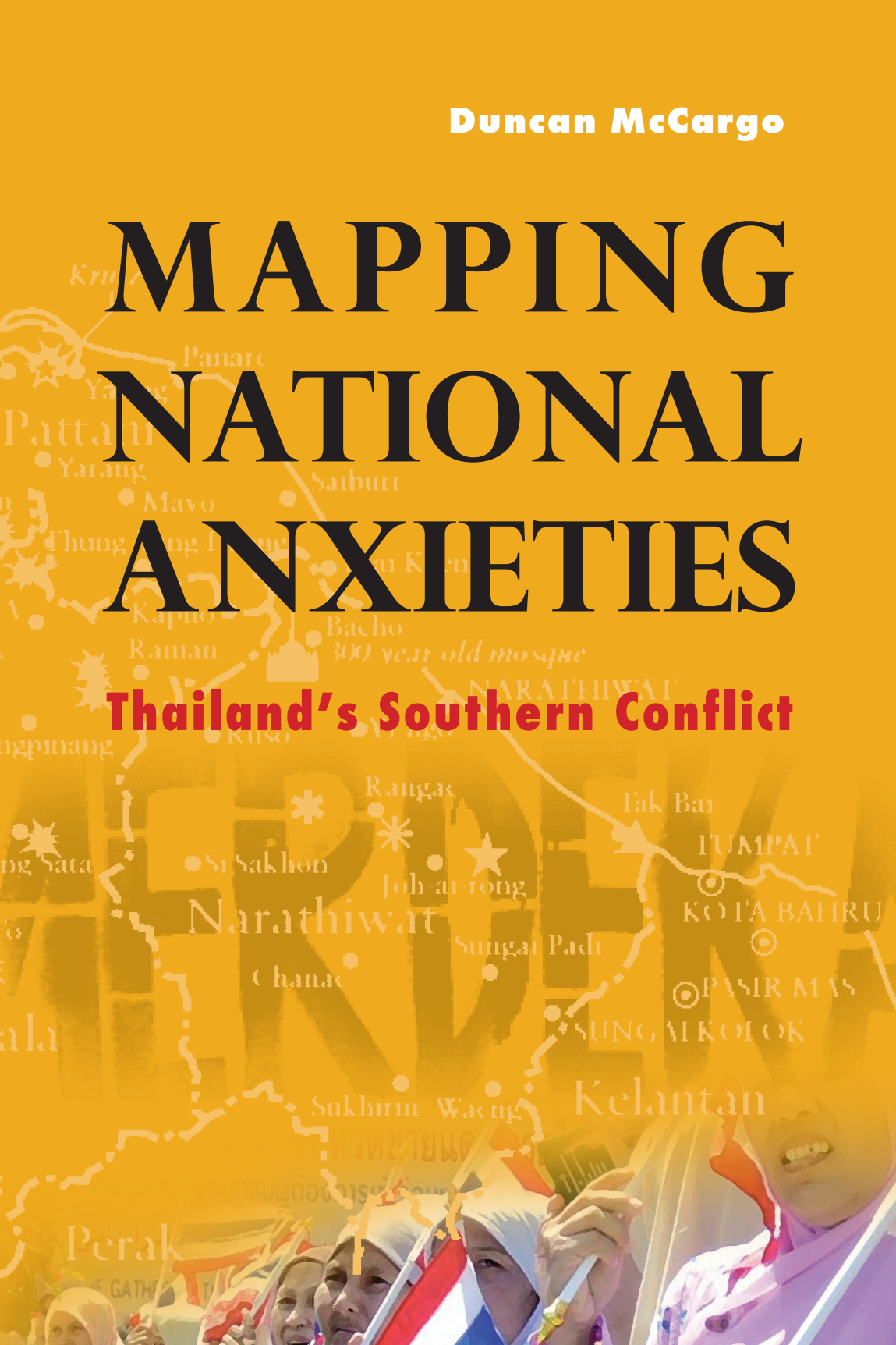
Duncan McCargo

MAPPING NATIONAL ANXIETIES

Thailand's Southern Conflict



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For two Michaels, Connors and Montesano

Contents

Photographs

Figures

Preface

Mapping national anxieties should ideally be read alongside my earlier book, *Tearing apart the land: Islam and legitimacy in southern Thailand* (Cornell 2008). While *Tearing apart the land* located the security dimensions of the conflict within the context of politics and Islam, the present book develops a range of issues that arise from the overarching arguments I have advanced previously. In brief, *Tearing apart the land* argues that at the core of the southern Thai conflict is a crisis of legitimacy for the Thai state, which cannot be adequately addressed by the deployment of the security forces, and which cannot be substantially ameliorated by socio-economic development policies. *Mapping national anxieties* delves further into the role of religion – both Buddhism and Islam – in framing what is not simply a regional conflict, but also a national one. It explores a number of vexed related questions, including whether a fractured nation may be repaired through processes of 'reconciliation', how citizenship is understood by minority groups, and how far Thailand's governance structures might be reorganised to accommodate greater local participation.

Both books result from a longstanding research project on the southern Thai conflict that was generously funded between 2005 and 2009 by the Economic and Social Research Council, grant number RES-000-22-1344. Core fieldwork was conducted from September 2005 to September 2006, thanks to a period of sabbatical leave provided by the School of Politics and International Studies at the University of Leeds. A complete list of published outputs appears as an appendix to this book. Thanks are due to the Faculty of Political Science, Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani, for hosting my stay in the region, and especially to my dedicated and endlessly supportive colleagues Srisompob Jitpiromsri and Wattana Sugunnasil. I am very indebted to my fantastic research assistants Bhatchara Aramsri and Kaneeworn Opetagon, and I received invaluable additional help from Diyaporn Wisamitanan and Piyanut Kotsarn.

A very large number of other people have aided me in this project; for a full list of acknowledgements, see pp. xvi–xx of *Tearing apart the land*. I must, however, mention again the constant guidance and criticisms of Chaiwat Satha-Anand, Michael Connors, Francesca Lawe-Davies, Michael Montesano and Don Pathan; as well as all those who generously shared their insights with me during the more than 270 interviews I conducted. I also benefitted immensely from the year I spent at the Asia Research Institute (ARI), National University of Singapore, 2006–2007; thanks are due to all my colleagues there, especially director Anthony Reid, and Michael Laffan.

The present book has been made possible through a series of conference invitations, and permissions to reprint a number of resulting journal articles.

An earlier version of the first part of chapter 1 was originally published as 'Mapping national anxieties: Thailand's southern conflict' in the *RUSI Journal* 154, 3 (2009): 54–61. This piece began life as a presentation at a conference organised by Beatrice Heuser at the University of Reading, 10–11 October 2008. John Mackinlay urged me to write up my talk for the *RUSI Journal*, and the journal's then editor Terence McNamee badgered me until I did so. Many thanks to the Royal United Services Institute for allowing me to republish it here.

Chapter 2 started off as a paper presented at the Association for Asian Studies 2007 annual meeting in Boston, at a panel I organised on Buddhists in the south of Thailand. It was later published as 'The politics of Buddhist identity in Thailand's deep south: the demise of civic religion?', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40, 1 (2009): 11–32, in a symposium based on that panel. Thanks are due to the editors of the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* and Cambridge University Press for granting permission to publish, to Justin McDaniel for sponsoring the AAS panel, and to my fellow panellists Marc Askew, Michael Jerryson and Amporn Marddent.

I am very grateful to Bryan Turner, who invited me to present an earlier version of chapter 3 as a keynote address for an ARI workshop on 'Unravelling of Civil Society: Religion in the Making and Unmaking of the Modern World', in Singapore, 22–24 March 2006. That paper then appeared as 'Co-optation and resistance in Thailand's Muslim south: the changing role of Islamic Council elections', *Government and Opposition* 45, 1 (2010): 99–113. I greatly appreciate the permission to reprint which was granted by Government and Opposition Ltd and Blackwell Publishing.

An earlier version of chapter 4 was presented as an invited plenary paper at the International Conference on International Studies, organised by Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) and the Malaysian Strategic Research Centre, 5–6 December 2006, in Kuala Lumpur. Many thanks to Datuk M. Mustafa bin Ishak (UUM) for this invitation; and to Stephen James for permission to reprint the resulting article, which appeared as 'Thailand's

National Reconciliation Commission: a flawed response to the southern conflict', *Global Change, Peace and Security* 22, 1 (2010): 75–91.

Chapter 5 began life as a keynote address at the conference 'Media, Politics, Development and Human Security', organised by Macquarie University Department of International Communication, 28 April 2006. Many thanks to Sripan Rattikalchalakorn and Naren Chitty for that invitation, and for granting permission to republish the resulting paper, which originally appeared as 'Communicating Thailand's southern conflict: media alternatives', *Journal of International Communication* 12, 2 (2006): 19–34.

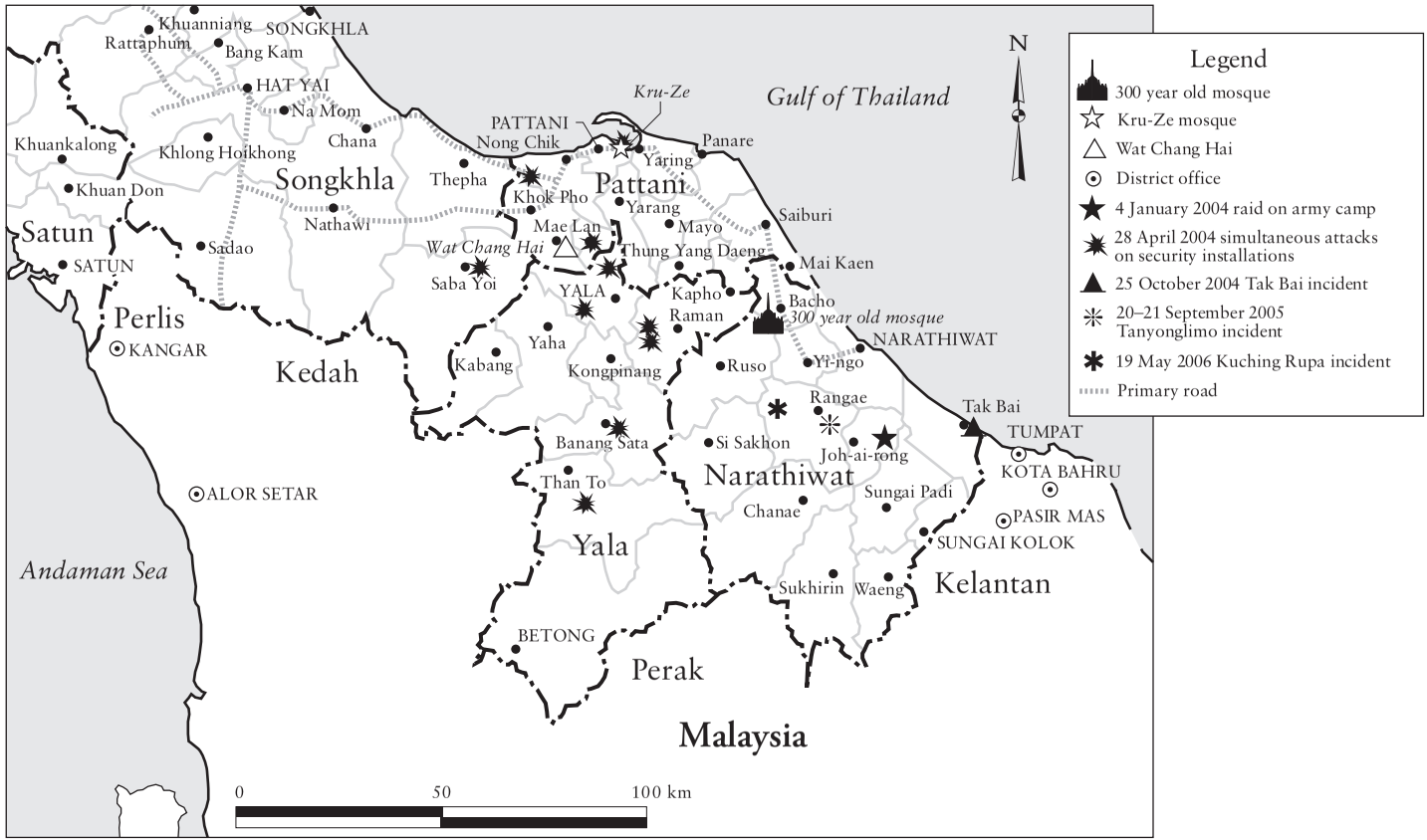
Michelle Miller deserves very warm thanks for inviting me to take part in a June 2009 workshop at ARI in Singapore, which led to the paper from which chapter 6 is derived. Many thanks to Taylor and Francis for kindly granting me permission to republish the resulting article, 'Informal citizens: graduated citizenship in Southern Thailand', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34, 5 (2011): 833–49.

An earlier version of chapter 7 was presented (in Thai) as the opening keynote address for the Tenth Annual National Conference on Political Science and Public Administration, Prince of Songkhla University International Convention Centre, Hat Yai, 1 December 2009. It later appeared in print as 'Autonomy for southern Thailand: thinking the unthinkable?' *Pacific Affairs* 18, 2 (2010): 261–81. Many thanks to the conference organisers for their invitation, and *Pacific Affairs* for their permission to republish.

Chapter 8 is based on a short piece commissioned by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), which appeared as 'Thailand's twin fires', in *Survival* 52, 4 (2010): 5-12. Many thanks to the IISS, *Survival*, and Taylor and Francis for allowing me to make use of it here.

I am also very grateful to Phrae Sirisakdamkoeng, who kindly allowed me to include her fascinating paper on internet responses to the southern violence as a bonus chapter in this book. Thanks also to Ryan Anson, for granting permission for the use of his very striking photographs. Pechladda Pechpakdee deserves a medal for the many hours she spent tweaking the Thai script in the footnotes and bibliography; any remaining errors are entirely the responsibility of the author. Warm thanks are also due to Donald B. Wagner for his expert typesetting and ingenuity with the Thai fonts, and to Anthony Horton for his very thorough indexing. I would also like to thank Cornell University Press for allowing me to reproduce the useful map of southern Thailand they prepared for my previous book.

This book has only appeared because of two people: Gerald Jackson, my long-suffering publisher at NIAS Press in Copenhagen, for taking on the project so readily; and Pauline Khng, without whose infectious enthusiasm and wonderful editorial skills nothing would have come of the idea. I cannot thank either of them enough.



Map 1 Southern Thailand. Reprinted from *Tearing apart the land: Islam and legitimacy in southern Thailand*, by Duncan McCargo.

CHAPTER 1

Mapping Anxieties[1]

When I visited the southern Thai province of Yala in January 2009, a security official presented me with a 2009 calendar, featuring 14 historical occasions on which Siam (later Thailand) had lost territory. Using maps, locations and dates, it illustrated how Siam had progressively diminished in size, as lands had been successively ceded to Burma, Laos, Cambodia and Malaya. This was the personal calendar of the Fourth Army Commander, the senior general responsible for Thailand's southern region. The unstated message was clear: Pattani must not be 'lost' to the separatists. Thailand's national pride was at stake. By evoking historical myths to suggest a narrative of humiliation and vulnerability, the calendar perfectly illustrated collective Thai fears about the future, and the difficulties of addressing such fears calmly and dispassionately.

A low intensity violent conflict has been under way in Thailand's southern border provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat since late 2001, with violence increasing sharply after January 2004.[2] The conflict reflects resistance to rule from Bangkok among some sections of society. The region was only formally incorporated into Siam in 1909; around 80 per cent of residents are staunchly both Malay and Muslim, in an otherwise predominantly Buddhist nation defined by unifying myths of 'Thainess'. Intermittent violent and non-violent resistance has occurred regularly

1 An earlier version of the first part of this chapter was first published in the *RUSI Journal* 154, 3 (2009): 54–61 as 'Mapping national anxieties: Thailand's southern conflict'.

2 For discussions of the violence, see several recent reports by the International Crisis Group (henceforth ICG) www. crisisgroup.org; *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 32, 2 (2010), special issue, Southern Thailand: Anatomy of an Insurgency; and the excellent essay in Chaiwat Satha-Anand (ed.) *Imagined land: the state and southern violence in Thailand*, Tokyo: ILCAA, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2009.

during the past century. From the 1960s to the 1980s, fighting was led by organised militant groups such as the Patani United Liberation Organisation (PULO) and the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), and was directed primarily against the Thai security forces. In the early 1980s, an elite compact was agreed between the militants and the Thai state; militants were granted an amnesty, and the Prem Tinsulanond government set up special security and consultative arrangements to manage the region.[3] During the more open politics of the 1990s, some Malay Muslim MPs gained ministerial office, while a new tier of sub-district organisations – a kind of elected local council – created greater political space for increased Muslim representation.[4]

Despite the appearance of greater tolerance and more democracy, the deep south remained firmly under the central control of Bangkok. As in the rest of the country, provincial governors were career bureaucrats appointed by the Interior Ministry and were not popularly chosen or elected. The controversial premiership of former police officer Thaksin Shinawatra (2001–2006) was associated with a heavy-handed approach to governance and security matters in the south, and coincided with renewed militant violence. Prominent Malay Muslim politicians loyal to Thaksin were undermined and discredited during this period; they appeared to have been co-opted by the Thai state. Neither virtuous bureaucratic rule – by 'good' civil servants and military officers – nor representative electoral politics on Thai terms were able to plug Bangkok's legitimacy deficit in the region. The Malay Muslim elite, both political and religious, had been thoroughly contaminated and discredited by a protracted dalliance with the Thai state. While as recently as the 1950s some elements of the southern Thai insurgency sought to 're-join' Malaysia, arguing that the border provinces had ended up on the wrong side of an arbitrary line drawn between Siam and British Malaya in the early twentieth century, latterly militants have consistently demanded an independent Pattani state.[5]

From 2004 onwards, a renewed militant movement has been able to exploit the fragmented and essentially leaderless society in the region to promote murder and mayhem. The precise nature of this movement remains

3 Thai names are given in full at first mention, but thereafter Thais will normally be referred to by their first name only, following usual practice in Thailand. Thais are listed in the bibliography and index under their first names.

