators are the permanent positions of Secretary for Ministry of Defense, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, the Heads of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, and the National Police Chief. The second period commences five years later after the date of the Royal Decree comes into effect. The Senate will consist of 200 members installed from a selection by and among persons having the knowledge, expertise, experience, profession, or characteristics or common interests or having worked in varied areas of the society. The division of groups shall be made in a way that enables every person having the right to apply for selection to belong to any one group. The main duties of the Senators under the current constitution are to monitor, advise, and push forward the national reform to achieve its Category 16 of the national reform, to maneuver and implement the national strategic plan, to consider future bills related to Category 16, and to request the President of the Parliament to make a judgment on the considered bills (Chaivised, 2017).

To conclude the preliminary theory and concept of identity politics, it is important to note that collective identities could result in both inclusion and exclusion of people. If the identities are respected equally, it is likely that the motivation to ignite oppressive violence will

be reduced. If we put together diverse identities, we will be able to see the sources of relationship and conflict, including the path to relation-building. There are different ways of using identity politics to demand rights, freedom, and equality, and one of them is to take part in formal politics to make changes at the policy level by becoming parliamentary representatives.

The triumph of Donald Trump in the 2016 US Presidential election has raised concerns among scholars that identity politics might inspire violence and polarization. Yuktanan (2013) points out that identity politics will create division and the line between "them" and "us", exclude others, reproduce the painful past, and force people to submit to collective identity. According to this concern, the "sameness" of specific identities will be the only legitimate indicator of people involved in political mobilization collectively. In other words, identity politics has led people to seek personal similarities, not common political values (Heyes, 2000). In the state of our changing world and globalization, the old concept of identity is gradually replaced by the collective identity, and it is interesting to note how it will change in the future (Brown, 1995).

There are some scholarly works published to counter the criticism of identity politics by arguing that this concept rests on the basis of reality and still shapes today's politics. For them, identity politics is not limited to similar physical appearance; it also includes people of different identities who share common experiences of oppression and marginalization by superior groups. These people come together not just to end those experiences but to achieve common goals of freedom and equality. However, this does not necessarily mean that they leave their identities behind. The denial of their political participation may lead to the creation of a cycle of conflict and violence. As mentioned earlier, the core concept of identity politics is that it emphasizes assisting the exploited and oppressed people or minorities to gain their rights, freedom, and equality, both socially and economically, through available channels. Therefore, the identity politics of inferior groups is more important than the one that is politicized by someone like Donald Trump and other political leaders around the world (Garza, 2019).

In short, identity politics can be seen as the movement of minorities or ethnic groups in society to demand the rights, freedom, and equality for their ethnicities and identities. According to this study, access into formal politics through elections and becoming representatives will be an effective way to meet those demands.

Muslim identity in politics

To understand identity politics that effect formal political participation of Malay Muslims whose religion is "Islam", it is first necessary to understand both the concepts of Muslim identity and political Islam. In terms of Muslim identity, Muslims are those who believe in the Islamic faith and whose identity is mostly associated with the teachings of Islam which could be adapted to conform with each regional culture. Ramadan (2004) states that Muslim identity is associated with five principles of Islam which include the pronouncing of the *shahada* (belief in one God and Muhammad is His messenger), praying five times a day, paying *zakat* or donations to help the poor, fasting, and performing *Hajj* (a pilgrimage). Kabir (2015) further points out that Muslim identity is also influenced by the Muslim family,

environment, and community that one belongs to. Thus, Muslim identity involves many aspects, including the daily ways of life, and integrates with other identities of a person.

When Muslim identity is brought into the political sphere, the identity politics of Muslims is often associated with the demand to gain rights and freedom according to the teachings of Islam. To understand the political direction of Malay-Muslim politicians, it is necessary to study the framework of political Islam. Because of the strong connection between religion, politics and daily lifestyle, Muslim politicians will likely use the opportunity of their representation to demand the entitled rights for Muslims. Although the democratic political regime is different from the traditional Islamic system which holds the Quran and Hadith as the supreme principles, the current context of the world is pushing Muslims to search for political space to maintain their Islamic teachings and principles while participating in politics. The term "political Islam" does not mean the implementation of Islamic law. Still, it refers to the explanation of the phenomenon of Muslims' participation in politics to increase the integration of Islam in politics. Therefore, political Islam employs a peaceful means to achieve political goals (Sahoh & Sattar, 2016).

