



Western Washington University  
Western CEDAR

---

WWU Honors Program Senior Projects

WWU Graduate and Undergraduate Scholarship

---

Spring 6-2018

## Becoming Indigenous: A Story of the Moklen People

Olivia Zimmerman  
*Western Washington University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://cedar.wwu.edu/wwu\\_honors](https://cedar.wwu.edu/wwu_honors)



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Zimmerman, Olivia, "Becoming Indigenous: A Story of the Moklen People" (2018). *WWU Honors Program Senior Projects*. 87.

[https://cedar.wwu.edu/wwu\\_honors/87](https://cedar.wwu.edu/wwu_honors/87)

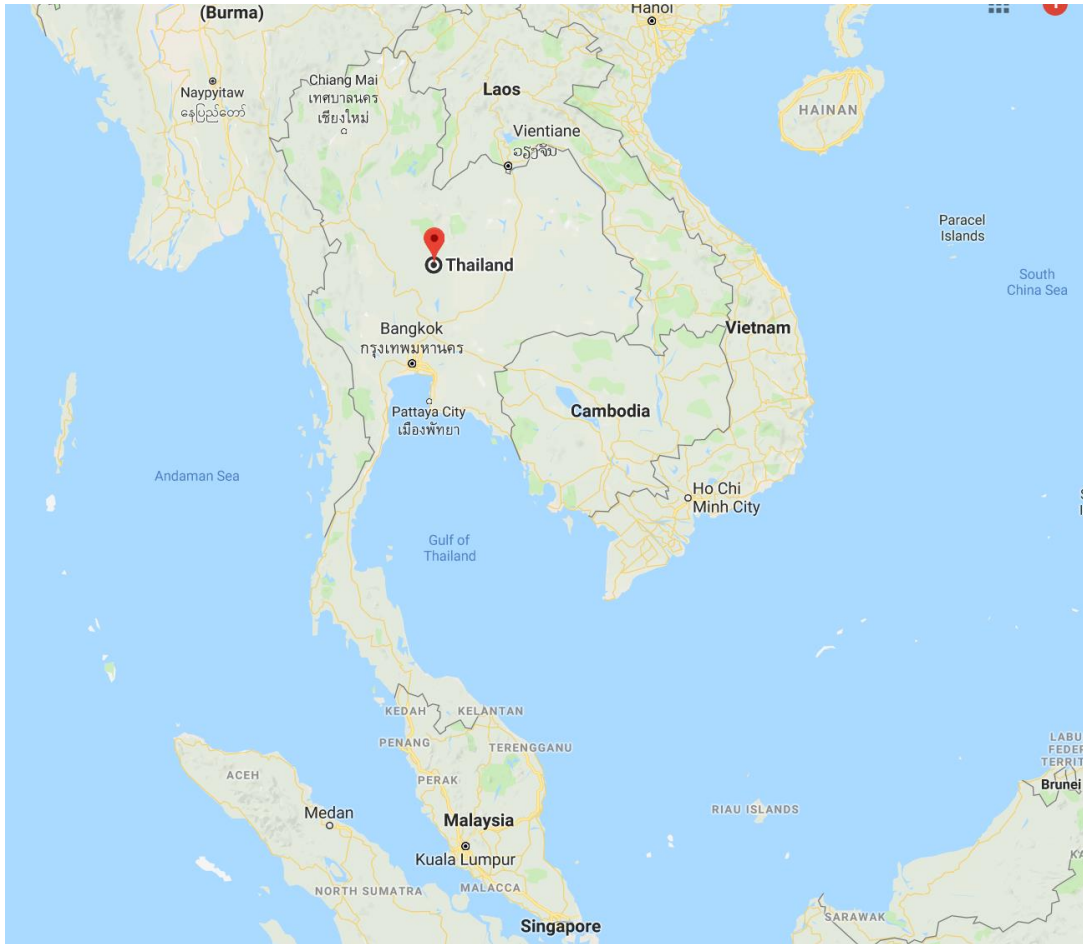
This Project is brought to you for free and open access by the WWU Graduate and Undergraduate Scholarship at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in WWU Honors Program Senior Projects by an authorized administrator of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact [westerncedar@wwu.edu](mailto:westerncedar@wwu.edu).

**Becoming Indigenous:**  
A story of the Moklen people  
Western Washington University  
Olivia Zimmerman

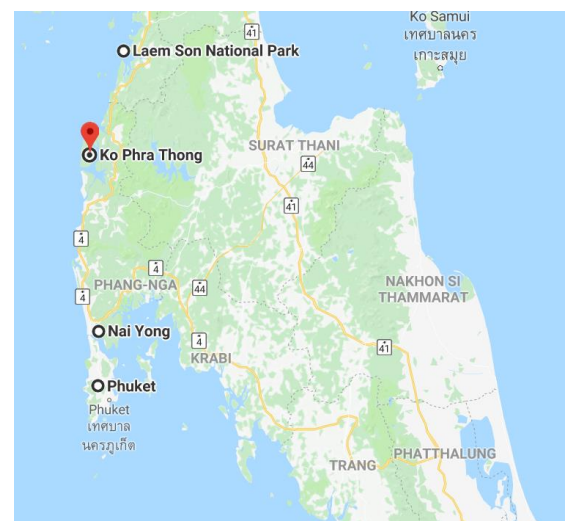
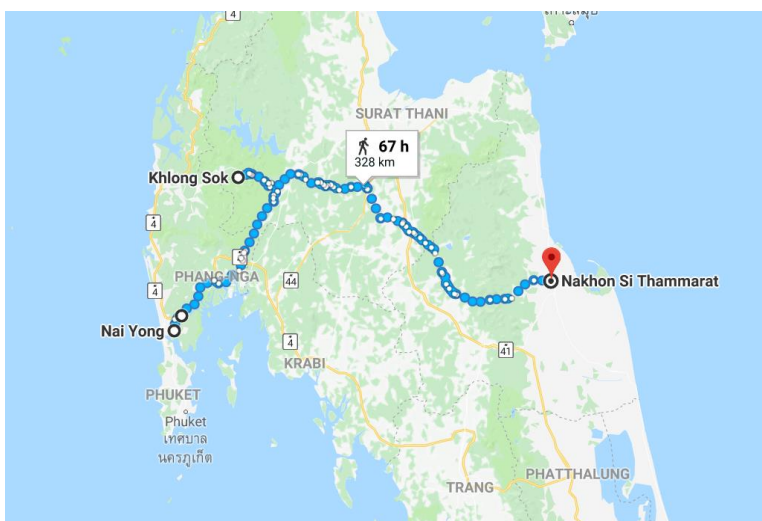
## Preface