4 For more detailed arguments along these lines, see Duncan McCargo, *Tearing apart the land: Islam and legitimacy in southern Thailand,* Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2008; Singapore: NUS Press, 2009.

5 The spelling of Patani/Pattani is often problematic. In this book, 'Pattani' refers to the modern Thai province, while 'Patani' refers to an older and larger imagined region roughly corresponding to the three provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat.

a matter of debate.[6] Most attacks are carried out by small groups of *juwae* (fighters), young men predominantly aged between 18 and 25. Some analysts believe that the militants are essentially a reconfigured version of the old separatist groups, perhaps led by the shadowy BRN Co-ordinate. Others argue that the militant movement is extremely decentralised, based on a cell-like village level structure, and lacks an explicit central command and control. In such readings, the militant movement may be a 'network without a core', despite having some degree of shared training and co-ordination. The goals of the militants remain unclear, but seem to range from a simple desire to antagonise the Thais, to demands for a separate state and aspirations for substantive autonomy.

Between January 2004 and February 2011, 4,621 people were killed and 7,505 injured in the southern Thai insurgency, yet the conflict remains little known in the wider world.[7] The most relevant regional comparison with southern Thailand is to the conflict in Mindanao, in the southern Philippines, though there are important differences. Most analysts of the Pattani insurgency believe that this remains a localised conflict over territory and identity, rather than part of a global jihad that fits neatly into Bush-era narratives of a 'war on terror'.

While many of the victims and perpetrators of the Patani insurgency are Muslims, the violence has not been persuasively linked to standard narratives about international jihadist networks.[8] The conflict is largely confined to the southern border provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat (and four districts of neighbouring Songkhla), a thousand kilometres from Bangkok, and a world away from the 'other' Thai south, the beach resorts of Phuket and Ko Samui. Two large-scale incidents in 2004 captured widespread attention: the simultaneous militant attacks of 28 April, immediately followed by the storming of the historic Kru-Ze mosque by the Thai Army; and the brutal dispersal of a peaceful protest at Tak Bai on 25 October, during which 78 Malay Muslim men perished after being loaded five-deep into military vehicles. Nearly 200 died during these two days alone. While central to the story of the insurgency, both these episodes proved deeply unrepresentative

6 For an excellent discussion see Joseph Chinyong Liow and Don Pathan, *Confronting ghosts; Thailand's shapeless southern insurgency*, Lowy Institute Paper 30, Sydney: Lowy Institute for Public Policy, 2010.

7 Figures compiled by Deep South Watch, personal communication from Srisompob Jitpiromsri, 22 March 2011.

8 On the failures of such approaches to generate useful understandings of the conflict, see Michael Connors, 'War on error and the southern fire: how terrorism analysts get it wrong', in the special issue of *Critical Asian Studies* 38, 1 (2006), also published as Duncan McCargo (ed.), *Rethinking Thailand's southern violence,* Singapore: NUS Press, 2007.

of what followed. Most subsequent deaths have been in ones and twos, and only very rarely has any single incident claimed more than ten lives. Put crudely, not enough people are being killed at once for the violence to claim serious international attention. While the Patani conflict has only been matched in intensity by Iraq and Afghanistan,[9] the insurgency has assumed a routine character, unremitting but relentlessly unspectacular. While extraordinary attacks on security forces gain most attention, this is actually a war of attrition, often targeting civilian victims.

The play within a play

Even within Thailand, the south rarely figures as a major news story. Since late 2005 it has been overshadowed by an ongoing national conflict between supporters of billionaire businessman and now former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, and those who prefer the monarchy, the army and the country's traditional institutions. This colour-coded feud between so called 'yellow shirts' (the pro-monarchy People's Alliance for Democracy, or PAD) and the 'red shirts' (the pro-Thaksin UDD) has gradually eclipsed and subsumed other political issues in the kingdom. Since 2006, media attention, both domestic and international, has focused mainly on Bangkok: three general elections, two senate elections, a military coup, a new constitution, and several dramatic judicial interventions to ban politicians from office and dissolve political parties. Regular large-scale street protests by the PAD and UDD have formed key themes of media coverage. During the second half of 2008, the PAD occupied Government House (the office of the prime minister) for three months, before seizing Bangkok's airports.[10] In April 2009, the UDD disrupted an ASEAN summit in Pattaya and attacked the prime minister's car.[11] From March to May 2010, the UDD occupied key locations in central Bangkok until they were forcibly dispersed by the military; in all, these protests claimed 92 lives.[12] For many Thais, therefore, the southern conflict resembles a sideshow rather than a struggle for the soul of Thailand.

9 David Kilcullen, *The accidental guerrilla: fighting small wars in the midst of a big one,* New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 121.

10 For a discussion see Duncan McCargo, 'Thai politics as reality TV', *Journal of Asian Studies* 68, 1 (2009): 7–19.

11 For the best account of the 2009 events, see Michael Montesano, 'Contextualising the Pattaya summit debacle: four April days, four Thai pathologies', *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 31, 2 (2009): 217–48.

12 Michael K. Connors, 'Thailand's emergency state: struggles and transformations', in *Southeast Asian Affairs 2011*, Singapore: ISEAS, forthcoming.

In reality, though, the sideshow is integral to the main act, a play within a play that illuminates Thailand's central conflict. The question for Thailand is a simple one: what is the basis of the country's legitimacy? Officially, the answer is equally straightforward: the constitution, the executive and the legislature. The Thai people are sovereign. Yet the reality is much more ambiguous. The much loved 1997 'people's constitution', the high watermark of Thai liberalism, was torn up by the military on the night of the 19 September 2006 coup d'état. In the end, for many Thais, royal prestige and authority, especially the personal charisma of the current King Bhumibol (the world's longest serving monarch) trumps the authority of prime ministers and parliaments. In theory, Thailand is a constitutional monarchy, but in practice the monarch enjoys an extra-constitutional aura that allows the royal family and those around them to exercise considerable informal influence. In recent years the operation of this 'network monarchy' has become increasingly exposed to critical scrutiny.[13]

For many, the basis of Thai legitimacy remains the longstanding shibboleth 'nation, religion, king'. In other words, Thailand's national identity – linked to historical myths centring on the way in which King Chulalongkorn averted formal colonisation – is predicated largely on extra-legal, pre-modern notions of 'Thainess' and royalism. King Chulalongkorn is believed to have hit upon a winning formula that served Siam – later Thailand – extremely well. Tinkering with this configuration – in which all power is centralised and all ethnic identities are subordinated to an overwhelmingly dominant (yet highly constructed) Thainess – is considered dangerous to the future of the Thai nation. In fact, Thailand is a composite of disparate identities, including Mon, Khmer, Lao (the major ethnicity of the northeastern region of Isan, which contains a third of the country's population), Lanna (northerners) and Chinese. 'Real' Thai are hard to find, if indeed they may be said to exist at all.

Given the primacy of the Army-controlled Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) over security arrangements in the south – as decreed by the outgoing military-appointed Surayud Chulanont government early in 2008 – civilian agencies such as the reconstituted Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC) lack either the clout or the credibility effectively to spearhead a more reconciliatory or participatory community-based approach to the conflict. The short-lived People's Power Party (PPP)-led coalition government headed by Samak Sundaravej (February to September 2008) and then Somchai Wongsawat (September to December

13 For this widely cited concept see Duncan McCargo, 'Network monarchy and legitimacy crises in Thailand', *Pacific Review* 18, 4 (2005): 499–519.

2008) spent most of its term in office trying to counter anti-government protests led by the self-styled PAD. The PPP government failed to pass any legislation at all during almost a year in office, and paid no real attention to the southern conflict, the management of which was left firmly in the hands of the security forces.

The creation in December 2008 of a Thai government headed by Democrat Party leader Abhisit Vejjajiva provided an opportunity for a fresh look at the southern conflict. The new prime minister declared that bringing peace to the south was a top priority for his administration. The Democrat Party has electoral strongholds in the south, and has historically presented itself as the party with expertise and understanding on the troubled region. However, in reality the south of Thailand comprised two distinct entities: the Malay Muslim majority 'border provinces' of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, sometimes referred to as the 'deep south', and the eleven provinces of the 'upper south'.[14] The Democrats were the party of the upper south, not the Malay-dominated lower south. Despite talking the talk of prioritising a resolution of the southern violence, Abhisit proved a weak premier, challenged by opposition forces and undermined by tensions within his own administration and support base. Neither his special cabinet committee to work on the south, nor his verbal support for the gradual civilianisation of ISOC, succeeded in bearing any real fruit.[15]

The changing security situation

Despite Abhisit's talk of 'politics leading the military',[16] in practice the south remains largely the preserve of military interests. Thai security forces claimed after mid 2007 that their tougher approach on the ground was yielding real results in terms of curtailing the violence. A new policy of mass arrests of suspects, coupled with locking down suspected 'red' villages, has been in

14 The upper south comprises Chumphon, Krabi, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Phangna, Phatthalung, Phuket, Ranong, Satun, Songkhla, Surat Thai and Trang. Satun, a Muslim majority border province not affected by violence, really needs a category of its own. Four districts of Songkhla – Na Thawi Sadao, Saba Yoi, and Thepa – were also affected by violence.

15 For a discussion of trends in the conflict and the performance of the Abhisit government, see Srisompob Jitpiromsri and Duncan McCargo, 'The southern Thai conflict six years on: insurgency, not just crime', *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 32, 2 (2010): 156–83.

16 Speaking at a Deep South Watch conference in Hat Yai on 18 January 2009, Dr Srisompob Jitpiromsri referred to this facetiously as การเมืองที่สับสนนำการทหารที่สับสน [Confused politics leading a confused military].

operation since June 2007. Along with 'inviting' cohorts of Malay Muslim men from insurgent-intensive areas to spend extended periods undergoing vocational training in military camps, this more aggressive security policy (known as the 'battle plan for the southern lands') made some impact on the number of violent incidents. But the effect of the policy was relatively short-lived, and by 2011 violence was increasing once again. Overall, the number of incidents was subject to considerable fluctuation.[17] According to Srisompob, the majority of those killed in the violence to February 2011 have been Muslim: 2,728, as opposed to 1,765 Buddhists – though far more Buddhists than Muslims have been injured.[18] Muslim victims of violence include both so-called *munafik* (from Arabic, traitors to their religion) killed by militants, and a smaller number who have been extra-judicially murdered by the authorities.

The number of minor incidents had declined sharply. Militants had apparently adopted a new strategy of concentrating on more deadly attacks, with a renewed emphasis on targeting the security forces. In early November 2008, for example, 60 people were injured in bomb blasts, just a week after then Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat had visited the region and declared that violence was declining. Militant activity waxed and waned in different districts across the three provinces; in some former insurgency-intensive areas of Narathiwat and Yala levels of violence had decreased considerably, but the militant activity had apparently been displaced to different areas, including previously relatively peaceful districts of Pattani. As the security forces adjusted their strategy and tactics, the militants responded with new approaches. For example, the 'show of support' militant tactic of using mass protests by villagers to surround communities or encircle locations such as police stations, prevalent in 2005 and 2006, was later abandoned because it resulted in too many arrests. During 2008, militants made use of larger and more precisely targeted bombs, including car bombs. There was renewed upsurge of violence in 2011, including a 19 January attack by scores of militants on a Narathiwat army base, in which four soldiers were killed – an incident that invited comparison with the original January 2004 attacks.

17 Statistics compiled by Srisompob Jitpiromsri suggest that after dipping from mid 2007 until late 2008, incidents of violence began increasing again in the first three months of 2009. See Deep South Watch, 'Updated statistics: Thailand's southern violence from January 2004 through March 2009', http://www.deepsouthwatch.org/node/287. For further statistics on the violence, see the various tables in Srisompob and McCargo, 'The southern Thai conflict six years on', pp. 156–64.

18 Another 128 people of unspecified religion were killed. The injury figures for the period January 2004 to February 2011 were 4,512 Buddhists and 2,460 Muslims, plus 525 of unspecified religion. Srisompob personal communication, 22 March 2011.

Five soldiers looking nonchalantly in the same direction at a Sungai Padi roadside checkpoint (photograph Ryan Anson)

This and a series of subsequent large-scale incidents undermined previous claims by the security forces that the situation in the south was normalising.

Both analysts of the conflict and some key informants within the security community have argued that the apparent gains produced by more hardline methods were somewhat misleading. Even General Vaipot Srinual, then deputy permanent secretary of the Ministry of Defence and one of the military's top experts on the conflict, cautioned against assuming that the situation was really improving in 2008. In Malay Muslim communities across the region, resentment against the security forces was undiminished, and in some areas was actually increasing. By now most people knew someone who had been questioned, arrested or ill-treated. A very detailed January 2009 report by Amnesty International found widespread evidence that torture of suspects had become a standard operating procedure, routinely practised by army Rangers and other military and police units, often carried out in unofficial detention centres which included at least three Buddhist temples. In one high profile case, imam Yapha Kaseng from Narathiwat died of injuries sustained in custody at the Special Taskforce 39 camp inside Wat Suan Tham in April 2008; an inquest later found that he had been unlawfully tortured and killed.[19] While the security forces were struggling to gain the upper hand in a conventional war for control of territory, the real conflict was a war over ideas and feelings, in which the Thai state was unsuccessful.

On the ground, checkpoints abounded, though many were only operated intermittently. The tactic of properly manned and operated mobile checkpoints, as used in most similar conflicts around the world, continued to elude the Thai security forces. The army acquired 98 South African-made REVA armoured personnel carriers, which were raised high above the road and were designed to withstand the impact of roadside bombs. The ubiquitous deployment of these REVAs served to heighten locals' sense that their region was being forcibly occupied by the Thai authorities; on a psychological level, increased militarisation may have proved counter-productive by fuelling resentments.

The REVAs were one illustration of another salient trend: the huge budget allocated to security and 'development' activities in the south, the great bulk of which passes through the military, partly via ISOC. Greatly increased following the military coup of September 2006, the total budget for the period 2004–2008 was 81,748 million Thai baht (US$2,292,000,000), with a further 27,547 million baht (US$772,284,000) allocated for 2009. These levels of expenditure were a further source of resentment amongst

19 Amnesty International, *Thailand: torture in the southern counter-insurgency*, ASA 39/001/2009, London: Amnesty International, 2009.

most Malay Muslim and some Buddhist communities in the south, who felt that despite these vast budgets, they gained little benefit locally in terms of enhanced security or economic assistance.

Without giving credence to conspiracy theories that attribute most of the violence to the security forces themselves,[20] it should be noted that these budgetary increases give the military a significant stake in the conflict, and may reduce its incentive to support solutions that could curtail or end the violence. Given that much of the frontline, day-to-day security work in the south has actually been delegated to conscripts from the northeast, to rapidly expanding low-cost Ranger outfits (Rangers are not professional soldiers, but volunteers hired on short contracts) and to various village defence and militia groups, the professional army is being paid handsomely to wage a war that it has largely sub-contracted to other actors.

Command and control remains an issue. Although southern Thailand notionally falls under the jurisdiction of the Fourth Army Region, the Fourth Army is generally viewed as the least prestigious and professional of the army's regional commands; because of their involvement in illegal business activities, their cliquish organisational culture, and their claims to 'special understanding' of the insurgency, officers of the Fourth Army are often mistrusted by the top brass. No Fourth Army commander has ever been promoted to the top post of Army Commander-in-Chief. Partly because of this mistrust, and partly to share the benefits of the budgetary allocations made to quell the insurgency, former Army Commander-in-Chief General Anupong Paochinda assigned officers and troops from the other three army regions to assume leading security roles in the southern border provinces. The Fourth Army is currently responsible for security only in four districts of Songkhla province; the First Army (normally responsible for Bangkok, central and western Thailand) oversees Narathiwat, the Second Army (northeast) oversees Pattani, and the Third Army (north) oversees Yala. Security structures and the commanders responsible have been changed repeatedly since 2002, and even some army officers themselves appear confused about current lines of command. One problem is that officers and soldiers from other regions tend to be assigned to the deep south only for short periods; the military has not developed good methods of learning lessons and fostering institutional memory to support government efforts to suppress the insurgency.

Security measures are supposed to operate hand-in-hand with the prosecution of those apprehended on suspicion of engaging in violence. In 2008,

20 Some of these theories are critically reviewed in Marc Askew, *Conspiracy, politics and a disorderly border: the trouble to comprehend insurgency in Thailand deep south*, Policy Studies 29 (Southeast Asia), Washington DC: East-West Center; Singapore: ISEAS, 2007.

there was a significant increase in the numbers of security case suspects being brought to trial. After a long spell of few convictions, by the end of 2008 more than 150 defendants had been convicted in 105 cases. In 15 cases, militants were given the death penalty, in 27 cases life imprisonment, and in the remaining 63 cases defendants were awarded other jail terms. However, another 55 cases were dropped after reaching court, usually because judges felt that there was insufficient evidence. Given that between January 2004 and October 2008 more than 3,000 people were killed, and that 6,050 security cases had been investigated by the authorities as of October 2008, the proportion of cases reaching a successful conviction was still woefully small. The police identified suspects in only 20 per cent of cases (1,223), and in almost a third of these cases (338) they were unable to apprehend the suspects. In other words, the criminal justice system is not proving an effective means of countering the militant violence: alternative approaches are badly needed.

Towards political solutions?

There has been little public acknowledgement from the Thai state that the conflict in the south is essentially a political problem, since this would involve recognising the scale of Bangkok's legitimacy crisis in the region.[21] Like others before him, Prime Minister Abhisit spoke the language of tolerance, justice and fairness, when the core problem was actually one of power, participation and accountability. Notions of autonomy for the region have long been considered 'off the table', since the Thai constitution specifies that the country is an 'indivisible' unitary state. To advocate autonomy could be considered a treasonous act of disrespect towards the monarchy.

Nevertheless, there is growing evidence that senior Thais are beginning to 'think the unthinkable' in relation to the deep south. Elder statesman and former royal physician Dr Prawase Wasi – the architect of the liberal 1997 constitution – has hinted as much publicly.[22] Then interior minister Chalerm Yubamrung openly expressed his support for autonomy in February 2008, only to be quickly silenced. Behind closed doors, many leading figures now

21 For a comparative approach which demonstrates that political grievances and militant mobilisation, rather than socio-economic issues, underpin similar conflicts, see Mohammed Hafez, *Why Muslims rebel: repression and resistance in the Islamic world,* Boulder CO: Lynne Reinner, 2003.