Hirschkind (2011) argues that the term "political Islam" has been adopted to identify the irruption of Islamic religion into the secular domain of politics (separating religion from politics) and to distinguish these practices from those of personal beliefs under the guidelines of Islam. The term has enlarged the framework of traditional Islam into a modern context and mainly relates to the expansion of the state's authority and social dimension where Islam plays a role. This perception implies that Muslims' participation in politics is only in order to change policy to be more friendly and conform to the Islamic religion, for instance, the right to wear a hijab, inclusion of Islamic financial systems, affairs related to *Hajj*, etc. (Sahoh & Thongfuea, 2014).

In conclusion, political Islam is the term employed to explain the phenomenon of Muslims' participation in the national political domain through political parties and elections in many parts of the world, such as Turkey in the 1990s, and Tunisia or Egypt before the revolution, to call for the implementation of Islamic principles under the available entitled and legal rights. However, in last decade, the concept of 'post-Islamism' or 'post-secularism' has been widely used to explain the idea of merging individual choice and freedom with Islamic values and making the Islamic values more visible in the public sphere. In other words, this concept has shifted the paradigm to challenge the separate thought of secularism and religion in the public sphere and to promote pluralism while the official sphere remains impartial and neutral. (Konuralp, 2020)

After considering the principles of Muslim identity and political Islam or post-secularism, it is clear that the former has often been employed in political space by Muslims. This paper also supports the idea that political Islam is not visible in the Malay-Muslim identity in the political movement in the Deep South of Thailand because the former concept is associated with election campaigns and policies that represent Islam. According to Aphornsuvan (as cited in Eoseewong, 2007), people often equalize Islam with the political society and culture of the Middle East while indeed Islam is quite distinct in each part of the world, especially in Southeast Asia. Shamsul (2005) used the term "Embedded Islam" to describe the arrival of Islam in this region where the people believe in the traditional indigenous

beliefs, Buddhism, or Brahmanism. These newer faiths, including Islam, did not replace but rather were superimposed on the old beliefs of people in this region. However, the concept of post-secularism is still something that could be involved when thinking about Muslim roles in the public sphere, especially in the political space.

Malay identity: The "other" in Thai society?

In speaking of Malay people, they are the people who live in the southern region of Southeast Asia which covers the areas from the Banda Sea Islands to the eastern coast of Sumatra and from the Philippine Islands to Timor and Sumba Islands. Although various languages exist in this region, they are all connected by the Malay language. Malay people also have a close relationship with Islam because Muslims have lived here since at least the 12th century. The Malay language has been used as the primary tool for conveying the messages of Islam in the Deep South of Thailand. Therefore, Malay identity has a very close connection with Islam. According to Eoseewong (2017), Malay identity is important for the Pattani people who live in this region, not only because it includes the valuable cultural heritage of Malay identity, but also that of Muslims. Malay is the harmonization of the inherited Malay race, tradition, and language, including religion (Prachuabmoh as cited in Eoseewong, 2007). McCargo (2015) states that Malay Muslims in this region are proud of their identities as Malay, Muslim, and citizens of the Deep South region where Pattani is located. These identities have made Malay-Muslim identity distinct from those in other parts of Thailand.

The introduction of cultural assimilation policies by the Government of Field Marshal P. Pibulsongkram against the strong Malay-Muslim identities replaced these with "Thai-Muslim" and "Thai-Islam" by erasing the word "Malay" (Aimauryut, 2016). These policy changes created a bitter feeling among the subjects of the Deep South. This is because Malay identity, for the people here, means more than culture and includes religion and beliefs. Therefore, the identity realization of Malay-Muslims often creates polarizing opposition to the Thai state and Thai-Buddhists in general (Eoseewong, 2007) as well as distrust towards Muslims who live in other parts of Thailand because of their profound integration within Thai society (McCargo, 2015). Jitpiromsri (2017) also agrees that identity is the central problem in the Deep South's conflict because it revolves around the aspects of being part of the Malay race (language, culture, tradition, and Malay lifestyle), Muslim (beliefs and practices according to the principles of Islam), and a member of the Pattani-Malay state (the realization of history and inherited local identity). These identities have formed a sense of unjust treatment by the Thai state and resulted in doubt, bias, and hate towards other identities, especially Thai. The introduction of various assimilation policies into this region through the migration of people with different identities from other parts of Thailand, the use of educational space, and the investment in infrastructure have led to the eruption of a Malay movement either by using violence or getting access to formal politics both at local and national levels.