While completing a study abroad program based around service learning and intimate relationships with host communities, a last minute change of plans landed my group and me in a Moklen village. We were connected to a contact in the Moklen village of Tubtawan village by the Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Cultures in Thailand Association (IMPECT), a non-governmental organization run by indigenous folks who seek to correct indigenous issues using indigenous knowledge, which is often otherwise associated with primitivism and is at risk of being discarded through assimilation. In Tubtawan, the village opened up to let us in, even though the organization through which we were travelling had not been able to establish rapport with the community beforehand. I stayed with a family of squid fishermen, with two older sisters who visited often, a younger brother, and plenty of Other family members and kin. While there, stories were translated to us about the village and the Moklen people; these stories involved the very painful and recent tsunami that devastated the village and much of the region on Boxing Day in 2004.

My short stay in Tubtawan inspired subsequent interest in the Moklen people and their relationship with their indigenous identity. They occupy an interesting space by claiming indigeneity in a place where indigeneity is not often recognized formally. This claim resides in a chaotic nexus which includes identity, ethnicity, indigeneity, politics, and resistance practices, among the many moving parts. In examining the context in which the Moklen assert their identity as well as how it is accessed and practiced, I also hope to connect the Moklen people with a greater audience. The community in which I stayed simultaneously faced being hidden and being surrounded by powerful and ignorant participants—the tourist. These tourists do not realize that their resorts rest on stolen grounds, exclude the Moklen from their own sacred spaces and practices, and also exploit them as cheap labor. One reason we were welcomed into homestays and community events so instantly by a self proclaimed shy people, was that we were eager to listen and learn to the stories we were being told.



- A. Above: Current map of Thailand and surrounding area, with box over area of focus (Google Maps, accessed 13 June 2018).



- B. Close in on named locations from below passage. Left: locations travelled under Thananthani. Right: Dispersed settlements (Google Maps, accessed 13 June 2018).

I. A major belief of the Moklen people is of their ancestors, the 3,000 parents, a story which is told from generation to generation down 13 generations about the past of the "chao le". The Moklang [Moklen] tribe was located in the Gulf of Thailand. in the area that is Nakhon Si Thammarat province today. Those who governed that region took the Moklen as slaves to build temples there. The slaves were mistreated. The leader, Thanathani, "Father of the 3,000" was also mistreated. One group fled along the coast. The group with Thanathani fled along the Silk Road to Khlong Sok [Takola] subdistrict, to Agun Village in Takua Thung District Phang Nga Province. Later, Thanathani was killed and the community moved to Nai Yong River, which was the last place the tribe was together. They dispersed into settlements in the dense forest in "Laem La" [Author note: I believe this could be in what is Laem Son National Park], Phuket, and Phra Thong Island (pers. comm. with Wittawat Tepsong<sup>1</sup>, trans. by Dr. Judith Pine; see Appendix 1 for full original Thai, and Appendix 2 for full translation).

The Moklen people live in Southwest Thailand, and are spread out across 24 villages in two provinces along the Andaman Sea. They are one of the three groups which are called *Chao Le*, or people of the sea, along with the Moken and Urak Lawoi. The Urak Lawoi are ethnically and culturally closer to the Malay than the Moklen and Moken. Each of these three named groups have their own language, which are all related (Robinson & Drozdowski 2016, 536 & 538). The Moklen and Moken share many cultural connections; some consider them to be more or less the same people, and "when asked directly about what groups they identified with, many Moken [authors use Moken to mean inclusive of Moklen] told us that in fact there was often no or little difference between the Moken and Moklen groups, 'Moken, Moklen, it's all the same', as one participant explained." (Robinson & Drozdowski 2016, 539). This sentiment was also put forth during my short stay in a Moklen village in Phang Nga. Others identify Moklen and Moken as completely separate

---

<sup>1</sup> Wittawat Tepsong is an ethnically Thai man who lives within a Moklen community with his wife who is ethnically Moklen, and their two children. He and his wife are both activists for the indigenous movement within Thailand and for the Moklen people. They were our contacts in staying in Tubtawan village and they both spent a lot of time teaching us about their experiences.

groups, with linguistic and cultural markers highlighting these differences. One of the main distinctions made between the two is that in general the Moken live primarily on the sea, and Moklen move between the sea and land though this distinction projects an understanding of these groups that does not allow for their fluid realities. The Moklen have formed long established communities on land where they have resided for several generations, transitioning seasonally between homes right against the shoreline and homes further inland. They can then transition from growing rice and some horticultural practices to traditional practices of fishing and gathering shellfish, depending on the season. The Moklen are also seen as a nomadic people, even after taking up permanent residence on land. In my personal experience at Tubtawan village, the Moklen use the term nomadic to describe themselves while simultaneously describing themselves as having residence in Tubtawan.

The other [option] is to treat historical continuity as an indicator rather than a requirement. This approach emphasizes the commonality of experiences, concerns and contributions made by groups in many different regions, and argues that functional matters such as dispossession of land, cultural dislocation, environmental despoliation and experiences with large development projects establish a unity that is not dependent on the universal presence of historical continuity. . . The flexible approach to definition advocated here would be problematic if the concept of “indigenous peoples” were understood as operating primarily in the positivist sense of defining and delimiting a category of right holders. (Kingsbury 1998, 457)

Indigeneity intersects with identity, ethnicity, and nationality to shape the lived experiences of those claiming it. Despite often having clear connotations to Western audiences, indigeneity remains a contested term for many audiences. Further, ability to claim this identity is sometimes restricted by the governments under which indigenous people reside. Despite a lack of recognition for indigenous folks in Asia, the concept and claim to indigeneity has not stagnated; recognition has been extended by several governments across Asia and indigenous movements continue to grow. There is still much controversy

over who can claim an indigenous identity, and further be recognized as an indigenous population. As the concept of indigeneity is stretched, it is also more critiqueable. For indigeneity to become a global term, the word needs to be re-examined in its meaning. While the Thai state has not been welcoming of claims of indigeneity, in making this claim the Moklen are simultaneously making a political move, practicing resistance, and aligning themselves with a powerful movement and lived experience that exists both within Thailand and internationally.