22 Prachatai On-Line 'ประเวศ' หนุนใต้ปกครองตัวเอง ยันไม่กระทบพระราชอำนาจและไม่ใช่ไม่รักในหลวง' [Prawase: insists self-governance for south does not affect royal powers and does not suggest lack of love for the King], 10 November 2007, www.prachatai.com.

agree; General Surayud Chulanont, who served as prime minister after the 2006 coup, is said to be among them. The difficulty is now to mainstream such debates and gain wider acceptance for decentralisation proposals, both from the public and from the security sector. The process will be necessarily gradual.

Despite the Thai government's insistence that it will not negotiate with militants over the southern conflict, it is an open secret that various forms of 'dialogue' have already taken place. These include talks on the Malaysian island of Langkawi, brokered by former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad in 2005–2006, and a meeting in Bogor, Indonesia on 20–21 September 2008, initiated by Indonesian vice-president Jusuf Kalla. To date these meetings have made little progress for two main reasons. Firstly, the representatives of the militants have declined to prove their credentials – for example, by calling a short cessation of hostilities – and it remains unclear whether they really command insurgents on the ground. A bizarre fake 'ceasefire' declared by some supposed militants on TV Channel 5 (the Army's television station) on 17 July 2008 illustrated the problems surrounding authentication of the movement's leaders. Secondly, the Thai authorities have brought little to the table, since they refuse to discuss substantive questions of governance, autonomy or decentralisation. The Thai side appears to have been playing for time, perhaps hoping to find ways of co-opting those behind the insurgency.

Thailand is currently in the grip of intense anxiety. The legacy of Siam's creation of a modern nation-state, viewed as the crowning achievement of King Chulalongkorn, has been consolidated during the reign of King Bhumibol. Communism has been defeated, discontent in the northeast and insurgency in the south have been held in check, and the last 50 years have seen remarkable economic growth and rising national pride. Yet the King is now elderly and the twilight years of his reign have arrived. The future, both for the monarchy and the nation itself, remains profoundly uncertain. Precisely because the legitimacy of the Thai state is so inextricably bound up with the present occupant of the throne, people fear that anything could happen in the not too distant future.

Into this vacuum have stepped various new and resurgent forces. One example was the alliance of groups associated with former prime minister Thaksin, who sought to make electoral success the basis for government legitimacy. Another was a revived Malay Muslim militant movement seeking to resuscitate old 'separatist' political demands in the deep south, and to challenge the legitimacy of a hegemonic royalist 'Thainess'. These forces, and other counter-forces associated with the monarchy and the status quo, have staged a series of actions during the new millennium. The revived militancy in Thailand's deep south is just one of a number of movements that are

holding increasingly realistic dress rehearsals for the larger crisis that many fear could surround the impending royal succession. Moreover, the political landscape is dangerously over-centralised and lacks sufficient direction to respond to current challenges. The southern insurgency is at core a challenge to the legitimacy of the Thai state, and a pre-emptive strike that could culminate in a radical reorganisation of power. Thailand's southern violence is the microcosm of a potentially wide ranging civil conflict in the country. As such, this neglected conflict deserves far greater local and international attention than it currently receives. The map of Thailand need not be redrawn, but it must be at the heart of the debate about the country's future.

The book

The chapters in this book explore a range of issues related to the southern Thai conflict, though not with a primary focus on security aspects of the insurgency. Rather, they examine the interlocking questions of religion, politics, reconciliation, identity and alternative futures that help explain Thailand's local and national anxieties.

In chapter 2, national level anxieties among Thailand's Buddhist majority population are explored, and linked to a range of developments on the ground in the deep south. The chapter makes use of a DVD sermon by a Bangkok monk to lay out the main sources of anxiety: fears that Muslims will 'swallow' Buddhists as the sangha grows weaker, the monarchy no longer offers such a powerful legitimating force, and the Muslim population grows larger, more overtly pious and ever more vocal and demanding. In the south, such fears are echoed in anonymous leaflets disseminated by militants, and are evident in the growing number of temples that have virtually no monks in long-term residence. The military has come to play an important role, using temples as improvised bases, and providing security for monks, novices and Buddhist communities. Some soldiers have even ordained into the monkhood, acting as undercover security operatives who both gather alms and bear arms. Worse still, Buddhist temples have been used as detention, interrogation and even torture centres by the security services. Even so, many ordinary Buddhists feel they are not sufficiently protected by the state, and have joined various kinds of militia groups to protect themselves and their communities. Finally, the place of the Buddhist minority was a major focus of dissent around the 2005–2006 National Reconciliation Commission (NRC), which was widely mistrusted by Buddhists in the region. The chapter demonstrates the rise of potentially corrosive forms of Buddhist chauvinism at both the local and national

level, so further questioning received assumptions about the 'civil' nature of Thai religion.

The focus shifts from Buddhism to Islam in chapter 3, which explores the controversies surrounding the 2005 Islamic council elections in the three conflict-ridden provinces. Bangkok-based actors ranging from the military to various political parties sought to influence the outcome of these elections, which became a kind of proxy struggle to secure the loyalty of the Malay Muslim religious elite to the Thai state. The elections came to resemble other forms of election across Thailand, featuring vote-buying, intimidation, coalition-building and grandstanding. They further illustrated Bangkok's deep distrust of the southern border provinces and determination to interfere in all possible ways, a pattern of interference which proved largely counter-productive.

Chapter 4 returns to the NRC, closely scrutinising the internal politics of this well intentioned but ultimately misguided and ineffective body. It argues that the NRC had too many commissioners and too few other resources properly to tackle the huge agenda it took on. More seriously, however, the NRC was constrained by a narrow focus on issues of justice and equity, and an inability to view the conflict in political terms. The NRC report is primarily notable for its studious avoidance of controversial questions such as decentralisation, and its anodyne recommendations failed to have much substantive impact. Part of that failure also reflected the NRC's lack of a systematic media strategy.

Chapter 5 explores the question of how to communicate a complex political problem such as the southern conflict through Thai media outlets that emphasise news and comment, while eschewing analytical coverage. With the backing of the NRC, the Thai Journalists Association created the Issara News Centre (INC), an experimental news agency to which Bangkok-based reporters were seconded on rotation. For a year, the experiment helped pioneer alternative ways of doing journalism in Thailand – before the INC fell victim to internal politics and lost its way. The INC illustrated all the weaknesses of a reconciliation-based approach that tried to gloss over the political fundamentals underlying deep-rooted conflicts. Nobody wanted to read 'good news' features about the south; what they needed were stories that went beyond crime-style accounts of violent incidents, to explain the reasons behind them.

In chapter 6, questions of identity come to the fore: what is the basis on which Thais become citizens? Most Malay Muslims in the southern border provinces were born in Thailand, yet are not really regarded as 'Thai' – and nor do they describe themselves as such. The chapter argues that legal-rational notions of citizenship are inadequate to capture the way minority groups are

viewed and treated in countries such as Thailand. Instead, citizenship must be seen as a matter of degree, a continuum of identity, rights, loyalty and affinity. Given that Malay Muslims have a distinct identity that marks them out from other citizens of Thailand, why not recognise their special status within the country through some form of administrative change?

Chapter 7 looks at options for administrative reform, regionalisation or autonomy. It argues that most serious students of the conflict well understand the urgent needs for a political solution of some kind, but articulating this in public risks facing allegations of disloyalty. Indeed, public figures ranging from Anand Panyarachun and Prawase Wasi to Chavalit Yongchaiyudh and Abhisit Vejjajiva have all previously said as much, but have been unable to elaborate any detailed proposals to hand more power to the south. The present over-centralised governance arrangements in Thailand have become inextricably bound up with the history and prestige of the Chakri dynasty. The chapter argues that if Thailand's warring elites could achieve a modus vivendi over new governance arrangements for the south, they might see a way forward to address the larger political problems of the country as a whole. The striking parallels between Thailand's twin fires – the southern conflict and the national-level polarisation between pro- and anti-Thaksin forces are briefly sketched and reviewed in chapter 8.

Finally, in Appendix I, Thai scholar Phrae Sirisakdamkoeng explores the virtual tensions apparent on Thailand's popular forums, containing disturbing under-currents of anti-Muslim sentiment, especially in the immediate aftermath of well publicised attacks on Buddhists in the south. Her contribution is the first systematic attempt to analyse Buddhist attitudes to the southern conflict and towards Thailand's Muslim minority through the exploration of new media. Thai speakers should read the original comments provided in the footnotes, since much of the darker nuance is inevitably lost in English translation. Phrae offers uncomfortable insights into a complex, fluid society far less tolerant and easy-going than is often recognised by outsiders.

CHAPTER 2

Buddhist Fears[1]

The fact that Buddhism is the national religion of Thailand should be accepted and declared, for the sake of the security of the nation, religion and monarchy, which would make it possible for Thailand to have enduring peace and security.[2]

In a well organised campaign of protests and demonstrations in the early part of 2007, Buddhist monks and organisations pressed for Thailand's new constitution to proclaim Buddhism as the country's national religion.[3] Yet the above quotation pre-dated this campaign by almost 18 months: it was part of a 20-point declaration issued by the Pattani Sangha Council in response to the violent October 2005 attack on Wat Phromprasit in Panare, Pattani. The national religion campaign of 2007 reflected a growing sense that Buddhism – the religion of more than 90 per cent of the Thai population – was under threat from a resurgent and militant Islam concentrated in the south. The recent rise of Buddhist chauvinism in Thailand illustrates the shortcomings of earlier claims that Thai Buddhism is essentially inclusivist and tolerant – in short, that it constitutes a 'civil religion'.

This chapter reviews a number of issues relating to the politics of Buddhist identity in Thailand's southern border provinces, which have been

1 An earlier version of this chapter was first published as 'The politics of Buddhist identity in Thailand's deep south: the demise of civil religion' in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40, 1 (2009): 11–32.

2 Sangha Council of Pattani Province, คณะสงฆ์จังหวัดปัตตานี, แถลงการณ์คณะสงฆ์จังหวัดปัตตานี เรื่องความไม่สงบในสามจังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้ กรณีวัดพรหมประสิทธ์, ตำบลบ้านนอก, อำเภอปะนาเระ, จังหวัดปัตตานี [Declaration of the Sangha Council of Pattani Province on the subject of the unrest in the three southern border provinces, case of Wat Phromprasit, Tambon Ban Nok, Panare District, Pattani Province], point 18.

3 Leaders of the movement to make Buddhism a national religion (whom I interviewed at their protest site opposite the National Assembly in Bangkok on 17 May 2007) were a disparate group pursuing their campaign based on a range of political and religious motives.

the site of renewed violent conflict since January 2004.[4] These include the militarisation of Buddhist temples, the formation of Buddhist militias, and the arming of the region's Buddhist population. Following the Wat Phromprasit incident, prominent monks in the three provinces launched public attacks on the stance of the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC), a body created by the Thaksin government to propose a peaceful solution to the southern crisis.[5] These interventions by senior monks were apparently prompted by past and present senior military chiefs, but also testified to deep misgivings in wider Buddhist society. Underlying the abbots' uncompromising statements lay widespread Buddhist fears that they could ultimately be 'swallowed' by Muslim neighbours and driven from their land. This chapter uses interview materials and other texts to explore the fears and aspirations of the region's Buddhist community.

Thai Buddhist studies are too often pervaded by a set of simplistic and rarely challenged assumptions: Buddhism is a peaceful religion, Thailand is a tolerant country guided by the exercise of *metta* (loving kindness) and characterised by religious freedom, while Thai Buddhists enjoy harmonious relations with people of other religions. In this vein, Charles Keyes has characterised top down interventions in the sangha carried out by the Thai monarchy as 'revolutionary' and progressive in intent.[6] In his keynote address to the 1999 International Conference on Thai Studies, Keyes compared Thailand's 'civil religion' with that of the United States, and drew parallels between the Thai term, *satsana* (religion), and the ubiquity of the word 'God' in American public discourse.[7] In doing so, he glossed over the Thai state's suppression of dissident Buddhist movements, and the ways in which Islam and other religions were subordinated to the demands of a Buddhist hegemony. Yet as Jerry Muller argues:

> There are two major ways of thinking about national identity. One is that all people who live within a country's borders are part of the nation, regardless of their ethnic, racial, or religious origins. This liberal or civic nationalism is the conception with which contemporary Americans are

4 Two invaluable studies on the conflict in Thai are Supalak Ganjanakhundee and Don Pathan, สุภลักษณ์ กาญจนขุนดี และ ดอน ปาทาน, สันติภาพในเปลวเพลิง [Peace in flames], Bangkok: Nation Books, 2004 and Chaiwat Satha-Anand (ed.), ชัยวัฒน์ สถาอานันท์, แผ่นดินจินตนาการ: รัฐและการแก้ไขปัญหาความรุนแรงในภาคใต้ [Imagined land: the state and solutions for the southern violence], Bangkok: Matichon 2008.

5 For a detailed discussion of the NRC, see chapter 4.

6 Charles F. Keyes, 'Buddhist politics and their revolutionary origins in Thailand', *International Political Science Review* 10, 2 (1999): 121–42.

7 Charles F. Keyes, 'Buddhism fragmented: Thai Buddhism and political order since the 1970s', Keynote address, 7th International Conference on Thai Studies, Amsterdam, 4–8 July 1999, see especially pp. 24–5.

> most likely to identify. But the liberal view has competed with and often lost out to a different view, that of ethnonationalism. The core of the ethnonationalist idea is that nations are defined by a shared heritage, which usually includes a common language, a common faith, and a common ethnic ancestry.[8]

Scholars who suggest that Thai Buddhist ethno-nationalism has somehow quietly transformed itself into a harmless civic religion may be engaging in wishful thinking. Strongly influenced by the great philosopher-monk Buddhadasa's distinctive but potentially subversive liberal universalism, Donald Swearer similarly presents Thai state Buddhism as a benign 'civil religion of the centre', which he contrasts with the 'new movements on the periphery'.[9] Both Keyes and Swearer adopt an idealistic view of Thai religion, and skate over ample evidence of the ways in which Thailand's Buddhist institutions refuse to tolerate diversity, and view other religions with ill-concealed wariness.[10] At bottom, they imply that because movements such as Santi Asoke and Wat Thammakaya still exist, there is de facto freedom of religion in Thailand. Yet comparisons between Thai religion and American religion are dangerously misleading; while the legitimacy of the American state is based on a set of ideas enshrined in the constitution and a bill of rights, in Thailand state legitimacy derives from a set of national myths organised around the shibboleth 'nation, religion, king'. Religion in Thailand is national, particularist, and rather uncivil. Robb Stewart's provocative assertion that 'Freedom of religion does not exist in Thailand' has yet to be convincingly refuted.[11]

As Suwanna Satha-Anand has recently argued, there has been a shrinking space for tolerance in Thai Buddhism, especially in its relations with Islam and Christianity. Muslims have become increasingly threatening in the eyes of conservative Buddhists, who look askance even at such minor changes as the provision of Muslim prayer facilities at Bangkok's main

8 Jerry Z. Muller, 'The enduring power of ethnic nationalism', *Foreign Affairs*, March–April 2008.

9 Donald K. Swearer, 'Centre and periphery: Buddhism and politics in modern Thailand', in Ian Harris (ed.), *Buddhism and politics in twentieth century Asia,* London: Continuum, 1999, p. 225. See also, D. Swearer, *The Buddhist world of Southeast Asia,* Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995, pp. 63–105; despite devoting a whole chapter to Buddhism as 'civil religion', he fails to clarify what he really means by the term.

10 For an outline critique, see Duncan McCargo, 'Buddhism, democracy and identity in Thailand', *Democratization* 11, 4 (2004): 155–70.

11 Robb Stewart, 'Defending the faith(s): Buddhism and religious freedom in Thailand', Paper presented at the 7th International Conference on Thai Studies, Amsterdam, 4–8 July 1999, p. 1.

railway station.[12] Anti-Muslim sentiment amongst Thai Buddhists is growing, and the conflict in the south is sparking a heightened sense of Buddhist chauvinism both locally and nationally. Evidence of widespread anti-Muslim sentiments can be readily found on popular Thai language internet forums such as pantip.com.[13] Buddhist temples and monks have become a central element in the struggle against Malay Muslim militants in the southern border provinces. On the ground, there is very little communication between Buddhist and Muslim clerics, let alone any sense of a shared desire to normalise the situation and to avert further violence. Clerics from both religions have been targeted in the conflict, and the Thai state – led by the Queen – has initiated further moves to militarise the Buddhist community through the creation of armed militias.[14]

At the time of the 2000 census, the three southernmost provinces had a Buddhist population totalling just over 350,000 (Yala 127,442, Pattani 113,205 and Narathiwat 112,250), from an overall population of 1,7488,682 people. Less than 2 per cent of this population was classified in a category other than 'Buddhist' or 'Muslim' – mostly Christian. Narathiwat's population was 680,303 with an 83.5 per cent Muslim majority (the Buddhist growth rate was –2.65 per cent, compared to the Muslim growth rate of 1.59 per cent). Yala's population contained the largest percentage of Buddhists. It had 439,456 people with a 71 per cent Muslim majority (the Buddhist growth rate was –0.29 as opposed to the Muslim growth rate of 2.70). Pattani's population was 628,922 with an 82 per cent Muslim majority (Buddhist population growth also dropped at –1.39, compared to the Muslim growth rate of 2.24).[15] Unpacking these statistics can be tricky: 'Buddhists' in the region constitute a problematic category. The term is popularly used to cover three main groups: the Sino-Thai community, some of whom have lived and traded in the region for centuries; 'local Buddhists', Theravada Buddhists who were born or grew up in the region (some of whom have deep roots there, while others migrated from other parts of Thailand as recently as the

12 Suwanna Satha-Anand, 'Buddhist pluralism and religious tolerance in democratizing Thailand', in Philip Cam (ed.), *Philosophy, democracy and education,* Seoul, Korean National Commission for UNESCO, 2003, pp. 193–213.