Aimauryut (2016) has pointed out that identifying as Malay is more than the connection between Malay identity and religion as it also connects with some traditional local identities. In terms of ethnicity, it is found that Malay ethnicity only emerged after the annexation of the Pattani-Malay state into the Thai state. The new identities were constructed based on the integration between Malay and Muslim identities. There have also been attempts to separate

Muslim identity from Malay and other local Malay traditions. Puaksom and Saengthong (as cited in Milner, 2008) have noted that Malay identity will usually be maintained through language and culture. However, it became less powerful than the discourse or identity that revolves around Islam. The recent trend of reimplementing "Malay" seems to be influenced by the universal concept of accepting the diversity of people in society in general.

Winichakul (2017) states that people's identity in the Deep South is considered as the "other" by Thai people. However, this region is one in conflict because, in geographical terms, it is located in Thailand but different from the majority in other terms. With these conditions, Jitpiromsri (2017) pointed out that the central solution to the conflict of identity politics and marginalization is to revive and create the legitimated power and to give the conflict management authority to the public at local, national and international levels. These changes can be done through the political process that makes citizens trust their authority and leader(s), and support the public authority. The implementation of the rule of law in society will also increase people's confidence. It is necessary to improve every dimension of political structure to solve the problem of identity oppression and make each identity group capable of getting access to political and public space where they can attempt to find a solution and fix the problem together. At the same time, it is necessary to make sure that there will be no dispute of power based on identity, which can be done through the proper design of the political regime.

In the case of the Deep South, the research titled "Dynamics of Melayu Muslim Politicians' Movements amidst the Violence in the Southern Border Provinces" has argued that, under the framework of identity politics, the connection between the representatives and Melayu-Muslims of the politician's movements can be divided into three periods as followed: before 2004, after the 2005 election until 2018, and after the election in 2019. Prior to 2004, politicians worked closely with each other to uphold and expand the rights of Muslims and people in the region. However, the eruption of conflict in 2004 has transformed many elected politicians' views on the issue and led to the defeat of some key previous Melayu Muslim politicians. The majority of issues driven by the representatives of the Democrat Party were about the infringement of rights of Muslims rather than Melayu identity. In the 2019 election, identity politics seemed to emerge through the work of the Prachachat Party. However, Melayu identity has become very similar to Muslim identity and made people think that they have merged together to become the same identity. This research found that the identity of Melayu-Muslims has played an evident role in political space in the Deep South. To some extent, their concept of identity plays an important role in the process of a representative election as shown in the 2019 election results where only Malay-Muslims were secured the parliamentary seats in the Deep South. In this way, it means that Melayu-Muslim politicians have a greater chance to get access to formal political space. This research has also attempted to reflect that politicians could use this opportunity as a channel to demand the protection of Melayu and Muslim identities.

Conclusions

      To sum up, this article has illustrated the connection between identity politics and representation of the Melayu people. On the one hand, identity politics may further lead to constructing the concepts of "others" and "us". On the other hand, it could lead to the reduction of violent conditions if identity is protected in the political space. This article assumes that, eventually, Muslim identity that relies on the teaching of Islam can be incorporated into current political conditions in a better way than the one that relies solely on Melayu identity because the term "Muslim" may not be as polarizing to "Thai" as much as "Melayu". However, when political space is more open, it is likely that the legitimacy of using violence to protect identity will be gradually limited, but not to the extent that it is wholly eliminated until the unjust practices by the government no longer exist in the region. In addition, access to the political power structure where each identity can have representation is undeniably essential. Therefore, it could be argued that an inclusive parliamentary system is the hope that people can use to build a political bargaining space where they can promote the persistence of a Muslim or Melayu identity which ideally could eventually reduce the conditions leading to violence.

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