For Western audiences, indigeneity tends to be interpreted as those who came first, who were originally on the land. However, to trace the presence of people on a land in the Old World to discern primary inhabitants poses major historical challenges. Indigeneity can be linked to two understandings: of first occupancy within a land and of prior occupancy relative to another group, both offering their own set of ambiguities and complexities (Waldron 2003, 62). Even expanding the indigenous definition to “prior occupancy” inherently encompasses ideas of the state and ownership, which cannot be universally applied historically. These conditions of indigeneity are exclusive to nomadic peoples and peoples who rotate between established settlements, and relies on the formation of the state or coloniser to define territory and ownership of territory. Prior to the imposition of the coloniser, a system of livelihood and order had existed. The presence of the colonizer savagely disrupts that existence, and even if done so without the betrayal of treaty (or proof of betrayal of treaty), the colonizer’s claim to territorial sovereignty is illegitimate (Waldron 2003, 66). The Moklen as well as other groups claiming indigenous identity in Thailand have been present since the formation of the state, but formed established communities in what would become Thailand following Thai peoples, so that they were not primary occupants of the territory defined by the state. A better and more inclusive conceptualization of indigeneity has come to understand indigenous people as those who have been colonized, though this as well possesses its own terminological issues.

The general prognosis of majority groups across Asia is that indigeneity is a ailment only of the thoroughly colonized. The colonization that shaped the cultures and borders around the world is not perceived to have arrived in Asia with the same impact, because it

did not involve a flooding of white settler bodies. This is the base understanding of the Salt Water Theory, which is subscribed to by most Asian states, including the Thai state (Baird et al 2017, 545). The Salt Water Theory is especially applicable in South East and East Asia, where the lack of settling endured in periods of colonialism and imperialism. This is not to say that the white world did not impact these regions, and that colonialism did not occur, but specifically that it did not emphasize the influx of white and Western people into the land and communities. The Salt Water Theory is not a denial of the legitimacy of indigenous identity, but a denial of its presence in Asia.

The United Nations created the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, an additional extension of the many international acts protecting Human Rights. This declaration mandates an extension of rights to indigenous peoples that the state is responsible for ensuring. Notably, it also does not provide any definition for who should be considered an indigenous person. Like other international declarations, it does not have capacity for enforcement; still, the majority of countries have signed themselves to it, including almost all of the UN member states in Asia. One key right afforded to indigenous people under this legislation is the right to self determination and nationality, which threatens the supreme authority of the state as sovereign as well as the state's monopoly of power in its territory. The rights and protections extended to indigenous populations are written to ensure their access to autonomy, which in turn limits the autonomy of the state, and also defends against discrimination. In abstract, rights and protections sound wonderful, however they also mean a loss of autonomy and capacity by the state, and an obligation to uphold of those rights and protections, likely to some loss of political, economic, or social capital by the state. Acknowledging the presence of indigenous peoples internally acknowledges an oppression and displacement of a people within the state, and a responsibility of the state as sovereign to protect the rights of the people within it. The right to self determination and to claim to their own identity is a heavy incentive to claim indigenous identity.

Indigeneity's relationship to conceptions of identity and ethnicity give it great capacity to create distinction between indigenous people and the greater community



amongst which they are living. This distinction is politically and socially reinforced. The perception of many Asian states as homogenous countries promotes imagery of unity and shared national identity. Homogeneity can be a clear asset of the state for these reasons, and so it is often protected and promoted. This is clearly true for Thailand, where the Moklen are found. Thailand is understood by its people to have various dialects and regions which possess cultural differences, however, it remains *Thailand*, the land of Thai people. To recognize any of the populations who are claiming an indigenous identity within Thailand is to recognize that it is not just the land of Thai people, and is instead a land with multiple nationalities besides the Thai nationality.

The history of ethnicity in Thailand possesses greater flexibility than is afforded by Western communities' conceptualization of ethnicity. Ethnicity was a more fluid and interwoven concept, especially in borderlands, it did not need to remain a fixed identifier of a person because their identities were not fixed. Peoples with different affiliations and identifiers lived amongst and alongside one another in the frontiers of empires, which did not encapsulate the same definitive nature as borders do in the present. However, the introduction of the state requires that one entity monopolize power of the region.

Thailand (then Siam) had begun to resemble the state that it is today at the turn of the twentieth century, when the French imperial presence in tandem with goals of modernizing pressed the government to begin a policy of national integration (Keyes 2002, 1178). They risked the loss of territory should the Lao within the Siamese kingdom be assigned an identity distinct from that of the ruling power, and so the Thai nation was created, bringing about a divergent understanding of the people within the state than had previously existed in the Siamese Empire. To explain differences, the Thai nation had regional tones, rather than ethnic variation. This equated to large scale erasure of cultural and linguistic distinction, which was carried out by assimilation policies, most notably through standardized and mandated education.

. . .by the 1930s a compulsory system of primary education which used a standardized form of educated central Thai language as a medium of instruction and from which students learned the

history of the nation in which differences were minimized, the vast majority of the people in the country began to think of themselves as being members of a Thai nation, no matter what domestic language they spoke or what local traditions they followed. (Keyes 2002, 1179)

The very palpable resistance to national integration, which had existed fiercely in the indigenous populations, faded in the face of strong assimilation measures. Most of the kingdom identified first with their national identity before any other facet of their person when Siam became Thailand in 1939 (Keyes 2002, 1179). As World War II began, a new boom of nationalism occurred, which began to establish the Thai race as transcendental to the boundaries of the state. This concept was used to begin a crusade for a Great Thai Empire inspired by Hitler's expansion of the German nation (Keyes 2002, 1179). While the physical Pan-Thai movement was terminated when the Pacific Theater fell to the Allies, the concept of the Thai race remained. This timeline follows the fairly recent construction of the Thai nationality, and subsequent construction of the unassimilable indigenous identity as Other.