13 See Patrick Jory, 'From "Pattani Melayu" to "Thai Muslim"', *ISIM Review* 18 (2006): 43, along with the detailed discussion by Phrae Sirisakdamkoeng in an appendix to this volume.

14 See ICG, *Southern Thailand: the problem with paramilitaries,* Asia Report no. 140, 23 October 2007, www.crisisgroup.org accessed on 5 September 2008, pp. 16–21. Duncan McCargo acted as a co-researcher and interpreter for many of the interviews underpinning this ICG report.

15 Information from 'Population and households census 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000: southern provinces', National Statistical Office, Bangkok: Prime Minister's Office, 2003.

1960s and 1970s under government-sponsored resettlement programmes, which have also included Muslims from the upper south, see below); and Buddhist 'outsiders', who have moved to the area as adults, often as a result of bureaucratic or military assignments. For a long time, relations between the Buddhist and Muslim communities were relatively harmonious and characterised by considerable reciprocity. As one abbot told Amporn Marddent, this reciprocity began to unravel following the upsurge in violence:

> There were no disagreements between Buddhists and Muslims. But if there were, the head of the village, imam, tok guru and me were mediators whom the villagers respected to solve the problems. Now, things change because the world goes so fast. Young generations don't know me. When issues arise at this different time, it is more complicated and now our land is controlled under dictators who don't want to listen to one other.[16]

Broadly speaking, Sino-Thais are the most successfully embedded community and enjoy the best relations with Malay Muslims, while Buddhist 'outsiders' are most often a focus of resentment and distrust on the part of Muslims. This applies with particular force to Buddhist government officials from provinces in the upper south, especially Songkhla, Phatthalung and Nakhon Si Thammarat, who are widely resented by Malay Muslims. 'Upper southerners' are typically viewed as aggressive, patronising and colonial in their attitudes to local Muslims. Rightly or wrongly, Malay Muslims often regard government officials from the upper south as second-rate officers, who have been sent to the deep south because they are not good enough to make the grade in their own provinces, or elsewhere in the country. Ironically, Malay Muslims tend to feel less resentment towards Buddhists from Bangkok or other regions of the country than towards their 'fellow' southerners. Nevertheless, the sub-categories of 'Chinese,' 'local' and 'outsider' Buddhist are overlapping and ambiguous, especially given growing mobility both within and without the region. In *tambon* (sub-district) Bang Lang in the violence-prone district of Bannang Sata, Yala, for example, many Buddhist villages created in the wake of a massive dam project were populated in the 1970s by settlers from Phatthalung. Yet these outsiders struggled to fit in, and most of them eventually sold their land at very cheap prices to Buddhists from elsewhere in the southern border provinces, mainly Pattani.

16 Interview with an abbot before the 19 September 2006 military coup, cited in Amporn Marddent, 'Buddhist perceptions of Muslims in the Thai south', Paper presented at the 59th Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Boston, 22–25 March 2007.

Buddhists find themselves in both a privileged and a threatened position. On the one hand, they hold a disproportionate degree of economic and administrative power in the southern border provinces – they control most businesses, and hold most senior bureaucratic positions – yet are also becoming increasingly marginalised by an assertive Malay Muslim community.

Between January 2004 and February 2011, 38 per cent of those killed and over 60 per cent of those injured in political violence in the border region were Buddhist, though Buddhists constituted only around 20 per cent of the population.[17] While only a small minority of Malay Muslims were actively engaged in violent struggle, a larger proportion gave some tacit support to the movement, rejecting the Buddhist-dominated Thai state, for example, by removing their children from government schools. Some Buddhists quit the area in the five years after 2004 (estimates range between 35,000 and 100,000), while others with nowhere to go – especially the more impoverished rural dwellers – were feeling increasingly encircled. In certain areas, southern Buddhists were arming and training themselves in preparation for what they feared might become a real battle for future survival.

A series of attacks on Buddhist monks and civilians lay behind such fears, beginning with the murder of a 64 year old monk in Bacho, Narathiwat, on 22 January 2004, and the killing of two monks and a 13 year old novice in Yala two days later. These attacks served as a trigger for the rise of more militant Buddhist sentiments towards Muslims. A psychological turning point was reached with the 16 October 2005 attack on Wat Phromprasit in Pattani, during which an elderly monk and two temple boys were killed. Although only a tiny number of monks had actually been attacked, the Wat Phromprasit incident was taken as signalling the onset of a systematic militant policy of targeting Buddhist religious institutions, and triggered a wave of reactions on the part of the Buddhist community in the southern border provinces.[18] These reactions ranged from the creation of armed militias, to protests against the policies of the Thaksin government. Attitudes among the Buddhist community were further hardened by unprovoked attacks on civilians. At the Narathiwat village of Kuching Rupa on 19 May 2006, two female Buddhist teachers were taken hostage in a room at the village nursery and beaten with sticks; one teacher, Khru Juling Pongkanmoon, went into a

17 Srisompob Jitpiromsri, personal communication, 22 March 2011. Full figures are given in chapter 1.

18 At the time of writing in 2011 eight monks had been killed in the southern Thai conflict, three in 2004, one each in 2005 and 2009, and three in 2011. There have been several other attacks on monks and temples.

coma and eventually died in January 2007.[19] The Khru Juling case evoked a great outpouring of national grief, tinged with growing overtones of Buddhist chauvinism.[20] A March 2007 attack on a minibus in Yala province produced even more intense reactions: eight Buddhist passengers were shot through the head in broad daylight, in an incident that triggered demonstrations across the country.[21] After the van attack, the Queen was quoted as saying: 'We have to help people there to survive. If they need to be trained, train them. If they need to be armed, arm them.'[22] When a young Buddhist woman was shot and burned alive in Yala the following month, 300 outraged local Buddhists paraded her charred body around the town and carried it to the provincial hall, where army commander and coup leader General Sonthi Boonyaratglin (himself a Muslim) was forced to view the corpse. On 12 June 2009, one monk was killed and another seriously injured while making an alms round in Yala; in a parallel incident in Pattani on 5 March 2011, one monk was killed and two injured, also while making alms rounds.

Muslims could swallow Buddhists: minority fears

A disturbing DVD entitled 'Muslims swallow Buddhists', circulating among upper middle-class Bangkok Thais in late 2005, featured a monk giving a lengthy oration on the subject of Muslim-Buddhist relations in Thailand.[23] The sermon began rather mildly, but gradually assumed an increasingly alarmist tone. The monk argued that separatism in the south was a hellish doctrine, as illustrated by terrible incidents such as the attack on a temple that killed monks and temple boys.[24] According to the monk, this attack was a violent action against Buddhism, yet in the 2,500-year history of the

19 Exactly why the two teachers were taken hostage, and why one was fatally injured yet the other emerged relatively unscathed, remains unclear and contested. Some have speculated that Juling was viewed as an informer for the security services, though such claims have never been substantiated and may be entirely unfounded.

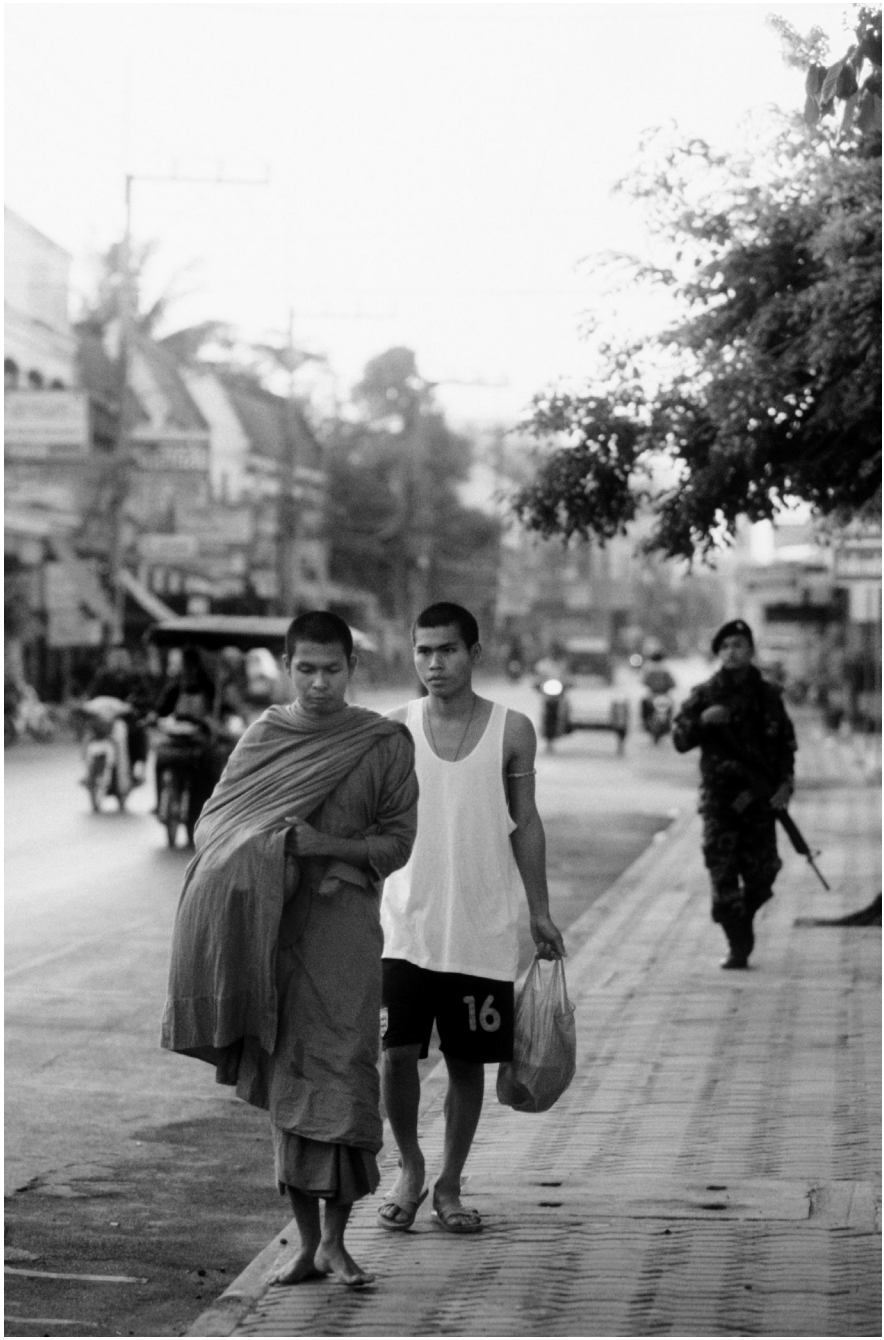
20 The Khru Juling case is the focus of *Citizen Juling,* a compelling documentary film by Ing K., Manit Sriwanichpoom and Kraisak Choonhavan; for a review, see Kong Rithdee, 'The human face of tragedy', *Bangkok Post*, 27 June 2008.

21 Provinces where protests were staged included Buriram, Phuket, Chumphon, Satun, Nakhon.

22 Rungrawee C. Pinyorat, 'Distrust, brutality and glut of guns puts Thai south at risk of communal combat', *Associated Press,* 27 April 2007.

23 มุสลิมกลืนพุทธ [Muslims swallow Buddhists], undated DVD of Buddhist sermon, apparently produced in late October or November 2005. No details concerning the identity of the monk or his temple were included.

24 The speaker was apparently referring to the attack on Wat Phromprasit on 16 October 2005, in which a monk and two temple boys were killed.



A monk in the deep South is escorted by an armed soldier
on his morning alms-round (photograph Ryan Anson)

Buddhist religion, there had never been any violence in Buddhism and no killing on behalf of the Buddha. Ironically, roles had now been reversed in the southern provinces: whereas in the past soldiers had sought amulets from monks to protect them, now monks needed to have soldiers with them for their own protection during the morning alms round.[25]

For all the talk of 'rule of law' and 'reconciliation', 'they' did not care about such ideas, and only valued the use of force. The King and Queen were extremely worried about the situation, and the Queen had created a 'widows' village' to accommodate those who had lost their husbands in the violence.

The monk had been told by military officers that the situation in the south was growing very serious: the separatists planned first to eliminate monks and temples, then make the region a forbidden area for Buddhists, who would be driven out of their homes and forced to move to other parts of the country. Eventually the south would be like Afghanistan, where huge ancient Buddha images had been blown up. The aim of the movement was to occupy not just the three provinces, but the whole country. It was essential that Buddhist land be protected so that the *phaendin* (Thai land and country) would not be divided. The strategy of the separatists was to rule the whole country using their religious laws. Muslims were now moving to many parts of the north and Isan and setting up *surau* and mosques everywhere, which would soon be as ubiquitous as Buddhist temples. He declared: 'I don't talk about this without evidence, but I heard it from many respected senior people who told me the same message and they are quite worried about the problem.' The speaker painted a picture of Thailand 20 years hence, transformed through political changes. The three pillars of nation, religion and monarchy would be weaker. The nation consisted of land and human resources, but these people would occupy the land by buying it. Land was being bought up all over the north and Isan on the pretext of planting rubber trees, which were now appearing everywhere. But the real purpose was to occupy the land legally first, so that their people could be moved in later. The next stage of the plan was to make their religious law into common law. He claimed that while

25 In 2007, the Internal Security Operations Command announced a programme to provide southern Buddhists with special protective *Jatukham rammathep* amulets. 'Amulets to help "protect Buddhists" in the south', *The Nation*, 14 March 2007. These amulets first appeared in 1987, and were supported by well-known police officer and occultist Khun Phantharak Rajjadej, who died in July 2006, aged 108. They commemorate two mythological princes of the Krung Srivijaya kingdom in southern Thailand. For details, see Ekarong Panupong, เอกรงค ภาณุพงศ, ย้อนรอยตำนานจตุคามรามเทพ [Retracing the myth of Jatukham Rammathep], Bangkok: Siam Inter Multimedia, 2007.

the Supreme Patriarch was only the head of around 350,000 monks, the Chularajamontri was the head of a much larger community of 3–4 million Muslims. The monk referred to a 1997 law requiring provinces to set up provincial councils, which could be used to manipulate the budget and get whatever they wanted.[26]

The speaker went on to complain about the NRC which he asserted had scored a notable 'own goal': some members had argued that the three provinces actually belonged to Malaysia, while the Thais had only come later to the area from China. He declared that Thailand was suffering from enfeebled national institutions: the monarchy was growing weaker as the King and Queen grew older, and the religious institution was also weakening. There were an estimated 6,000 abandoned temples,[27] and a declining number of monks and novices. Buddhists had actually failed to realise that they were being invaded; rather than accepting terrible incidents such as the murder of monks and of two marines, Buddhists and Buddhist institutions should start to speak out against what was happening, condemning these incidents and pointing out how they violated religious doctrines. Otherwise, opportunists would capitalise on public weariness with the violence to occupy territory, make demands and bargain, not just for control of the three provinces, but for the entire country. The aim of the movement was to turn the conflict into an international issue and bring in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which had helped East Timor to gain independence:[28]

> If we move too slowly, the conflict in the south will turn into a conflict between religion and the government, and they will call for justice and ask for a referendum, and finally the area will be separated. This phenomenon will happen if we are careless; at the moment Buddhists should not keep silent, but should help protect religion and the monkhood. We should be aware that Buddhism is our national religion.[29]

The sermon highlighted a number of recurrent themes in conservative Thai Buddhist discourse relating to the south. These included: an essentialised

26 The speaker was clearly referring to the 1997 Islamic Organizations Act, although he made no direct mention of Islam.

27 The Office of National Buddhism puts the number of abandoned temples at 6,040; see statistics as of 31 December 2007, http://www.onab.go.th/data/06.pdf Thanks to my colleague Martin Seeger for locating this information.

28 There seems little evidence that the OIC played much of a role in the independence of East Timor (Timor Leste), a country with a Catholic majority population.

29 In fact, Buddhism was not officially Thailand's national religion under the 1997 or previous constitutions, a source of resentment among conservative Buddhists.

and idealised view of Thai Buddhism as peaceful, a reading that overlooked structural and other violence used to maintain the Thai state; a visceral fear and mistrust of Islam; and anxiety about the future of Thailand, inseparable from overtly expressed fears about the post-succession monarchy. Other key themes included the important role played by the Queen in boosting Buddhist morale in the region, a deep suspicion of the NRC, and a parallel mistrust of the provincial Islamic councils and the Chularajamontri. Underlying this mistrust were fears concerning the institutionalisation of Islamic law; apprehension concerning long-term demographic spread and growth of Muslim populations; and fears about Muslim land ownership – real or imagined – in other parts of Thailand. In addition, many conservative Buddhists were dubious about the mediating role of international organisations, especially the OIC, and shared a deep-rooted belief that a referendum on the south could be a prelude to the division of the Thai nation. These themes together pointed to declining tolerance towards Islam on the part of Buddhists.

The DVD was passed to me along with a CD-Rom containing a number of documents, slide sets and PowerPoint presentations: one PowerPoint featured royally sponsored programmes to support and defend the Buddhist community in the south (complete with some horrific pictures of beheadings),[30] while another contained a graphic presentation of photographs showing the attack on Wat Phromprasit, including images of the bodies of the victims. Taken together, these visual texts constituted a highly emotional call for action, a call being heeded at the highest levels of Bangkok Buddhist society. The texts clearly illustrated the degree to which Buddhist 'tolerance' was beginning to unravel in the face of perceived threats from a resurgent and aggressive Islam.