The development of the Thai state brought on the construction of the Thai identity and the juxtaposed indigenous identities within Thailand. These identities do not have striking historical basis to credit their authenticity. Those who were incorporated to the Buddhist, Thai nation as Northern or Southern Thais included Muslims and Animists and speakers of Malay, Khmer, and a host of other languages and dialects. While these identities may not be exclusive of one another in practice, they are also not synonymous, and the homogeneity of the Thai state demands that Buddhism and Thai to be the national identity, often to the exclusion of Other identities. This can be seen in the Lao people in question when the national integration system took root, who transformed into regional Thais and whose Thai nationality superseded any piece of their heritage, despite a living generation connecting both events. The fusion of the Thai ethnic identity and national identity has established Thainess as the only privileged identity in the state to the exclusion of other identities. Extending Walton's argument on Burman-ness as akin to Whiteness, this fusion of nationality and ethnicity articulates Thainess in the same vein as Whiteness

because of its position of ethnic dominance, and also in the hierarchies of Thainess as well as the fluidity of of who can claim Thainess (2012).

Thailand is especially unique in the singularity of its constructed national image. Unlike neighboring countries, there is a pattern of labelling ethnic minorities as Other, whereas neighboring countries have tied them to the national identity (Baird et al 2017, 547). This identification of non-Thai people is clear in Thailand's relationship with the indigenous tribes residing in the North of Thailand, who are often referred to as "*chao khao*" or "hill people" and suffer much stereotyping. The King of Thailand did suggest "*chao Thai phu khao*" or "Thai Mountain People" as an alternative namer, however it never gained traction, and instead the national identity was ever more crafted in the image of Central Thai people (Baird et al 2017, 547). The emphasis on a singular national image does not provide room for the the indigenous Other, resulting in the exclusion of ethnic groups like the Moklen, which is recognized either through a denial of their presence in the Thai state or forced assimilation to adhere to the Thai model.

James Scott's work in examining the relationship between dominant and minority performance and narratives is an excellent framework through which to witness the Moklen's lived experiences. In Thailand, the dominant Thai society is the creator of the public transcript, and a very clear illusion of unanimity has been established in the same breath as the national image (Scott 1990, 55). At the same time, those excluded from the national image appear to be consenting to the public transcript, whenever they perform publicly in the normative ways that have been dictated by power.

In a study conducted in Chiang Mai province by Baird et al., members of four diverse indigenous groups were surveyed on who is considered to be indigenous and what different rights should be had by indigenous peoples. Their findings indicated that those surveyed in each group had differing understandings of the meaning of "*chon pheun muang*" and "*chon phao pheun muang*" (both translate to "indigenous peoples", the latter is sometimes preferred by indigenous activists). Further, regardless of ethnic group, most did not believe that members of an ethnic group should be given rights different from other ethnic groups (Baird et al 2017, 556). They offer two major reasons for these results, first pointing out that

there is a great deal of confusion regarding the actual meaning of “chon pheun muang” and “chon phao pheun muang” because of linguistic similarity to other Thai terms. They also point to a rejection of difference in rights because of Thailand’s value on aspiring to Thainess that is calibrated against the central Thai person. Any difference is further alienating for non-Thais, so there is a social motivator against emphasizing these differences even as they are still visible and societally marked (Baird et al 2017, 557). This study was conducted in Thailand’s Northern region, and does not reflect the Moklen’s conception of their relationship with indigeneity, however it does serve to frame Thailand’s relationship with indigeneity and identity.

Though the public transcript would lead us to believe that it is the only relevant transcript of a society, this is not the case. Scott writes, “We are in danger of missing much of their significance if we see linguistic deference and gestures of subordination merely as performances extracted by power. The fact is they serve also as a barrier and a veil that the dominant find difficult or impossible to penetrate” (Scott 1990, 32). The act of resistance to a dominant and oppressive narrative is embedded in the existence of lived experiences that counter the public transcript (Scott 1990, 45). In the negative space of any existent act of dominance, there is the act of resistance, Dominance is in constant engagement with resistance, the public transcript with hidden transcripts. Hidden transcripts emerge organically within gatherings of minority groups, and their existence is a constant threat to domination (Scott 1990, 65). Domination is constantly striving against a loss of power so it cannot tolerate insubordination to the created public narrative and subsequent performance.

There is great power in the constructed network of indigenous activism as it exists in Thailand and around the world, and in accessing their indigenous identity the Moklen are also accessing that powerful narrative and performance. This relates back to Kingsbury’s constructivist approach to indigeneity. He describes a conception of indigeneity which looks to the common experiences that are unifying of indigenous peoples; the hidden transcript is one language that is spoken ingroup that cultivates unity through shared experiences and shared experiences of censorship in public performance. In Thailand, the indigenous movement is generally associated with the Northern hill tribes, because these different

indigenous groups began the movement. The resurgence of the Indigenous movement in Thailand is dated to 2007, with the first celebration of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples with the Festival of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand (Morton 2017). The grassroots movement in Thailand has created a network of indigenous actors who have held public demonstrations and lobbied their government for the addressal of indigenous needs. It's estimated to now engage 6.1 million people across the nation, gaining more traction, or at least attention, from the government as it continues to grow.

One major landmark in the more recent trends to political reform has ironically occurred since the suspension of democracy. After a military coup overthrew Thailand's democratic government in 2014, the previous 2007 constitution became illegitimate. In designing a new Thai constitution, the Bowornsak draft was introduced, and though this initial draft did not make it to public referendum, this version contained article 83(5) that recognized indigenous people. Borrowing an unofficial translation by Baird et al., the draft roughly read as, "the government must promote and strengthen the following local groups: ... (5) Protect indigenous peoples and ethnic groups so that they can live in their own individual ways with dignity" (Baird et al 2017, 543- 544). While this draft was not adopted, it did hold weight for the indigenous movement and marked a recognition that previously had not existed at a constitutional level.

II. After leaving Naiyong, in those days the nature of the area was solid beach near mangrove forests, with lots of wild animals. The Moklen built raised houses with ladders in areas where navigation was easy and protected from monsoon, and they could plant rice and mixed gardens, and not far from burial grounds. They selected places where they could survive disaster, but the ancestral populations were not able to maintain control over the area. Most Moklen areas were surrounded by development, tourism, conservation areas and restrictions, as a result of which much of the (here, it comes out physical life, but I think it is more like material culture but also practices, the realization of traditional life) was lost (pers. comm. with Wittawat Tepsong, trans. by Dr. Judith Pine).

Without recognition from their state, the identity prescribed to the Moklen often overlooks their indigenous claims but affirms their status as Other and exotic. A narrative of vulnerability is often impressed upon the Moklen people and other *Chao Le*. This has occurred increasingly as they have gained more attention from the international community following the 2004 tsunami, which caused devastation to several regions, including Southwest Thailand, where the Moklen reside. Their social, political, and economic vulnerability was exasperated, but not introduced, by the tsunami. During our stay in Tubtawan, several families opened up about the tsunami's impact on their own lives and the loss of loved ones, and we were also taken to memorials and graves related to the tsunami. After the tsunami, many of the funds directed towards relief did not make their way to the Moklen people, and the restructuring of the coast mostly manifested in resorts and hotels, corralling Moklen land in even tighter. This positioned the Moklen as a people without culture, who have lost their own practices to modernism and yet are Other to the dominant Thai society they live in. In the wake of natural disaster, the Moklen were solidified as a vulnerable and struggling people to outside eyes.

A second, complementary narrative impressed upon the Moklen people has stretched back before the tsunami, however it too has become a calling card for the Moklen. This narrative of the Moklen paints them as a semi-mystical and traditionalist people—the last enclaves of nomadism in a modern world. Though assimilationist policies have resulted in loss of cultural heritage for many Moklen, it was retained by some. Of these some, several remembered the story of the Seventh Wave, which had been passed down orally for generations. A large part of what made the tsunami so devastating was that Thailand was not at all prepared for a tsunami, because they did not think that the Andaman Sea posed a tsunami threat. There were none that had ever been recorded. The Moklen, however, possessed a story, which told of the Seventh Wave, that came onto the land and took everything with it. It told of how to recognize that a tsunami was coming, and to get to high ground in order to be safe. My group was told of some evidence that has since been found that shows the coastline was altered at one point by an earlier tsunami, but this occurred so long ago that even the Moklen who knew the story thought that it was just that, a fantastical

story, probably to get teach children a lesson like “recognize the power of the ocean”. But when the tsunami came, some Moklen remembered the story, and they recognized the danger coming from the ocean. One family told about how a friend came by their home to warn them, and their family of six or so had clambered onto his motorbike to ride to the nearby hills for safety. The mother told about how she could see the people who had walked onto the beach when the water receded, as happens before the tidal wave crashes in, and she could see the terror and panic as the wave came in.

Their ability to see what no one else saw brought the Moken, inclusive of the Moklen, onto the international stage unlike before. The dual narrative of a vulnerable and exotic people became the story of the Moklen. Robinson and Drozdewski succinctly contextualize these stereotypes with examples of literature produced in regard to Chao Le by Hogan and Ivanoff (2016, 536- 537).

The Moken are sea-faring nomads, the Moklen and Urak Lawoi live in sea-side villages. The Urak Lawoi and the Moklen have lost much of their distinctive culture but have not yet been absorbed into the Thai community, so that many of them seem to be living in a cultural vacuum. Those Moken who are still nomads seem to have retained their own culture to a remarkable extent. Some [Moken] who have settled down in Urak Lawoi villages seem to share the cultural vacuum of these people to an acute degree. (Hogan 1972).

Employing so-called ‘archaic’ technology – the harpoon and the adze being their main implements – and clad only in skimpy loin-cloths, the Moken practise a purely symbolic type of agriculture and refuse technological innovation in any shape or form, including the use of more efficient gear such as fish traps and nets that could increase their catches; they have made a deliberate choice to go on using only pointed or pronged harpoons. (Ivanoff 1994).

These works are older pieces but still speak to contemporary perceptions of Chao Le, and realize how stagnation and orientalism have been impressed upon Chao Le peoples. Many contemporary pieces emphasize the superhuman ability of Moken people to see better

underwater than any other people, or their cultural practices of freediving (Thomson 2016). The Moklen are not as directly documented, likely because they are subsumed under the Moken label, or perhaps they don't freedive as spectacularly as the Moken, it is unclear to me. Also representative of the story pressed on *Chao Le*, are their common English names "sea gypsies" or "sea nomads". This construction of identity as it relates to the Moklen is problematic, and does not allow for fluidity and pluralism of Self. Robinson and Drozdowski offer a Chao Le understanding of Self obtained through ethnographic research conducted through interviews, "There are, as we would expect, multiple ways of explaining Moken identities" (Robinson & Drozdowski 2016, 538- 539).

Scott's writing explains roles as being defined by those who hold power, and performance as having to be responsive to those constructed roles. The stereotypes and outsider constructions of the Moklen people act as the created roles, and the everyday public performance of identity and Self by Moklen people is interpreted in relation to these roles. Often, the roles promote stagnation and singularity of a people, reducing and disempowering them. The hidden transcript offers a self-determined narrative composed of more robust dialogue and performance of identity to minority actors. Hidden transcripts become sources of power in reclaiming roles and Self. They are charged with a "normative and emotional resonance" by their very quality of hidden-ness (Scott 1990, 23). Each time a hidden transcript is stifled and censored for the public performance, attention is called to the dominant frame's false assumptions. The public transcript becomes visible in that moment as fabricated, a man-made institution, rather than taken as a natural ideology or societal force. The hidden transcript then can press against the limits of the public consciousness, reforming it, questioning it, testing its toleration for deviance from the standard. Each practitioner of a hidden transcript does this in a different way and in a different time.

III. After WWII, the Moklen were affected by policies and laws that restricted the use of resources by traditional communities, without regard to their humanity and equality. Whether forest concessions, mining concessions, loss of homes and habitats, destruction of natural resources by agriculture. Licenses were issued, and the Moklen community were given no concessions. Then



the state declared a conservation zone over the entire community, and the Moklen had no voice in this.