Leaflets and anonymous messages

In the southern Thai conflict, formal and public statements form only one element of the popular discourse about the ongoing violence. Equally salient is

30 General Naphon Boontap, deputy aide-de-camp to the Queen, performed important roles in many such activities in the south. For example, he arranged for 30 senior monks from other parts of Thailand to spend the rainy season in the southern border provinces in 2004, and presided at *kathin* ceremonies at 38 temples in the region in October 2006. These programmes were explicitly aimed to boost the morale of local Buddhists who had been faced with militant violence. Previously known as Rawat Boontap (Class 13), the general was a close friend of Surayud Chulanont, and formerly commander of the Second Army region, and assistant army commander. He retired from active military service in 2001 before becoming a royal aide-de-camp.

the informal discourse to be found in anonymous messages, often posted on village notice boards, thrown over garden walls, left in markets, or passed from hand to hand.[31] Many of these messages explicitly allude to the religious divide between Muslims and Buddhists. Some of the messages appear to come from anti-state militants or their sympathisers, while others resemble 'black' propaganda distributed by state officials. In some cases, militants may be distributing 'pro-Buddhist' leaflets which are actually intended to inflame communal tensions and provoke violent reactions from the Buddhist community.[32]

Warning leaflets are among the most common variety: some are left at the sites of violent incidents, while others urge local Buddhists to leave the area. One leaflet read simply:

> Hey! All you Thai Buddhists. If you still stay on our land, we will hunt you down and kill you all. Get out from my territory, or you will have to eat bullets again.[33]

Another, addressed to a principal, read:

> Dear Principal of the school,[34]
>
> About what happened, we have no intention to hurt anyone. This land belongs to us. It's time for us to get it back. Leave now if you don't want any more damage to lives and property. If you continue to stay, we will not guarantee your safety. Take your family away as well.
>
> From Patani State Liberators

Another, left at the site of a shooting incident in Yarang, read simply:

> YOU KILLED INNOCENT MEN
> (TANYONGLIMO)
> I KILLED INNOCENT BUDDHISTS!!![35]

31 For a discussion, see Duncan McCargo, 'Patani militant leaflets and the uses of history', in *Conference proceedings, The phantasm in southern Thailand: historical writings on Patani and the Islamic world, 11–12 December 2009,* Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University 2009, pp. 163–78.

32 For a discussion of how anonymous leaflets were deployed in one Buddhist community in Thepa district, Songkhla province, see Marc Askew, 'Landscapes of fear, horizons of trust: villagers dealing with danger in Thailand's insurgent south', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40, 1 (2009): 80–5.

33 Leaflet found in Khok Pho, Pattani 29 October 2004.

34 Typed letter addressed to a school principal in Panare, Pattani. Fax sheet dated 13 June 2005.

35 Dated 14 October 2005. The word 'I' is written in green, and 'killed' is written in red. The Tanyonglimo incident of 20–21 September 2005 began with the shooting dead of two Muslim men at a teashop, after which two marines were taken hostage by villagers and later beaten to death.

Leaflets purporting to come from the Buddhist side were typically much more long-winded, containing catalogues of complaints against the Muslim community and its leadership. One particularly interesting leaflet called upon Buddhists to boycott trade with Muslims:

> Dear the Beloved Thai People,[36]
>
> The violence that broke out in the three provinces has been intensified since January 4, 2004, and shows no sign of stopping. The reasons are ranging from the national and local politicians protecting their stakes, to drugs, the illegal oil trade, and separatism. The government policy to diminish the violence has resulted in more than 500 deaths. People called the insurgents 'five-hunded bandits,'[37] and it soon will be 'a thousand bandits' or more, since they won't stop in the near future. They killed innocent Thai Buddhists. For their fellow Muslims, they picked only policemen, soldiers, sub-district chiefs [*kamnan*], village headmen [*phuyaiban*], MPs, or whoever gets in their way. They also bring in foreigners to kill our people. Look at the Tak Bai incident; they had the intention to kill the officials and burn down the police station. They armed themselves with heavy weapons in the sacks that they placed there in advance. During the moment when they all marched to the police station, they shouted, 'I'm here to kill!'
>
> It was the right thing to do that the Fourth Army Commander dispersed the mob, because they posed a serious treat. They are clearly rebels and terrorists (international terrorists as well). We, the people, agreed with the authorities as the number of mobsters could have increased from 3,000 to 10,000–20,000. They were coming from all the districts in Narathiwat, Yala, Pattani, and some parts of Songkhla. They wanted to create chaos that would lead to separatism. The Tak Bai protesters were not ordinary teenagers. They were trained since they were three years old from domestic and international terrorist schools. On that day, they didn't expect that the officials would take things so seriously and be able to seal off the area. Up until now, so many Thai Buddhists have been killed, but the news was concealed. Our lives are not normal any more. We are the targets of murder and robbery. Academics are protecting the bandits. The innocent are neglected. We are living in constant horror. As soon as they can't take it any more, civil war will surely break out. Respected academics, how would you feel if your parents were killed?
>
> On the night of 16 November 2004, Her Majesty Queen Sirikit has ordered the NGOs and the university academics to stand up for the

36 Leaflet distributed in Yala, December 2004.

37 Bandits who killed 500 people, โจรห้าร้อย *jon ha roi*; bandits who killed 1,000 people, โจรหนึ่งพัน *jon nung pan.*

innocents that were killed or hurt. Hopefully, they would take it to your hearts and do accordingly, unless they are too brainless to do so. In the past, these people are always protecting the criminals.

The Prime Minister said they know who's behind the insurgency, but he never made that clear to us. As an old man of 65 years, I'm telling you the truth that even Her Majesty the Queen who is 72 years old knows who's behind this separatist scheme. . .[38]

May all of you publicly make this known among friends, relatives and business owners, merchants and people, so we can get rid of these people simply by:

- Bursting all the tyres of any car belonging to Muslims that enters the areas outside the three provinces.
- Not accepting any job applications. Some of them might be from terrorists.
- Not selling some merchandise such as nails in the three three provinces, because they can be used to make metal spikes or bombs.

1. Uric fertiliser should not be allowed in the three provinces, because it's a component of explosive. Propose to return all of it to the Ministry of Agriculture.
2. No delivery of crucial merchandise such as rice, or limit it to the top quality brand so that they[39] cannot afford to buy it.
3. Spit on all those MPs and Senators who are involved, that you come across.
4. Show your disdain towards the Muslims in the three provinces who side with the movements
5. Organise a demonstration in each province nationwide. Terrorists bring down the economy. In 2004, the expected economic growth rate was 8 per cent, but we only achieved 2.5 per cent. Billions of baht were lost.

They caused troubles to innocent people. We will not cooperate with them, and will chase them all away. Currently, there are about eight members of the movement in each village. That makes 10,000 altogether in the three provinces, plus hundreds of thousands more sympathisers [*naeo ruam*]. We must stop them from spreading. At this time, they are sending women and the elderly to map official locations and the residences of some important figures. There's no safe place anymore in Thailand. We

38 The leaflet goes on to list local politicians Den Tohmeena, Areepen Uttarasint, Najmuddin Umar, Kamnan Tohdeng, as well as religious teachers, Somchai Neelapaichit and Chavalit Yongchaiyudh as prime movers behind the violence.

39 The Thai term for 'they' here is พวกมัน (*phuak man*), a very insulting term.

must do something other than being afraid. We give full support to the Fourth Army Commander and the government.

From innocent people of every religion (except for those filthy politicians, separatists, drug dealers, arms dealers, illegal oil traders, piracy traders . . . etc.)

Leaflets such as this cannot be taken as literal statements of the views of ordinary Buddhists in the southern border provinces, but they were carefully crafted to provoke emotional reactions: the sentiments expressed here would resonate with large numbers of people, and testify to the deep-seated anxieties of the minority community. Themes that emerge include the untrustworthiness of both local and national politicians, fears that Muslim employees and customers could be supporting militant activity, and the notion that only the Queen and the military could be trusted to defend Buddhists in the region. According to the leaflets, the only effective response to the continuing violence was the kind of hardline security tactics employed at Tak Bai. Such leaflets, some possibly written by military intelligence officers, aimed to strengthen the determination of local Buddhists to resist violence caused by Muslims. Yet these leaflets also created a heightened sense of paranoia, thereby playing into the hands of groups intent on terrorising Buddhist populations. A sub-text of such leaflets was an attempt to discredit prevailing norms about the importance of mutual tolerance between the two major religious communities of the region, and to foster an alternative discourse based on enmity and fear.

Buddhist temples and Thai territory

Buddhist temples in the southern border provinces represent enclaves of Thailand's majority religion, outposts of 'nation, religion and king' that need to be defended from physical, religious, ethnic, cultural and political incursions by the Malay Muslims who comprise most of the area's population. Each functioning temple is a visible assertion of the Thai Buddhist state's continuing suzerainty over this rebellious region. For this reason, the Thai state has invested considerable moral and military capital in securing Buddhist temples for symbolic reasons. In practice, however, the definition of a 'functioning temple' has to be modified and adapted to the security context of the southern border. In a normal Thai Buddhist temple, there is an intimate relationship between the monks who reside there and the immediately surrounding community; monks perform a daily alms round, walking around their own community to receive donations of food. Villagers who provide

this food typically visit their local temple regularly, and receive religious services from the monks in a de facto exchange. However, in the southern border provinces the performance of the alms round is sometimes impossible – at one point in November 2006, some Narathiwat monks suspended the practice completely[40] – or it takes place only with the backing of armed military guards. Monks are often transported by their minders to carry out alms rounds at some distance from their actual temples, so breaking the connection between temple and community. Many Buddhist temples in the southern border provinces exist only nominally: monks are imported from elsewhere, alms are collected at a distance, and there may be no real interaction between monks and the mainly Muslim villagers whose homes adjoin the temple. Even a senior royal aide acknowledged the scale of the problem:

> Gen Naphon noted that every group – police, military and civilian – must cooperate with each other. He said CDs showing beheaded victims are currently distributed in Pattani province to intimidate people. Those involved in their distribution are not known at this time. If the situation persists the country's image will deteriorate. He appealed to everyone to help restore peace in the region. Even monks are afraid to stay in the region. For monks who remain, people have been asked to feed them at the temple so that monks do not have to leave the temples by themselves. Gen Naphon said he would persuade monks from elsewhere . . . to come to the region to give spiritual uplift to local Thai Buddhists.[41]

The example of one southern temple nicely illustrated the point.[42] The monks at Wat Ban Lek[43] had no communication at all with the surrounding community, which was entirely Muslim. When they performed their alms round each morning, they were taken by soldiers to a nearby Buddhist area about 3 kilometres away. A team of 12 soldiers provided round-the-clock security for the monks; this was not far from another temple where a serious militant attack had taken place. Previously, the temple had only two or three monks, but when I visited there were seven, their ranks boosted by volunteer ordainees from outside the area. The abbot confirmed that these volunteer monks came from Lopburi,[44] but when I pressed him as to whether any

40 See Amnesty International, *Thailand: Amnesty International Report 2007*, http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/thailand/report-2007 last accessed on 21 March 2011.

41 BBC Monitoring International Reports, 'Thai official says Queen's projects not aimed at dividing Buddhists, Muslims', translated from *Daily News*, 8 July 2005.

42 Fieldnotes, temple visit and abbot interview, 12 January 2006.

43 Temple names in this section are pseudonyms.

44 A central Thai province well known for its high concentration of military bases and main home to the Army's Special Forces.

of them were soldiers, he told me he had never asked them. Wat Ban Lek dated back to the Ayutthaya period and had a couple of very fine old buildings. However, after the remaining Buddhists left the locality, the temple was abandoned around the early 1980s. The temple grounds had become an area where local Muslim villagers grazed their animals. The current abbot had been appointed in 1998, with a mission to re-establish the temple in order to ensure that this land remained a Buddhist area. Yet his life there was extremely fragile; the temple had very few visitors.

Wat Ban Lek was an interesting example of how a temple can exist without a surrounding Buddhist community; the abbot explained that there were only two temples like this in the province. He had reclaimed the temple himself from Muslim encroachment, encouraged by a neighbouring abbot who was his mentor. The reclamation of Wat Ban Lek was a highly political act. When I suggested to him that temples with no Buddhist communities simply might have to be abandoned, or converted to other uses, he could not accept the idea. The abbot had clearly adopted the preservation of this Buddhist enclave within a Muslim community as a personal life mission, and was being strongly supported by the military. Without commitments from the nearby village and the state, this temple could not continue to function. Even so, its activities were largely symbolic, since it served no immediate community.

Wat Ban Yai, another isolated temple in the region, was also guarded round the clock by a contingent of soldiers. Only a single monk – the elderly abbot – was in residence. When asked their function, the NCO in charge of the 12 soldiers based at the temple explained that protecting the abbot was their primary task. The abbot was too infirm to conduct an alms round himself, and his food came from the alms collected by monks from neighbouring temples. A local middle-aged woman whose family had been victims of the violence had been hired to assist the abbot. As at Wat Ban Lek, elaborate mechanisms had been established to ensure that an essentially non-viable temple could continue to have a symbolic existence. However, Wat Ban Yai had far larger numbers of visitors than Wat Ban Lek, since the abbot was well known for producing much valued amulets, and was skilled in de-hexing: removing spells cast by others. The abbot was still in great demand among Muslims as well as Buddhists for his de-hexing services, activities attesting to syncretic modes of religious activity, in which local Buddhists and Muslims had overlapping traditions and beliefs. Such shared religious and community space had now diminished, and Buddhists and Muslims in the area no longer attended one another's festivals, or exchanged much more than cursory greetings.

Wat Ban Lek and Wat Ban Yai were extreme examples of the plight of Buddhist temples and their associated communities in the region. Such

temples had ceased to function as religious centres in any normal sense. Largely stripped of civil dimensions, they existed primarily as symbolic outposts of a hollowed out and de-legitimised Thai state, their continuing existence only secured through military force.

Temples and security

While few temples were as dependent on the military as Wat Ban Lek and Wat Ban Yai, many Buddhist temples were used as improvised army camps, housing troops who were performing duties such as escorting teachers to and from school, patrolling adjoining Muslim areas, and protecting the monks at the temples – including during their mornings alms rounds. At a farewell party for troops who had been based at one Narathiwat temple for a year, a Buddhist community leader declared that people would be very sorry to see the soldiers depart because they had become a familiar sight around the village – even though they had never really spoken to them.[45] In recent months, local people had been largely excluded from the temple, which had become primarily an improvised army base housing more than 100 soldiers. One Pattani abbot was very dubious about the security value of housing soldiers in his temple – sometimes more than 200 at a time – and refused to travel with a military escort.[46] He explained that many of the soldiers and monks were on bad terms.

Phra Paisal Visalo, a Chaiyaphum-based peace activist monk and NRC member, argued that it was not really appropriate to allow soldiers with guns into temples, and noted that some abbots did not permit armed men to enter their grounds, since they believed this could make the temple more vulnerable to attack. However, there had been little protest against the policy of assigning troops to temples, in view of the difficult security situation. He was concerned that matters might escalate, however, and felt that monks should not take defensive steps such as wearing bullet-proof vests.[47] Phra Paisal argued that although Buddhism was actually a non-violent religion, relatively few Buddhist monks clearly understood non-violent approaches. Paisal's point was confirmed during my interview with one abbot, who lamented that it was no longer possible for the security forces simply to eliminate 'bad guys' who caused problems in the community, which they

45 He stated that the soldiers were like their brothers, พี่น้อง (*phi nong*), and looked familiar, คุ้นเคย (*khunkuey*), although they never talked to them. Fieldnotes, Tak Bai district, 5 October 2005.

46 Abbot interview, 11 August 2006.

47 Interview, 19 February 2006.

used to do regularly. He was quite clear that a return to a policy of selective extra-judicial killing would be the best option to address the worsening violence.[48]

After 2004, there was a drive to encourage soldiers from other parts of Thailand to ordain as monks in southern temples: a batch of 75 soldier-monks (*phra thahan*) were ordained at one Pattani temple in 2005, then assigned to various temples around the province, in a project supported by the Queen.[49] It was a longstanding tradition for government officials – including those serving in the military – to be granted periods of leave during which they could ordain as monks. But the practice of ordaining serving soldiers in the southern border region produced a backlash, increasing the likelihood that monks would be targeted for attack by militants. In theory, soldiers ceased to perform any military duties once they ordained, but local practices varied. One abbot claimed that some *phra thahan* actually carried guns in their shoulder bags while out on their alms rounds.[50] He was highly critical of the government's security strategy, arguing that large troop deployments were completely ineffective in ameliorating the southern conflict. During 2006, there was a policy shift away from basing troops in Buddhist temples, which Muslim Army Commander Sonthi Boonyaratglin viewed as a one-sided posture that was likely further to alienate local people. Soldiers were now often based in smaller units posted at more neutral locations, but many remained stationed inside Buddhist temples.

Concerns about the blurring of the distinction between the operations of the security services and the sacred space of Buddhist temples were further highlighted by the revelations in a meticulously researched 2009 Amnesty International report. Not only were temples being used in the south as military bases, but were also used for the detention and even torture of suspected militants. Amnesty International described in detail three alleged episodes of torture which took place inside Wat Chang Hai, the most revered Buddhist temple in the southern border provinces, in late 2007 and early 2008. For example:

> Also in February 2008, a joint police-military force of between 30 and 40 troops arrested a construction worker from Pattani and initially took him

48 Abbot interview, 2006.

49 Abbot interview, 11 August 2006.

50 Ibid. For a much fuller discussion of the militarisation of Buddhist temples in the south, see Michael Jerryson, 'Appropriating a space for violence; state Buddhism in southern Thailand', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40, 1 (2009): 33–57; also published as 'Militarising Buddhism: violence in southern Thailand', in Michael Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer (eds), *Buddhist warfare,* New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 179–209.

to two police stations. The man told Amnesty International that he was unsure of what Special Taskforce unit the soldiers were from, but as he was then taken to Wat Chang Hai Battalion 24 Army Camp, it was likely the unit known as 'Shockor 24' which is based there. The soldiers bent the man's hands back until he lost feeling in them, and struck his head with a gun barrel, causing his skull to crack. He was kicked and choked, and the soldiers struck him in the stomach so hard that he continues to feel pain. This torture took place every day for a week and was designed to force the man to confess to knowledge of or involvement in the insurgency.