As a result of tourism development policies land is very expensive, and Moklen areas are being squeezed. Wealthy people have access to documents which allow them to invade even traditional burial sites. Today the Moklen are distributed among 26 communities in 2 provinces (pers. comm. with Wittawat Tepsong, trans. by Dr. Judith Pine).

The Moklen are not a static people, but many unwanted changes have been impressed on them externally by the Thai government through assimilatory practices, dividing them from their own indigenous identities. They also face challenges from commercial fishing, and tourist industries. The 2004 tsunami created much devastation for the Moklen people as a small group, and possessed little lobbying power or influence in the rebuilding of their lands after the loss of infrastructures and home. Much of the rebuilding following the tsunami was done in favour of the tourist industry which (over)populates Southern Thailand, particularly along the beaches where the Moklen live and have sacred grounds. Commercial fishing also gained root at this time and, along with environmental devastation brought on by pollution, has strained the sea's ecosystem, thereby devastating a source of tradition, food, and income for the Moklen.

Access to fishing boat launch sites as well as gathering seafoods and shellfish along the shore and in shallows has become very limited by the extensive tourism and commercial real estate along the sea. One morning we were preparing to go with our hosts on an overnight trip to a small island that was a traditional space for gathering and fishing. It had once been a much more frequent trip for the Moklen, but between having the correct tides and enough people available, it has become increasingly difficult to find time for. We waited off to the side while some of the fishermen readied the boats, and one of them began to offering information to our professor, who paraphrased their Thai back to us in English.

“*Khaa... Khaa*. Mmm, *Khaa*. Okay, he says that they used to keep these boats along the shore but had to move them in here to the lagoon because of the resorts.” She returned to

the conversation, punctuated with many polite “*khaa*”s to indicate her understanding in Thai.

“He says this land has been bought by a wealthy man, and he doesn’t want their boats here either, so he’s set tiger traps all along the water and in the grasses so that they stop using it.”

Tiger traps. He set tiger traps for humans beings.

“That’s what he says.”

Environmental desecration has clear intersections with encroaching environmentalism, and a continued disenfranchising of the Moklen people. Once while we were squid fishing with an uncle, my host brother threw a small plastic wrapper into the ocean. While I could communicate my basic needs, we still had a very intense language barrier between us, so I swatted at him after he did it, and then said general words for “ocean” and “bad” when he laughed at me. He grabbed my arm later—absolutely beaming—so that he could have my full attention as he tossed his banana peel into the ocean. I just shrugged and told him it was no problem. I didn’t know a Thai word for “biodegradable” and I don’t know whether the Moklen language, in its dying breaths, has even created one.

Later, the group I was traveling with was shown one of the burial grounds used by the Moklen. We climbed out of the back of the truck and walked along the side of the road next to a little patch of forest. We took a sharp turn into the forest just before a little hill of earth, and walked back among big holes in the earth, a few comments being made about the litter we kept seeing and how that was too bad. We went in and began to see mounds and realized that we were in the cemetery, and listened to the information being translated to us through our professor. After some time, we walked back out, and as we congregated again alongside the road, some people peered around the hill we’d stopped short of. The litter we saw had overflowed from the massive landfill just beside the Moklen cemetery, where we could see big excavators laying down fresh garbage. Maybe my brother didn’t know the direct impact of throwing waste into the ocean, but he knew the direct impact of throwing it away on the land. Maybe he was just being a careless thirteen year old and hadn’t thought twice.

Beach tourism has created a financial value on Moklen land that outweighs the sacred and human values attributed to it by those who inhabited the land. The Thai government has come to see that the capitalist value the land possesses makes private buyers and commercial interests more deserving in ownership than the Moklen people who have not cultivated the land to its full potential. The disruption of the Moklen's relationship with their long held land and homes is a violent colonialist act, and is not a singular event but a continuous assault. "In the process of settler colonialism, land is remade into property and human relationships to land are restricted to the relationship of the owner to his property. Epistemological, ontological, and cosmological relationships to land are interred, indeed made pre-modern and backward. Made savage" (Tuck & Yang 2012, 5). The Thai people also have an undeniable relationship with the land that they have inhabited for centuries, and it is not at all uncommon for Thai people to worship spirits of the place. Places of business and homes have spirit houses, a shrine to the spirits of the place, on their properties. Opening shift at the 7- Eleven easily could include leaving an offering, lighting candles or incense, or saying words at the spirit house. Indigenous populations in Thailand cannot simply be labelled as primitive in their existence and relationship with their lands. Those traits must be cast in a way that makes them not merely non-modern, but also non-Thai. In achieving such an imagery, the indigenous peoples of Thailand, especially the Northern Hill Tribes, are commonly used as a scapegoat in identifying the source of environmental issues. Doing this disrupts their claim to the land on which they reside, painting them as intruders in Thailand who can either be assimilated or exiled. This is an interesting collision of multiple frames of understanding. Liberal theory's ideals on the cultivation of property, the Thai cultural heritage, and the conceptualization of indigeneity intersect to formulate a narrative of those populations in Thailand who claim indigeneity that disrupts their claim. Their practices become premodern in a way that does not also place Thai practices as premodern, their relationship with the land is tainted and not as powerful and pure as the relationship of the Thai. For some powerful actors, this has provided the coverage under which they can perform violent acts without backlash. Tiger traps are set for human beings, landfills overtake cemeteries, and gaping holes appear in burial plots, where the oldest bones that

prove the Moklen's residence on the land are stolen, along with the Moklen's claim to the land and to their history.

The realities are not a secret, but are dominated by the public transcript. Thousands of tourists mill about alongside the Moklen every day because after all it is occurring on the sunny beaches of Thailand. In making their claim of indigeneity, the Moklen are resisting the public transcript and imposed public performance that has been impressed on them. Resistance has the capacity to enter the public discourse in disguise, it can be smuggled in through proverbs, folk tales, and coding. In entering the public transcript through these means, the transcript is disguised but no longer hidden, and is able to be spoken to Power (Scott 1990, 136). Moving forward as indigenous actors, the Moklen are both speaking and living their resistance to dominance.