In March 2008, a joint military-police force of over 300 troops, consisting of Special Taskforce soldiers based in Wat Leab and police from Saiburi Police station, detained a young farmer from Pattani, according to his relatives. They tied his hands behind his back, threw him to the floor, and kicked and stepped on him. Soldiers accused him of trying to escape, and then struck him on the back with a gun, before firing it so close to his ear that he could not hear for some time. The farmer was first taken to a police station where he was beaten while in handcuffs. In the afternoon, he was taken to Wat Changhai Battalion 24 Army Camp. Soldiers placed a plastic bag over his head and kicked and beat him. The man's nose was broken and the cuffs on his wrists cut him and left his arms numb. This torture lasted for three days, during which he could hardly eat or sleep, and was not allowed to pray.[51]

Unfortunately, it seems unlikely that these were isolated incidents. The Asian Human Rights Commission, in a press release dated 14 January 2008, had highlighted two recent cases of torture at Wat Chianghai, but this international appeal seems not to have averted the repetition of similar acts of torture in the weeks that followed.[52] The willingness of the Thai security forces – commanded almost entirely by Buddhists – to commit systematic acts of serious torture lasting up to a week, within the sacred space of a Buddhist temple, was deeply shocking. It is doubly disturbing that Muslim detainees were not permitted to exercise their own most basic religious freedom – the right to pray – whilst incarcerated within a renowned Buddhist temple.

The intimate connections between the security forces and the sangha demonstrated that Thai Buddhism was far from civil; it was not even essentially civilian, but an additional arm of the security state. By militarising

51 Amnesty International, *Thailand: torture in the southern counter-insurgency*, p. 17.

52 See Asian Human Rights Commission, 'Thailand: alleged torture of two men in southern Thailand', Urgent Appeal Case AHRC-UAC-005-2008, 14 January 2008, at http://www.humanrights.asia/news/urgent-appeals/AHRC-UAC-005-2008 accessed 21 March 2011.

Buddhism, the authorities arguably risked exposing monks, temples and civilians to further attacks; at the very least, they further reinforced the equation of nation, religion and Buddhism which alienated many Malay Muslims from Thai rule.

Local Buddhist militias

Security for temples was not only provided by full time soldiers and police officers, but also by local militias. Crucial among these was *Or Ror Bor,* which operated in Buddhist communities and came under the patronage of the Queen.[53] A senior royal aide-de-camp, General Naphon Boontap, played a key role in establishing this programme and training the volunteers.[54] *Or Ror Bor* drew inspiration from a controversial speech made by the Queen on 16 November 2004, in which she had called upon the 300,000 Buddhists in the southern border provinces to learn how to shoot – adding that she herself would learn to shoot without wearing her glasses.[55] Volunteers were generally better equipped and organised than the more widespread *Chor Ror Bor*,[56] and more highly motivated. *Or Ror Bor* was also quite well funded: the 46 volunteers in one Pattani scheme received 100 baht for every shift they worked, and eight people were on duty each night, operating in two shifts. Around 30 of them had their own guns, and 20 had been trained to shoot by rangers. Whereas *Chor Ror Bor* was rather vague in focus, *Or Ror Bor* was clearly organised to defend Buddhists from Muslim assailants, and security teams were often based in temples. In total, more than 100,000 people were members of the various militia groups in the southern border provinces.[57] Volunteers worked alongside soldiers and police officers, and constituted a de facto paramilitary force. In the face of criticism that village defence projects

53 Interview with an *Or Ror Bor* supervisor, Pattani, 23 April 2006. *Or Ror Bor* stands for อาสาสมัครรักษาหมู่บ้าน or civil volunteers for village protection.

54 ICG, 'The problem with paramilitaries', p. 19.

55 Somewhat divergent accounts of the speech were given in *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation*, 17 November 2004. Full Thai text http://www.manager.co.th/Home/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=947000008317 last accessed on 31 July 2008.

56 *Chor Ror Bor*, ชรบ. a programme of rotating teams of nightwatchmen in all villages across the southern border provinces, was administered by village headmen and supported by the Interior Ministry.

57 Diana Sarosi and Janjira Sombutpoonsiri, *Rule by the gun: armed civilians and firearms proliferation in southern Thailand*, Bangkok: Nonviolence International South East Asia, May 2009, p. 15. www.humansecuritygateway.com/.../NVISEA_ArmedCiviliansFirearms Proliferation_Thailand.pdf, accessed 21 March 2011.

exacerbated tensions between Buddhists and Muslims, General Naphol gave a press conference in July 2005:[58]

> General Naphon said the purpose of the news conference was to refute misinformation by adversaries, who charge that the training of village defence volunteers is aimed at pitting Thai Buddhists against Thai Muslims. He denied that the project had such a motive; [he said] it aims to enable people to protect themselves. Regarding the project's origin, villagers in Tanyonglimo sub-district called on the Queen to ask for assistance because their villages were attacked by motorcycle gangs at night. Gang members shot into their homes and viciously attacked villagers when they were working on fruit farms. Some victims were beheaded. Such vicious acts never occurred [before] in Thailand. The Queen told them that as they were born here and their ancestors earned their livelihood here, they should not migrate elsewhere. They should find ways to protect themselves.
>
> General Naphon said: 'The Queen often said that everyone has a right to defend himself in the face of danger. The training is not aimed at encouraging people to arm themselves to attack others. There is no intention to divide people who have different religious beliefs. The Queen said she would ask the Fourth Army Region commander to send troops to supervise local people on their defence. When people group together, adversaries cannot hurt them. They assist each other to tap rubber and work on farms. Strangers have not breached village perimeters since villagers received arms training. There have merely been occasional shootings to intimidate, not to kill. The training is aimed at giving villagers a capability to protect their property. After the training was launched, two villagers were killed while they were going to the city for business.

General Naphol's statement illustrated the pressures placed on rural Buddhists: they had been instructed by the Queen, no less, to remain where they were and to defend themselves at all costs. The assertion that local Buddhists had been born where they were currently living was a problematic one; while many did have deep roots in their localities, some Buddhists in the southern border provinces had migrated there quite recently, as indeed had many Muslims. During the 1960s, the National Economic and Social Development Board sought to boost the Buddhist population of the region through schemes to encourage migration into the area.[59] In districts such

58 'BBC Monitoring International Reports, 'Thai official says Queen's projects'.

59 For details of some of these schemes, see National Economic and Social Development Bureau, สรุปสาระสำคัญ แผนพัฒนาการ เศรษฐกิจและสังคมแห่งชาติ ฉบับที่๒ (๒๕๑๐-๒๕๑๔), สำนักงาน

as Bannang Sata in Yala, development projects had led to large-scale movements of population. To complicate matters further, land originally allocated to Buddhists from the upper south in the 1970s had later been sold, often to Buddhists from Pattani or other nearby areas.[60]

While the creation of *Or Ror Bor* was on one level an extremely logical development on the part of a threatened minority community, organising militias along communal lines was also replete with dangers. For some prominent figures in the southern Buddhist community, *Or Ror Bor* was just a small step in the important direction of preparing for the day when Malay Muslim militants would attempt to drive Buddhists out of their homes en masse. Huge numbers of local Buddhists had bought guns. One district officer did a roaring trade in gun permits; he had a collection of gun catalogues in his office, and would take orders for the weapons at the same time as he issued the licences. A low-ranking government official and shooting instructor who had trained dozens of local Buddhists on a firing range never actually carried a gun,[61] believing that possessing a gun could actually put an individual in greater danger. But every single Buddhist in this rural community knew how to shoot. According to this informant, the purpose of training local Buddhists to shoot was not so that they could protect themselves while travelling to and from work, as popular understandings suggested. Rather, weapons training formed part of the preparations for a future civil war, during which Buddhists might need to defend their communities from large-scale attacks and attempts at ethnic cleansing. The villagers had discussed among themselves how they would defend the community to the last house. The violence had brought Buddhist villagers closer together because of their sense of a shared threat. Large numbers of Buddhists in the region, whether or not they were members of militia groups, had purchased firearms, often aided by a relaxation in gun licensing rules and by state subsidised weapons purchase schemes.[62] Gun ownership in the region increased around 10 per cent annually between 2004 and 2008.

During our interview, the shooting instructor pointed to Muslims taking a motorcycle shortcut along a nearby road, and explained that some locals favoured creating their own checkpoint here to keep Muslims out of the Buddhist area, especially after dark.[63] The two communities already enjoyed

สภาพัฒนาเศรษฐกิจแห่งชาติ กรกฎาคม ๒๕๑๑ [Summary of the Second National Economic and Social Development Plan (1967–71)], Bangkok: National Economic and Social Development Bureau, July 1968, pp. 32, 63–7.

60 Conversations with Buddhist villagers in Bannang Sata, Yala, July 2007.

61 Interview, 13 April 2006.

62 Sarosi and Janjira, *Rule by the gun*, pp. 15–18,

63 Ibid.

substantial de facto separation: Buddhists did not send their children to schools – even government schools – in Muslim areas, and vice versa. One local high school which formerly had 1,000 pupils now had less than 200 students. This resulted from Muslim parents moving their children to private Islamic schools, and from local Buddhist parents sending their children to better and safer high schools, either government or private, in the nearby town. Under such conditions, both adults and children lived in fear. In the words of one 10 year old Buddhist boy from Yala:

> My school is full of terror. The insurgents come to agitate and threaten us often. My parents say that they want to create a situation so that everyone's scared. They want us to be so scared that we stop going to school. They cut down all the trees in my school so there is no more shade. I'm jumpy on my way to school because I don't know when they might come and really hurt us. The teachers ask to close the school often because the insurgents create the situation. Both teachers and parents are worried about the safety of teachers and pupils. This happens very often.[64]

The older practices whereby members of the two communities would attend one another's festivals and religious ceremonies had now greatly declined, as had other forms of communication and trade. Only two Muslim traders still visited local Buddhist communities, while no Buddhist now dared ply their wares in adjoining Muslim areas. Inter-religious marriage, never practised by more than 2 to 3 per cent of the local population was now extremely rare. Resentment against Muslims was strongest among less educated Buddhist villagers, many of whom harboured intensely negative feelings.

During 2007, informal Buddhist militias became more and more widespread. A senior Yala police officer, Colonel Phitak Iadkaew, was the leading figure behind a movement called *Ruam Thai,* which by mid-year had trained some 6,000 members in security awareness and the use of weapons.[65] *Ruam Thai* had established 23 groups across the three provinces and from parts of Songkhla.[66] While the movement operated from a private rented house and received no formal government support, *Ruam Thai* was clearly condoned and abetted by elements of the Thai state. Allegations that *Ruam Thai* members were taking part in anti-Muslim vigilante attacks led to an abortive move by the regional police commander to transfer Phitak out of the area

64 This is one of many disturbing quotations from children living in the three provinces, both Buddhist and Muslim, in the excellent report, *Everyday fears: a study of children's perceptions of living in the southern border area of Thailand*, Bangkok: UNICEF Thailand, 2008, p. 11.

65 Interview with Police Colonel Phitak Iadkaew, 23 July 2007.

66 ICG, 'The problem with paramilitaries', pp. 20–1.

in June 2007. Even more alarming was the apparent growth of clandestine Buddhist militias not operating under the umbrella of formal organisations such as *Ruam Thai*. An informant involved in such a militia explained:

> Lots of people are ready to fight. Some people will run away, not everyone will fight, but in the end we will be able to fight. Even some Muslims are leaving the area because they can't do business here. There's a network of local Buddhists, we have guns, we are trained, we have radios. The purpose of the weapons and equipment is to defend ourselves if the army is pulled out or they send in Muslim rangers who turn their guns on us. We are prepared.[67]

In some areas, there had already been concerted attempts to drive out Buddhist villagers. This was especially true in the Bannang Sata and Than To areas of Yala;[68] following a spate of leaflets and violent incidents, in November 2006, some 227 villagers from two adjoining communities in the area fled their homes and took refuge in a temple in Yala town. While some 33 villagers later returned to their homes, most of the others had no intention of doing so. One of the returnees explained that for Buddhists to abandon their homes would be to abandon part of the land of the Thai nation (*phaendin*), and could ultimately lead to the map of Thailand being changed.[69] Some Buddhists were willing to make the brave, arguably foolhardy decision to stay in high risk areas, partly for the sake of a passionately held nationalist ideology. Other villagers who had remained in the area expressed growing anxieties about their predicament when I visited them a few months later; some were ready to leave if the Thai government would offer them compensation and help them to resettle elsewhere.[70]

The potential dangers of arming Buddhist militias were clearly illustrated on 9 April 2007, when a group of village defence volunteers opened fire on a group in Ban Pakdi, Bannang Sata, Yala, killing four Muslim students who were returning from the funeral of a local politician killed earlier that day.[71] The defence volunteers had apparently been attacked with sticks and rocks by funeral goers, who blamed the Thai authorities for the death. Incorporating ordinary citizens into the defence forces could have alarming consequences, leading to further violence and escalating tensions on the ground.[72]

67 Interview, 24 August 2006.

68 The two villages concerned are in different districts, but closely abut one another.

69 Interview with villagers, Than To, 20 January 2007.

70 Interview with villagers, July 2007.

71 ICG, 'The problem with paramilitaries', pp. 17–18. Interview with local Border Patrol Police commander, July 2007.

72 For a discussion, see Human Rights Watch, 'Thailand: government backed militias enflame violence', 18 April 2007, http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/04/18/thaila15729.

While from the outside it might appear that Buddhists were receiving preferential treatment from the state – through measures such as basing army units at temples – rural Buddhists in the three provinces felt largely ignored by the authorities, whom they believed were preoccupied with trying to placate the more vocal and aggressive Muslim majority. Nevertheless, not all Buddhists shared the dark, even apocalyptic views of the interviewees cited here. When one of my most outspoken informants took me to meet a group of his friends, explaining to them that he had been filling me in on their preparations for civil war, another prominent local Buddhist responded 'Oh, it's not to that point yet.'[73] In one small Narathiwat town, I met a Chinese woman in her eighties whose family had been living and trading in the town since the nineteenth century. Her children had insisted that she move to Bangkok with them following the outbreak of violence in 2004, but after eight months she had returned to Narathiwat, where she continued to sit in the entrance to her shophouse, spending each day chatting to passers-by.[74]

As one prominent Sino-Thai businessman in another part of Narathiwat explained, the key to making a good living was maintaining good relations with local Muslims, who comprised the great majority of both the customers and employees for Chinese-owned businesses.[75] Indeed, the category of 'Buddhist' needed to be unpacked; typically, government officials and villagers who identified themselves as 'Thai' were much more likely to feel alienated from the Muslim community than their Sino-Thai, business-oriented counterparts. Similarly, urban Buddhists who lived alongside Muslims in relatively integrated provincial towns were much more tolerant than rural Buddhists, who typically felt 'surrounded' and outnumbered by Muslim neighbours.

Monks and the National Reconciliation Commission

The NRC was established by the Thaksin government in March 2005, under the chairmanship of the respected former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun. The Commission's brief was to investigate the conflict in the south and make recommendations for alleviating it. Anand was given complete discretion to select the 50 members of the NRC, and he invited a number of prominent southern Muslims to join the Commission, including the heads of the Islamic Councils in the three provinces. He did not, however, invite any

htm last accessed on 14 May 2008.

73 Fieldnotes, 24 August 2006.

74 Fieldnotes, 6 June 2006.

75 Interview, 25 August 2006.

of their Buddhist counterparts, the chief monks of the southern provinces. Only two Buddhist monks joined the NRC: Phra Paisal Visalo, a nationally prominent peace activist and Isan-based abbot; and Phra Khru Dhammadharanipala Jotako, the abbot of Wat Thoongkoi, Pattani, born in Nakhon Si Thammarat, a long-time advocate of inter-faith dialogue in the south. While both of these monks were extremely distinguished and impressive, neither was considered representative of the monastic community in the three provinces. Anand's decision not to include the chief monks of the southern provinces was entirely understandable, since some of them were openly hostile to ideas of conflict resolution and reconciliation – but their exclusion opened up the NRC to criticism that the body was excessively pro-Muslim.

Such complaints surfaced on 20 October 2005, four days after the Wat Phromprasit attacks. Phra Maha Thawin Khemkaro, chief monk of Pattani province and the abbot of Wat Lak Muang, organised a declaration by the provincial monastic council containing 20 detailed proposals concerning the southern violence, for consideration by the government. The points in the declaration had something of the character of a random wish list, ranging from a demand for all temples in the three provinces to be provided with secure gates,[76] to a request that the government establish a Buddhist university in Pattani.[77] In a subsequent interview elaborating on the declaration, Phra Maha Thawin called for the NRC to be abolished because it was taking sides with the terrorists and exacerbating religious differences.[78] When asked whether this declaration might encourage division between Buddhists and Muslims, he replied that the two communities had already been divided for a long time. He attributed the growing problems to weak leadership and lack of government action, and argued that any organisation set up to address the southern issue should be composed of local people or those with experience of working in the region. Phra Maha Thawin probably revealed something of his private agenda when he also remarked that General Panlop Pinmanee and General Kitti Rattanachaya – both well known for their hardline views on the conflict – should be given a role in addressing the problems in the south.[79]

76 แถลงการณ์ [Declaration], point 3.

77 แถลงการณ์ [Declaration], point 20.

78 แถลงการณ์ [Declaration], point 12, elaborated in Issara News Centre, เปิดใจ 'เจ้าคณะจังหวัดปัตตานี', กอส.เอาใจฝั่งตรงข้าม [The head of Pattani monks speaks out: the National Reconciliation Commission favours the other side], 23 October 2005.

79 See also, แถลงการณ์ [Declaration], point 5. In the declaration, Panlop, Kitti and former Fourth Army commander Phisan Wattananongkiri are described as really understanding the problems of the area, เข้าใจปัญหาในพื้นที่อย่างแท้จริง [*khao jai panha nai phunthi yang thae ching*], and sufficiently decisive, กล้าตัดสินใจ[*khla thatsinjai*]. Of course, Panlop was known primarily for his decisiveness in ordering the fatal

The interview with the chief Pattani monk quickly became headline news in the Bangkok press, and other comments followed. A group of Mahanikai monks explicitly criticised the lack of representation for local monks on the NRC, and asked how the NRC could reach an informed and balanced view when it included so many Muslims and outsiders.[80] One local monk, Phra Chaiyut Chotiwangso from Wat Burapuram in Pattani, complained that the authorities often convened meetings of 'religious leaders' to which only Muslims were invited. He was later quoted as saying that Buddhists were now being treated as second class citizens by Muslims in the three provinces, and some monks had left the areas, leaving the remaining monks unable to conduct Buddhist activities properly.[81] He argued that it was now time for monks in the three border provinces to get involved in politics, since they had kept quiet for a long time, with no results. Phra Khru Sankarm Somjai of Wat Prachumthara in Narathiwat questioned just who the NRC was working for, and pointed out that monks had been forced to change the way they performed their religious duties. In the past they often used Muslim-owned vehicles when they travelled around the region, but now had to be taken everywhere by Buddhists, make sure they returned to their temples early, and think carefully about the routes they took when travelling.