The concept of indigeneity is in constant evolution. It is being tested, grown, and stretched by different peoples and claims. Part of the power of indigeneity resides in its exclusivity; Indigeneity and colonization are not words to be used in metaphor, a truth which scholars like Tuck and Yang illuminate in their work (2012). However, indigeneity in practice and as an identity is also not stagnant or singular. Groups like the Moklen challenge the assumed structure of indigeneity, strengthening an understanding of indigeness while also strengthening their own identity in accessing this powerful concept.

## Appendix 1.

ชนเผ่า “มอแกน”

การตั้งถิ่นฐาน

บรรพบุรุษที่ชาวเลมอแกนนับถือสูงสุดคือ.. “พ่อตามสามพัน” ซึ่งเป็นไปตามค  
 าบอกเล่าที่สืบทอดสู่ ผนัง ำ รุนต่อรุน มาฉบับ 13 ชั่วอายุคน อดีต..ชาวเล ชนเผ่า  
 มอแกนกระจายตัวตั้งหย่อม ชุมชนอยู่ ั้งอำเภอไทย บริเวณที่เป็น  
 นจังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราชในปัจจุบัน แต่เนื่องจากการเข้าครอบครองดินแดน  
 และชาวมอแกน ถูกจับเป็น นเชลยสร้างพระธาตุเมืองนครฯ ทั้งผนัง ำ ยังถูกปองร้าย “ ทวดธานี  
 ” หลานชายของ “พ่อตามสามพัน” จึงให้ประชากรมอแกนฉบับ ผนัง  
 หลบหนี..บรรพบุรุษส่วนหนึ่งไข้เส้นทางล่องเลียบชายฝั่งมาทางน้ำ ส่วน “ทวดธานี”  
 พาบรรพบุรุษชาวมอแกนหนีเลียบเส้นทางสายใหม่ที่ใช้ขนส่งสินค้าเส้นคลองศก-ตะโกลา  
 เดิน มาลงที่บ้าน “อาคุณ” ตา บลกะโสม อา เกอตะแก้ว ทุ่งจังหวัดพังงาในปัจจุบัน  
 ต่อมา “ทวดธานี” โดนตามฆ่าตายจึงย้ายหนีไปตั้งชุมชนบนแผ่นดิน ที่ 2 ที่บ้าน  
 “ในหยง” นับเป็น ันที่ สุดท้ายที่มีการอยู่ ่วมกัน ทั้งเผ่า  
 ก่อนมีเหตุให้ต้องแยกย้ายกระจายตัวตั้งถิ่นฐานชุมชนชนอยู่ตามป่าทึบ ชายฝั่ง  
 ตั้งแต่แหลมหลาจังหวัดภูเก็ต - เกาะพระทอง จังหวัดพังงา หลังสงคราม  
 มโลกครั้งที่ 2 ชาวเล ชนเผ่า มอแกนถูกผลกระทบจากนโยบายและกฎหมาย  
 ที่เปิดช่องให้มี อา นาจการใช้กำรครอบครองทรัพยากรในพื้นที่ชุมชนดั้งเดิมโดยไม่ค  
 ึ่งถึงมนุษยธรรมและความเท่าเทียม ไม่ว่าจะเป็นยุค สมั ปทานป่าไม้ยุค สมั ปทานเหมืองแร่  
 ที่ทา ให้อั่งสูญเสียบ้านเรือน,ถิ่นอาศัย ทรัพยากรธรรมชาติถูกทา ลาย  
 พื้นที่กสิกรรมฯถูกยึดครอง เพราะการสมั ปทานส่วนใหญ่..ถูกเอาไปออก

เอกสารสิทธิรัฐไม่เคยได้ที่ ี่ดินคืน ส่วนที่เป็นชุมชนที่ไม่เคยมีการสมั ปทาน รัฐปี  
ระกาศเขตอนุรักษ์ บั หัง ชุมชนโดยชาวมอแกลนไม่ได้มีโอกาสรับรู้

ในยุคนโยบายพฒั นาคารท่องเที่ยว..ที่ดินแพงมาก พื้นที่ของชุมชนมอแกลน  
ถูกเบียดเล็กลงเรื่อยๆ มีการ ด้วยคนรวยมีโอกาสเข้าถึงการออกเอกสารบุกรุกครอบครอง  
แม้แต่ สุสานฝังศพ ปัจจุบันชาวเล ชนเผ่ามอ แกลน กระจายชุมชนตั้งถิ่นฐาน ทั้ง 2จังหวัด จา  
นวน 26 ชุมชน

- จังหวัดพังงา ( ทุ่งดาบ , ปากจก, ท่าแป๊ะโยย ,อ่าวน้ำ จืด, ตะกลุ า , เทพรต ัน, เทพประทาน ,  
ชัยพฒั น์, ทุ่งละออง , น้ำ เคมี , ทับ ตะนน , บนไร่ , ปากวิป ,บางขยะ, ทุ่งหวา , เขาหลัก , ล  
าแก่น , คลองญวน , เกาะนก , ขนิม ,ทับปลา , ล าปี , หินลาด , ท่าใหญ่ )
- จังหวัดภูเก็ต (หินลูกเตี้ย ,แหลมหลา )

**กายภาพ** การตั้งถิ่นฐานของบรรพบุรุษชาวมอแกลน หลังอพยพออกจาก “ในหยง”  
ลักษณะพื้นที่ มีทั้งที่สภาพเป็นทิวเขาชายหาด และบริเวณใกล้คลองริมป่าชายเลน  
ในยุคนั้นยังมีสัตว์ป่าดุร้ายมากมาย ชาวมอแกลนจึงสร้างบ้านที่มีใต้ถุนสูง บันไต่ยกเก็บได้  
โดยการเลือกพื้นที่เน้นคำนึงถึงลักษณะต่างๆดังนี้ การสัญจรลงทะเลสะดวก  
มีพื้นที่หากินและจอดเรือหน้ามรสุมได้ มีบริเวณปลูกข้าวและสวนผสมได้ ไม่ไกลจาก “เปลว”  
หรือสุสานฝังศพ สามารถอยู่รอดปลอดภัยจากภัยพิบัติ