In response to this chorus of criticism, Anand and other NRC members visited Phra Maha Thawin on 11 November 2005, to listen to his views and assure him of their sympathy and sincerity. Somewhat to their surprise, they found that the senior monk's main complaints were actually directed at the government rather than the NRC.[82] The NRC also visited Wat Phromprasit on 13 November; Anand and other senior commissioners talked to the abbot, other local abbots, and to a gathering of Buddhist villagers. On 19 February 2006, the NRC visited another Buddhist temple in Narathiwat, and the following day hosted an inter-faith dialogue meeting between senior Muslim clerics and local monks. Yet despite these gestures, hostility to the NRC

storming of the historic Kru-Ze mosque on 28 April 2004, while Phisan was forced out of his post after the deaths of 78 unarmed Tak Bai protestors in military custody on 25 October 2004.

80 Issara News Centre, 'พระมหานิกายวอนกอส.และรัฐบาลเปิดเวทีรับฟังความเห็นคณะสงฆ' [Mahanikai monks ask National Reconciliation Commission and the government to listen to the views of the sangha], 26 October 2005.

81 Issara News Centre, 'เมื่อพระต้องพูด! เสียงสะท้อนจากชายแดนใต้' [When monks have to speak! Reflections from the southern border], 27 October 2005.

82 Fieldnotes, 11–12 November 2005. Anand suspected that monks were somewhat suspicious of him because he had never been ordained himself, on account of his bad back. But a close reading of the 20 October declaration shows that the NRC – which is mentioned only in the twelfth of 20 points – was not the monks' main target; the call for its abolition seems to have been a strategy to grab media attention.

remained widespread among the monastic and lay Buddhist communities in the southern border provinces. One abbot involved in the preparations for the February 2006 meeting criticised the event as meaningless, and the NRC as ineffective. At the meeting, religious leaders from both sides had agreed to control their followers, but Muslim leaders had not kept their side of the bargain:

> We can control our followers so violence doesn't come from Buddhists, but they cannot control their followers. They don't keep the agreement.[83]

Anusart Suwanmongkol, a Sino-Thai hotelier who topped the polls in Pattani's April 2006 Senate election, acknowledged that expressing support for the NRC was not a vote winner with local Buddhists. Fortunately, he had not been invited to join the NRC, membership of which might have cost him dearly in the Senate race. He certainly had no enthusiasm for raising the issue of the report in parliament:

> As a Buddhist senator, it would be very difficult for me to raise the issue, because most of the Buddhists disagreed with the report. To me, there's no core constituency in the report. Most Muslims don't really care. The only people who do are the academics. The Buddhists voters don't care at all. Would it be prudent for me to raise the issue?[84]

For the most part, the NRC was regarded by Buddhists in the south as selling out their interests to the Muslim majority, part of a broader process of marginalisation. Only the Queen, Panlop, Kitti and a few other outspoken conservative Thai nationalists were seen as consistently sympathetic regarding Buddhist fears and concerns.

NRC member Phra Paisal was sceptical about the 20-point 'anti-NRC' declaration of 20 October 2005, saying that the declaration had been agreed by a show of hands, and only about 5 of the 20 points had been debated and agreed by the provincial sangha council members.[85] The outcome was emotional rather than rational. Another well informed figure pointed out that very few of the senior monks in Pattani actually signed the declaration,[86] which was organised by two or three prominent figures in the monastic

83 Abbot interview, 11 August 2006.

84 Anusart interview, 28 August 2006. Because of the 19 September 2006 military coup, Anusart was not able to take up his Senate seat. However, in early 2008 he was made an appointed Senator under the terms of the 2007 constitution, which had transformed the Senate from an all elected body to a part elected, part appointed one.

85 Interview, 19 February 2006.

86 Interview, 11 June 2006.

community, including Phra Maha Charat Uchujaro of Wat Chang Hai.[87] He believed the declaration had actually been orchestrated by a group of conservative military figures, including former Fourth Army Commander Phisan Wattananongkiri, and some of General Panlop's subordinates. They had tried to use the monastic order as a means of discrediting the current military leadership of army chief Sonthi and Fourth Army Commander Ongkorn Thongprasom, who were committed to a 'softly softly' approach to the southern conflict. In other words, the declaration had little to do with the NRC, and much more to do with internal power struggles between hardline and liberal factions inside the army. The overlap between the monastic order and Thailand's state security structures was clearly illustrated by the somewhat spurious NRC controversy, which nevertheless illustrated some real anxieties on the part of southern Buddhists.

Conclusion

This chapter has challenged notions that Thai Buddhism is a form of 'civil religion', by focusing on the precarious position of Thai Buddhists in the Muslim-dominated southernmost provinces of the country in the period following January 2004. Buddhists in the region were deeply apprehensive, faced with regular militant attacks and a propaganda campaign aimed at driving them out of the area. Many temples were barely functioning, and some had been transformed into de facto military bases. Relations between Buddhist and Muslim communities had sharply deteriorated, and many Buddhists were deeply suspicious of Muslim political and religious leaders. They were also extremely sceptical about attempts by outsiders – ranging from the NRC to human rights groups and the OIC – to play a role in mediating or monitoring the conflict. Some Buddhists feared that such interventions could form the prelude to a sell-out of their interests on the part of the government. Encouraged by the Queen and by some elements in the security forces, Buddhists were undertaking weapons training and forming their own militias, partly for their immediate self-defence, but also in preparation for what some feared could degenerate into an all-out civil war.

By no means all Buddhists were preparing for Armageddon, and most Buddhists in the south demonstrated considerable restraint in the face of intense provocation. Norms of reciprocity and mutual tolerance that had endured for generations did not vanish overnight. Many Buddhist reactions

87 Phra Maha Charat Uchujaro's handwritten name and mobile phone number have been added to my faxed copy of the declaration, which bears no signatures at all.

to their growing sense of physical danger, marginalisation and encirclement were entirely reasonable and understandable. Nevertheless, the position of Buddhists in the region offers significant challenges to received and outmoded understandings of Thai Buddhism as a tolerant and diverse form of 'civil religion'. Buddhist chauvinism was on the rise in Thailand, both in the south and elsewhere, and popular responses to violent incidents such as the March 2007 Yala minibus attack revealed the extent to which hardline nationalist discourse and anti-Muslim sentiments were becoming increasingly overt and mainstream elements of Thai Buddhist identity and thinking. In a response to my criticisms, Charles Keyes has usefully clarified and refined his earlier arguments about 'civil Buddhism', acknowledging that more tolerant forms of Thai Buddhism are in constant tension with a highly nationalistic 'establishment Buddhism'.[88] A rather more nuanced set of arguments has been made by my Leeds colleagues Martin Seeger and Michael Parnwell, who suggest on the basis of extensive fieldwork on local forms of Buddhism that

> the liberating tendencies of relocalization and democratization have given rise to a wide variety of interpretations as to the appropriate path forward and beyond the historical constraints of a homogenized and centralized civic Buddhism.[89]

As collective national anxieties rose about the royal succession and the future political direction of the country following the anachronistic 19 September 2006 military coup, many Thai Buddhists were turning inward. One response was to look towards popular religion and superstition, illustrated by the extraordinary cult of Jatukham Rammathep protective amulets in the first half of 2007. Another response was to see Buddhism as under threat from Islam, a threat epitomised by – and yet by no means confined to – the southern violence. While Buddhist individuals and communities in the south began arming and militarising themselves under royal patronage, elements of the sangha joined a nationwide campaign to enshrine the place of Buddhism in Thailand's next constitution. Key elements of Thai Buddhism were becoming increasingly particularistic, more national and markedly less civil. In the light of these disturbing developments, new, more critical and more empirically grounded approaches to the study of Thai Buddhism are urgently needed.

88 Charles Keyes, 'Muslim "others" in Buddhist Thailand', *Thammasat Review* 13 (2008/2009): 19–42.

89 Michael Parnwell and Martin Seeger, 'The relocalization of Buddhism', *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 29 (2008): 78–173, http://www.buddhistethics.org/ accessed 21 March 2011.

CHAPTER 3

Managing Islam[1]

I don't think there is political interference, because Islam is also politics. Islam does not separate this life and the next life, and it's different from Buddhism because in Islam the worldly leader and the prophet is the same person. We can't separate politics and religion.[2]

Securing the loyalty of religious community leaders has long been a priority for many states. Where these leaders head a community characterised by violent division and conflict, the imperative to keep them on board seems all the greater.[3] Although 'but one cultural component of the ethnic or nationalist mindset',[4] religious differences may serve as an important trigger for tensions that brim over into violence. In the post 9/11 world, many nations have been especially anxious about the need to monitor, to placate and to manage potentially restless Muslim minority populations whom they see as a threat.[5] At the same time, Muslims often view matters very differently. L. Carl Brown argues that 'quietism' and

1 An earlier version of this chapter was published in *Government and Opposition* 45, 1 (2010): 93–113 as 'Co-optation and resistance in Thailand's Muslim south: the changing role of Islamic council elections'. The author thanks Government and Opposition Ltd and Blackwell Publishing for permission to reproduce the original article.

2 Den Tohmeena, quoted in 'การเมืองแทรกคัดเลือกกรรมการอิสลาม' [Political interference in the Islam council elections], 24 November 2005, Issara News Centre, 24 November 2005.

3 For an example from a British context, see Rachel Briggs, Catherine Fieschi and Hannah Lownsbrough, *Bringing it home: community-based approaches to counter-terrorism*, London: Demos, 2006.

4 Jeff Haynes, *Religion in third world politics*, Boulder CO: Lynne Reinner, 1994, p. 151.

5 See Prina Werbner, 'Divided loyalties, empowered citizenship: Muslims in Britain', in Michael Waller and Andrew Linklater (eds), *Political loyalty and the nation-state*, London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 105–22.

'pessimism' characterise the views of many Muslims towards the state, even in Arab societies: a feeling that the state has little to do with them, and that they lack any influence over it.[6] This feeling is only compounded where Muslims form a minority community. As such, they may be deeply wary of government attempts to monitor or control their activities.

For the most part, Western social scientists remain deeply attached to ideas of secularism and appear reluctant to engage in close critical readings of the messy interactions between secular and religious forms of authority and power.[7] Such a state of affairs is mirrored in developing countries such as Thailand, which has no official national religion, yet for all practical purposes is de facto a Buddhist nation. The relationship between politics and religion remains largely a no-go area, both for media commentary and local academic research. Yet the presence of a virulent insurgency in the country's southern border provinces – which has claimed the lives of more than 4,600 people since 2004 – makes these issues extremely salient.[8] As Greg Fealy has argued in relation to Indonesia and Malaysia, increased 'religiosity does not, of itself, necessarily lead to more overtly Islamic politics'.[9] He draws a clear distinction between Islamism – in essence, greater piety – and Islamicisation. In his view, the politicisation of Islam arises from factors such as 'the complexity of the *umma*, the nature of the political system and the dynamics between Islamic parties'.[10] In the context of Thailand, which has no Islamic parties, it could be deduced that a more Islamicised politics may only emerge if and when 'secular' political forces – such as the army, the bureaucracy and national political parties – seek to enlist Islamic institutions for their own political projects.

Thailand has long sought to manage religious affairs through a centralised, top down system that enforces orthodoxies of belief and practice. This approach is epitomised in the administration of Buddhism by the Office of the Prime Minister – until recently by the Ministry of Education. Buddhist

6 L. Carl Brown, *Religion and state: the Muslim approach to politics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, pp. 68–75.

7 See John Keane, 'Secularism', in David Marquand and Ronald L. Nettler (eds), *Religion and democracy*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, especially pp. 14–19.

8 For classic accounts of the background and origins to the current conflict, see Surin Pitsuwan, *Islam and Malay nationalism: a case study of Malay Muslims of southern Thailand*, Bangkok: Thai Khadi Research Institute, 1985; and Wan Kadir Che Man, *Muslim separatism: the Moros of southern Philippines and the Malays of southern Thailand*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990.

9 Greg Fealy, 'Islamicisation and politics in Southeast Asia', in Nelly Lahoud and Anthony H. Johns (eds), *Islam in world politics*, London: Routledge, 2005, p. 167.

10 Fealy, 'Islamicisation', p. 167.

movements that adopt non-mainstream beliefs and practices are subjected to official harassment of the kind used against the Santi Asoke group in the late 1980s, and against Wat Thammakai a decade later. Although the Thai constitution enshrines the freedom of religion as an individual right, religious organisations are subject to constant monitoring and regulation.[11] For example, one Christian organisation – the Hope of the Thai People Foundation – was refused permission to set up a church, after the Thai government's Religious Affairs Department consulted five major Christian organisations in the early 1990s. In effect, Christian churches such as the Baptists and Seventh Day Adventists were permitted to veto the establishment of a rival church.[12] As Erick White argues, the Thai state has also waged a longstanding war on spirit mediums, a mission often sub-contracted to 'self-appointed guardians and arbiters of the collective good: virtuous monks, public intellectuals and zealous reporters'.[13]

A broadly similar approach has been applied to Islam in Thailand. As leading Thai historian Nidhi Aeusrivongse has argued, Thai Buddhist monks are effectively *kharatchakan*, government officials. The Thai state has sought to make imam, the official heads of registered mosques, into a form of government proxy, answerable to the Chularajamontri or Shaikh Al-Islam (often misleadingly referred to as the 'spiritual leader' of Thai Muslims, who is also a royal adviser on Islamic affairs) through a national level Islamic council. Since 1999, local imam have elected members of 29 provincial Islamic councils, who in turn nominate members of the national Islamic council and send delegates to select the Chularajamontri.[14]

The intention here was to nationalise Islam in Thailand, curbing its dissident tendencies and linking it to the legitimacy of the state. The Islamic council system forms part of what Keyes and Swearer have portrayed (in the parallel Buddhist context) as 'civic religion' or 'civil religion' in Thailand;[15] in Hefner's term, it constitutes an attempt to institutionalise

11 David Streckfuss and Mark Templeton, 'Human rights and political reform in Thailand', in Duncan McCargo (ed.), *Reforming Thai politics*, Copenhagen: NIAS, 2002, pp. 73–90.

12 'Panel probes Christian group: Den – irregularities in registration', *Bangkok Post*, 21 January 1999.

13 Erick White, 'Fraudulent and dangerous popular religiosity: moral campaigns to prohibit, reform and demystify Thai spirit mediums', in Andrew C. Willford and Kenneth M. George (eds), *Spirited politics: religion and public life in contemporary Southeast Asia*, Ithaca NY: Cornell University Southeast Asian Program, 2005, p. 90.

14 See Imtiyaz Yusuf, 'Islam and democracy in Thailand: reforming the Office of the Chularajamontri/Shaikh Al-Islam', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 9, 2 (1998): 277–98.

15 Keyes, 'Buddhism fragmented', p. 225.

a 'civil Islam' in which religion is intimately linked to the wider agendas of Thai society and integrated into notionally representative political structures.[16] Writers such as Omar have argued that the involvement of Muslims in different forms of electoral politics is a positive development, reflecting wider agendas of democratisation and political reform.[17] On the face of it, 'opening up' previously remote and unaccountable religious bodies to processes of free selection would seem to be a positive step for Thailand.

At the same time, the administrative structure of Thai Islam is highly problematic. Islam in Thailand is by no means monolithic. Shiites, though making up only 1 to 2 per cent of Thai Muslims, continue to play important roles.[18] Yet the most significant divide is between the Malay Muslims of the southern border provinces, and the more heterogeneous Muslims in the rest of Thailand, who are typically much more integrated into the wider Buddhist-dominated society. Gilquin argues that there are around 5 million Muslims in Thailand, between 3.5 and 4 million of them in the south.[19] While the precise numbers of Muslims are contested, all concur that the overwhelming majority of Thailand's Muslims are in the south, primarily the far south; and yet the office of the Chularajamontri was long monopolised by Muslims from central Thailand. Indeed, Malay Muslims tend to view the Chularajamontri as not representative of their aspirations, and

> . . . comments and statements made by non-Malay (and non-Malay speaking) Muslim political, community and religious leaders are not deemed by Malay Muslims to be legitimate articulations of their grievances.[20]

Islamic councils have limited functions. Officially, they exist to advise the provincial governor on Islamic affairs, and are thus intimately tied to the power of the Thai state. It is clear that cooptation is a central plank of the Islamic council system: one newly elected member of the Yala Islamic Council proudly showed me his certificates of appointment from the governor and army commander, which he had already framed.[21] Islamic councils have a role in resolving religious disputes (mainly over inheritance and divorce)

16 Robert Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and democratization in Indonesia*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

17 Omar Farouk Bajunid, 'Islam, nationalism and the Thai state', in Wattana Sugunnasil (ed.), *Dynamic diversity in southern Thailand*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 2005, pp. 1–19.

18 Michel Gilquin, *The Muslims of Thailand*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 2005, pp. 19–20.

19 Ibid., pp. 39–40.

20 Joseph C. Liow, *Islam, education and reform in Southern Thailand: tradition and transformation*, Singapore: ISEAS Press, 2009, p. 22.