จากอดีตถึงปัจจุบัน..บรรพบุรุษแต่ละชุมชนไม่เคยสามารถถือสิทธิครอบครองพื้นที่ได้เลย  
พื้นที่ชุมชนชนเผ่ามอแกลนส่วนใหญ่ จึงถูกห้อมล้อมไปด้วยความเจริญของสิ่งปลูกสร้าง  
การท่องเที่ยวเขตอนุรักษ์และเขตหวงห้ามต่างๆ

ซึ่งเป็นส่วนหนึ่งที่ทำให้กายภาพที่เหมาะสมต่อการดำรงชีวิตชาวเลชนเผ่ามอแกลน..หายไป  
และเป็นสาเหตุที่ต้องทำให้ชนเผ่ามอแกลน ร่วมกับเพื่อนเครือข่ายชาวเลฯ กะเหรี่ยง และภาคี

ผลักดันให้มีเขตคุ้มครองทางวัฒนธรรมกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์และชนเผ่าพื้นเมือง

เพื่อให้เกิดการสร้างเขตคุ้มครองหัตถวิทยากรธรรมชาติวิถัวัฒนธรรมชนเผ่าพื้นเมืองต่อไป

## Appendix 2.

the Moklen

It is a major belief of the Moklen people that their ancestors, the 3,000 parents, a story which is told from generation to generation down 13 generations about the past of the "chao le".

The Moklang tribe is located in the Gulf of Thailand. In the area is Nakhon Si Thammarat province today, those who governed that region took the Moklen as slaves to build temples there. The slaves were mistreated. The leader, Thanathani, "Father of the 3,000" was also mistreated. One group fled along the coast. The group with Thanathani fled along the Silk Road to Khlong Sok subdistrict (Khlong Sok - Takola, but I'm not sure what Takola is, looks like part of place name?), to Agun Village in Takua Thung District Phang Nga Province.

Later, Thanathani was killed and the community moved to "Naiyong", which was the last place the tribe was together. They dispersed into settlements in the dense forest, in "Laem La" (not sure what sort of unit) Phuket, and Phra Thong Island.

After WWII, the Moklen were affected by policies and laws that restricted the use of resources by traditional communities, without regard to their humanity and equality. Whether forest concessions, mining concessions, loss of homes and habitats, destruction of natural resources by agriculture. Licenses were issued, and the Moklen community were given no concessions. Then the state declared a conservation zone over the entire community, and the Moklen had no voice in this.

As a result of tourism development policies land is very expensive, and Moklen areas are being squeezed. Wealthy people have access to documents which allow them to invade even traditional burial sites. Today the Moklen are distributed among 26 communities in 2 provinces.

In Pang Nga province, these communities are Thung Swab, Pak Kret, Tha Pae Yai, Ao Nam Jid, Takuapa, Theparat, Thepparat, Chaiyaphum, Thung Lum, Nam Khem, Khao Lak, Lam Kaen, Klongnun, Ko Nok, Kham Nim, Thap Pla, Lam Lat, Tha Yai.



In Phuket province, they are Hin Luk Diew (my romanization) and Laem Ya.

#### Location of Moklen ancestral settlements

After leaving Naiyong, in those days the nature of the area was solid beach (not sure what this means) near mangrove forests, with lots of wild animals. The Moklen built raised houses with ladders in areas which where navigation was easy and protected from monsoon, and they could plant rice and mixed gardens, and not far from burial grounds. They selected places where they could survive disaster, but the ancestral populations were not able to maintain control over the area. Most Moklen areas were surrounded by development, tourism, conservation areas and restrictions, as a result of which much of the (here, it comes out physical life, but I think it is more like material culture but also practices, the realization of traditional life) was lost.

## References

- Baird, Ian G., Prasit Leepreecha & Urai Yangcheepsutjarit. 2017. "Who should be considered 'Indigenous'? A survey of ethnic groups in northern Thailand." *Asian Ethnicity* 18, no. 4: 543-562. DOI: 10.1080/14631369.2016.1268044
- Hanson, Allen. 1989. "The Making of the Maori: Culture Invention and Its Logic". *American Anthropologist* 91, no. 4: 890- 902
- Hogan, David. W. 1972. "Men of the Sea: Coastal Tribes of South Thailand's West coast." *Journal of the Siam Society* 60: 205–235
- Ivanoff, Jacques. 1994. "The Myth of the Moken: Twixt Land and Sea." *UNESCO Courier* 47 (November): 14–16
- Keyes, Charles. 2002. "Presidential Address: 'The Peoples of Asia' - Science and Politics in the Classification of Ethnic Groups in Thailand, China, and Vietnam." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 61, no. 4: 1163-1203
- Kingsbury, Benedict. 1998. "'Indigenous Peoples' in International Law: A Constructivist Approach to the Asian Controversy." *The American Journal of International Law*, 92, no. 3: 414-457. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2997916>
- Lebel, Louis, Supaporn Khрутmuang, & Jesse Manuta. 2006. "Tales from the margins: small fishers in post-tsunami Thailand." *Disaster Prevention and Management: An International Journal* 15, no. 1: 124-134. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09653560610654284>
- Morton, Micah F. 2017. "Indigenous Peoples' shifting engagements with the Thai state." *International Institute for Asian Studies*, Autumn 2017. <https://ias.asia/the-newsletter/article/indigenous-peoples-shifting-engagements-thai-state>
- Robinson, Daniel F. & Danielle Drozdowski. 2016." Hybrid identities: juxtaposing multiple identities against the 'authentic' Moken." *Identities* 23, no. 5, 536-554. DOI: 10.1080/1070289X.2015.1070730
- Scott, James C. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Thomson, Helen. 2016. "The 'sea-nomad' children who see like dolphins". *BBC*, March 1, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20160229-the-sea-nomad-children-who-see-like-dolphins>
- Tuck, Eve & K. Wayne Yang. 2012. "Decolonization is not a metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1: 1- 40.
- UN General Assembly, REsolution 61/295, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, A/61/L.67 (13 Sep 2007). [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)
- Waldron, Jeremy. 2003. Indigeneity? First Peoples and Last Occupancies." *New Zealand Journal of Public and International Law* 1, no. 1: 55- 82
- Walton, Matthew J. 2012. "The 'Wages of Burman-ness:' Ethnicity and Burman Privilege in Contemporary Myanmar." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 43, no. 1: 1-27, DOI: 10.1080/00472336.2012.730892