21 Interview, 25 January 2006.

that are beyond the expertise of imam; they also preside over the appointment of imam, collect *zakat* (Islamic taxes) to support their activities, and play a role in issuing halal food certificates, a complex, controversial and potentially lucrative area.[22]

Given the current political violence in the southern border provinces, the leadership of Muslim communities in the sub-region has become a matter of considerable interest to the Thai state and its security forces.[23] The government would like to see provincial Islamic councils in the three provinces take a strong stand against violence, rejecting separatist ideology and the spread of radical or militant strains of Islamic thinking. Since January 2004, the Thai authorities have been seeking to enlist provincial Islamic councils in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat as allies in its struggle against violent movements calling for the creation of an independent state in the area. Following the storming of the historic Kru-Ze mosque on 28 April 2004, the then Chularajamontri Sawas Sumalayasak, an elderly former Democrat Party MP from Bangkok, publicly supported the military operation to seize the mosque, which led to the deaths of 32 suspected militants.[24] Sawas's statements on this subject greatly undermined his standing among Malay Muslims, rendering him largely ineffective as a voice for moderation in the region. The state's emphasis shifted to co-opting local religious leaders. Pattani Governor Panu Uthairat explained that if a particular imam was suspected of militant sympathies, the governor would ask the provincial Islamic council president to host them both for dinner, and deliver a warning to the suspect.[25] Andrew Cornish has argued that the more the Thai state interferes in the running of Malay villages in the region, the more resistance will be generated, and the more violence is likely to result. His argument has been clearly borne out by developments since 2004.[26] The Pattani Islamic Council, formed under new legislation in 1999, was widely perceived by the Thai authorities as a site of resistance to the power of the state. The Pattani Council was dominated by Den Tohmeena, a member of the Thai Senate, a former MP and deputy minister, and founding father of the Wadah group

22 Thirteen functions of the provincial Islamic councils are laid out in Article 26 of the Islamic Organizations Act of 1997.

23 For discussions of the violence, see several recent reports by ICG www.crisisgroup.org; McCargo, *Tearing apart the land;* Askew, 'Thailand's intractable southern war'.

24 Imtiyaz Yusuf, 'The role of the *Chularajmontri* (*Shaykh al-Islam*) in resolving ethno-religious conflict in southern Thailand', *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 27,1 (2010): 44–46.

25 Interview, 25 May 2006.

26 Andrew Cornish, *Whose place is this? Malay rubber producers and Thai government officials in Yala*, Bangkok: White Lotus, 1997, p. 118.

of Muslim MPs from the deep south.[27] Den's importance in the southern Thai context derives from his family background as a representative of the Tohmeena *trakun* (literally, dynasty). His father was Haji Sulong, an Islamic leader and an outspoken critic of Thai government policy in the south.[28] Haji Sulong disappeared in 1954, along with his son Ahmat, after reporting to the police in Songkhla. Den's brother, Ameen, then took up the cudgels of the Malay Muslim cause, only to be forced into exile in Malaysia in 1980. Trading on widespread local sympathy for the treatment of his father and brother, Den was able to secure longstanding political support in Pattani province. Den saw himself as articulating ideas of Malay Muslim identity and rights, but has consistently denied that he harboured any sympathy for political violence or separatist causes.[29]

Den was not simply a local politician. As a member of parliament in the late 1990s, he chaired the House Religious Affairs Committee and was instrumental in introducing the legislation that instigated the current system of provincial Islamic council elections. Den himself insisted that the process was not one of election, but of selection, since some critics argued that Islam contains no provision for elections.[30] Previously, 30-member provincial Islamic councils were appointed by a rolling, papal-style system of self-perpetuation – when one member died or resigned, the remaining members would invite someone to take his place. Den's reforms limited the terms of Islamic councils to six years, and gave all imam one set of voting rights: each imam could cast 30 votes for the slate of his choice. Pattani has around 600 imam, of whom 592 took part in the 2005 elections. These reforms gave individual imam considerable influence, in view of the very small size of the electorate.

In theory, the new system was much more open and democratic than the previous arrangements, since the old structure excluded those who lacked good personal connections to the existing council members, and in practice often led to dynastic politics: new members generally came from the same important religious families as those they replaced. It is difficult to offer any

27 On Den's family and political career, see James Ockey, 'Elections and political integration in the lower south of Thailand', in Michael J. Montesano and Patrick Jory (eds), *Thai south and Malay north: ethnic interactions on a plural peninsula*, Singapore: NUS Press, 2008, pp. 124–54.

28 Chalermkiat Khunthongpetch, เฉลิมเกียรติ ขุนทองเพชร, หะยีสุหลง อับดุลกาเดร์: กบฏ...หรือวีรบุรุษแห่งสี่จังหวัดภาคใต้ [Haji Sulong Abdul Kadir: rebel or hero of the four southern provinces], Bangkok: Matichon, 2004.

29 Den Tohmeena, เด่น โต๊ะมีนา, เลือดเนื้อใช่เชื้อไฟ [My family (flesh) is not behind the southern fires], Bangkok: Samnakngan Working Experience, 2005.

30 Conversation with Den Tohmeena, 24 November 2005.

robust intellectual or moral defence of such a system. However, the new system was also fraught with problems, since it had the potential to replicate many of the shortcomings of Thailand's electoral politics. Thai elections at all levels – from village headmen to the national parliament – have long been vitiated by problems of vote-buying and electoral manipulation.[31] Thailand struggled to curtail these abuses during the 1990s, and in 1997 agreed a new constitution that established an independent Election Commission and a range of other new agencies and regulations. Yet these reforms failed to prevent the continuing centrality of 'money politics', as illustrated by the fact that in 2001 one of Thailand's richest men – billionaire telecommunications tycoon Thaksin Shinawatra – successfully bought his way to the premiership. Vote-buying was based on networks of *hua khanaen*, or vote canvassers; securing election was all about ensuring support from these local power brokers, who often sold their services to the highest bidder.[32]

For his opponents, Den's creation of an election system for Islamic councils was hardly a disinterested move, but one that reached far beyond Muslim issues. By incorporating imam – a politically influential group, since their views could sway voting decisions, especially in rural communities – into a political network to support a particular team of Islamic council candidates, Den planned to create a network of *hua khanaen* that would strengthen his family's political base in Pattani. In effect, this was a continuation of his longstanding political strategy, seen in the 1980s in the creation of a group of Islamic leaders (*ali ulama*) as a core component of his Wadah political faction.[33] Mobilising imam was important for elections at all levels, but in November 2005 the main target in view was the April 2006 Senate elections. The 1997 constitution limited senators to a single six-year term, but Den was determined to pass on his seat to his daughter, Pechdau, a Malaysian-trained medical doctor and social activist. Though highly educated and well qualified, Pechdau faced various obstacles in her pursuit of a Pattani Senate seat. She was a woman – a major electoral handicap in such a conservative area – and she had spent her entire adult life working

31 See Sombat Chantornvong, สมบัติ จันทรวงศ์, เลือกตั้งวิกฤต :ปัญหาและทางออก [Elections in crisis: problems and solutions], Bangkok: Kobfai, 1993; William A. Callahan and Duncan McCargo, 'Vote-buying in Thailand's northeast: the July 1995 general election', *Asian Survey* 36, 4 (1996): 376–93.

32 On vote canvassers, see Anyarat Chattharakul, 'Networks of vote-canvassers in Thai elections: informal power and money politics', PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2007.

33 Phichai Kaosamran, Somchaet Naksewi and Worawit Baru, พิชัย เก้าสำราญ, สมเจตน์ นาคเสวี และ วรวิทย์ บารู 'การเลือกตั้งปัตตานี ปี 2529 ศึกษากรณีกระบวนการหาเสียงและระบบหัวคะแนน' [1986 elections in Pattani: case study of the system of campaigning and vote-canvassing], Bangkok: Foundation for Democracy and Development Studies, 1988, p. 29.

and studying outside Pattani. Den faced a struggle to ensure that she could inherit his seat, and the support of imam would be crucial. The 2005 Pattani Islamic Council elections were a crucial stepping stone in locking in that support. Also important were the forthcoming national elections for the Islamic Council of Thailand, of which Den was then the secretary.

Many of Thailand's senior military and security officials regarded Den with deep suspicion, believing that his role both in Pattani and at the national level was inimical to the country's broader interests. In April 2004, Den was openly accused of harbouring active separatist sympathies and supporting the campaign of violence that flared up in Thailand's deep south from January 2004. A highly detailed confidential 97-page intelligence report prepared for the prime minister early in 2004 identified Den as one of the major culprits behind the renewed insurgency, along with other members of his Wadah group, including some sitting Thai Rak Thai MPs. This confusing intelligence report, a mish-mash of elaborate conspiracy theories, typified the muddied waters of Thaksin government thinking about the conflict during this period. Matters were not helped by the fact that the president of the 1999–2005 Pattani Islamic Council, Waeduramae Mamingchi, came under strong suspicion when Abdullah Pahsee, aged 20, was arrested and charged with the murder of Rapin Ruang, a Pattani judge, on 17 September 2004. Abdullah had been living at the Triam Sueksa School owned by Waeduramae. The Pattani Islamic Council president, who was widely perceived as a front man for Den, insisted that he was horrified to find that his school had housed someone accused of such a crime.[34]

While no compelling evidence ever emerged to suggest that Den and leading members of the Pattani Islamic Council were themselves implicated in the violence, a second source of frustration for many Thai government officials was the apparent passivity of the Islamic council in the face of a deteriorating security situation. The authorities wanted the Islamic council to speak out against the violence, criticising it from a religious perspective or even issuing a fatwah denouncing political violence as unIslamic. The Pattani Islamic Council showed little interest in such ideas, preferring to avoid confrontation by sitting on the fence. An activist supporting the challengers on the day of the Islamic council election argued that the studied silence practised by the Pattani Council amounted to a de facto support for those behind the violence: neutrality was just a cover for tacit sympathy for separatism.[35] He claimed that the Pattani Islamic Council chairman simply ignored instructions from

34 Anthony Davies, 'School system forms the frontline in Thailand's southern unrest', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, November 2004, p. 14.

35 Interview, 24 November 2005.

the Chularajamontri to speak out against violence, and to instruct all imam to do the same. Yet the council's passive stance was understandable to many Muslims: as one prominent Muslim who had no personal sympathy for Den or the Pattani Islamic Council argued, any Muslim leader who expressed overt criticism of the violence would not be able to survive in post for long: he would either be killed, or be forced to flee.[36] In some respects, the criticisms made by the authorities reflected their inability to empathise with the impossible situation faced by Muslim leaders in the deep south.

Opposition to Den was not confined to the Thai authorities, and was not solely concerned with the question of his allegedly ambiguous stance towards political violence. For many devout Muslims in Pattani, Den was simply not the right figure to play a leading role in an Islamic council, at either national or provincial level: he was a lawyer by training and a politician by profession, and lacked the deep religious knowledge that ought to be a prerequisite for leadership in a Muslim society. Den had never studied Islam systematically, and presented himself first and foremost as a Malay. In this sense, he represented what is often termed the 'old school' of Pattani Malay Islam, a more traditionalist, syncretic form of religion. This was in contrast to the 'new school' of Islam that had grown more popular and influential in the previous couple of decades, reflecting more strict forms of practice brought in by Muslim teachers who had studied in the Middle East. The differences between these schools are debatable and elusive, but can be symbolised by small details such as the wearing of different coloured caps: black Malay caps vis-à-vis white Turkish caps.

The majority of rural Malays in Thailand's southern border provinces remain traditionalist adherents of the 'old school', but 'new school' thinking is dominant among academics and well educated Muslims. In some areas, conflicts between different schools of thought have led to the creation of second mosques in quite small villages, and resulted in considerable tensions over the election of imam. Den had sought to mobilise rural voters to resist the encroachment of the 'new school', partly as a way of securing his own political power base. So long as traditionalist Muslims continue to outnumber 'new school' adherents in Pattani and neighbouring provinces, the influence of a politics that emphasises 'Malayness' will be impossible to eradicate. To many Muslim intellectuals, Den represented all that was wrong with Islam in greater Pattani: a sentimental attachment to *barami cheung prawatisat* (literally, historical charisma), localist and regionalist sentiment that overshadowed the centrality of Islamic doctrines and practices.[37] For

36 Fieldnotes, 15 March 2006.

37 Interview, 24 January 2006.

Den, by contrast, the 'new school' was an attempt to impose alien notions of Islam that were inappropriate for Pattani, and which failed to recognise the distinctive history and culture of the region. He argued for a set of principles based on historical consciousness and a sense of Malay identity, accusing the new school of destroying Malayness by wearing Arab-style clothing and speaking Thai. The old school/new school dichotomy is absolutely not a simplistic divide between separatist sympathies and ideas of loyalty to the Thai state, but it is possible to read the divide at some level in these terms.[38]

During the Pattani Islamic Council elections of November 2005, a concerted attempt was made to oust the incumbent membership. This challenge was led by three major figures, all of them principals of prestigious Islamic private schools: Nideh Wabah, a very prominent and outspoken Islamic leader from Saiburi, who had close ties to the military and the monarchy, via his longstanding patron, privy councillor Palakorn Suwannarat; Asamad Kamae Waemuso, an Indian-educated and highly respected ulama; and Abdulwahab Abdulwahab, who had served as president of the Pattani Islamic Council before Den's 1999 reforms had seen him ousted from his post. The 30-member slate assembled by the challengers was full of intellectual heavyweights. The contenders argued that they represented a much more modern understanding of Islam: to be an imam, you needed a wide range of skills, a determination to change the ideas and thinking of the society, and the ability to promote a modern form of development.[39] Above all, members of Islamic councils needed to be religious experts, rather than people with secular backgrounds who assumed these posts for the purpose of supporting political positions. In the past, Den had been able to control the Islamic council because there were not enough well organised and articulate religious leaders in Pattani: most of the prominent Islamic scholars were not proficient in Thai, and lacked the range of skills needed to deal with the Thai state.

The challengers issued a series of 10 leaflets setting out their ideas and proposals and trying to 'educate' imam about the issues behind the election and the importance of the choices they were making. The first of those called for the selection of a capable and knowledgeable team, who would ensure that the Islamic council provided good services for people, based on principles of justice and using transparent budgetary practices that could be checked.[40] Some of these points reflected criticisms of the unprofessional and old-fashioned way in which the Islamic council worked in Pattani. The

38 For a detailed discussion see McCargo, *Tearing apart the land*, chapter 1.

39 Interview, 24 January 2006.

40 Details from a copy of a leaflet produced by the challenging team, headed '24.11.05'.

challengers campaigned on the slogans 'Distribute power back to imam' and 'Give imam their rights'. They argued that the previous team had made use of the votes of imam, but had failed to recognise or appreciate them. The challenging team included 22 imam on its 30-man slate, whereas the incumbents fielded only two imam. Even the incumbent president himself was not an imam, but a *khatib*, or deputy imam.[41] Many of the incumbents were *tadika* teachers.[42] The challenging team also included many teachers, but most of them were prominent figures with more than one role, combining teaching with serving as imam.[43]

This new opposition depicted the incumbents as a lacklustre team in terms of education, religious credentials and standing in the community: they were a slate of second-raters distinguished largely by their loyalty to Den and their subservience to his own political agendas. By contrast, the incumbent team argued that they were dedicated to improving the quality of education and information for imam. A central plank of their campaign was the creation of an 'imam college'; other policies included improving the curriculum for *tadika* schools to prevent instruction from supporting separatism, and bringing these schools under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education.[44]

In theory, the 2005 Pattani Islamic Council elections were a struggle over principles about religion and identity, and about the relative qualifications of the candidates. Two slates of 30 candidates stood for election, and both sides sought to persuade the electorate of imam to support only one slate. The process of persuasion soon spilled over into forms of money politics and electoral manipulation that were all too familiar to long-term students of Thailand's secular politics. Accusations of vote-buying were rife, with many arguing that both sides sought to secure the support of imam with monetary incentives. Islamic council elections were not subject to regulation by Thailand's independent Election Commission, and so the normal procedures for registering complaints about irregularities – which could lead to the disqualification of candidates, or even to elections being declared null and void – did not apply. Apart from allegations of vote-buying, there

41 Formally speaking, the *khatib* was responsible for leading Friday prayers and the *bilal* for making the call to prayer, but in practice these roles were often interchangeable and both men were regarded as deputy or assistant imam.

42 *Tadika* are privately run schools offering supplementary elementary education about Islam, mainly to children, rather like Christian 'Sunday schools'.

43 Interview, 24 January 2006.

44 Issara News Centre 'เปิดวิสัยทัศน์ประธานอิสลามปัตตานี: ตั้งวิทยาลัยอิหม่าม, ดึงตาดีกาเข้าระบบ' [The Islamic leader of Pattani's vision: establishing an 'imam college' and bringing *tadika* into the system], 1 December 2005. www.tjanews.org/cms

were also rumours of intimidation, and a general acceptance that both sides had invited groups of imam to attend 'seminars' during the run-up to the election, events that some saw as an indirect form of electoral lobbying or vote-buying.

Matters were further complicated by claims that one or both sides received moral and even financial support from elements of the military. Other rumours suggested that sources close to the ruling Thai Rak Thai Party were funding certain teams. Some fingers pointed at Pichet Sathirachawala, who hoped to replace Den as secretary-general of the Islamic Council of Thailand. Pichet was a recent convert to Islam, a former transport minister who had been barred from holding political office because of asset-declaration violations. According to some theories, Pichet's interventions were bankrolled by Khunying Potjaman, wife of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. In the crudest version of the theory, Pichet was primarily backing the incumbents on behalf of Thai Rak Thai, while the military and the Democrats were backing the challengers on behalf of the monarchy.

Since 2005, Thailand's national politics have involved clashes between two main power networks, those aligned with Thaksin Shinawatra (later the 'red shirt' movement that staged major protests in Bangkok in April 2009 and again from March-May 2010) and those aligned with 'network monarchy' (later the 'yellow shirt' movement that seized Bangkok's airports in December 2008).[45] In more sophisticated readings, Pichet was, in typical Thai fashion, supporting both competing teams in the Pattani elections, as a sure-fire means of firming up his own support base. And in yet more elaborate interpretations, the military was also backing both teams, using funds from its secret budget, in the hope of then co-opting whoever won.

The Pattani Islamic Council elections resulted in a split: the incumbent team loyal to Den secured 19 seats, while the challengers secured 11 seats. Many imam failed to cast all their votes for one slate or another, preferring to split their votes among preferred candidates from both slates. The positive interpretation of this vote-splitting was that these imam were seeking to select the best qualified candidates; a more cynical view was that they had been subjected to lobbying – or taken payments – from both sides, and sought to assuage their consciences by dividing their votes. A leading member of the challenging team argued that the 592 imam could be roughly divided into three groups of 200: one group firmly loyal to Den, a second group strongly supportive of the challengers and a third group of waverers, on whom the outcome hinged.[46] This argument is broadly but not precisely

45 For a relevant discussion, see McCargo, 'Thai politics as reality TV'.

46 Interview, 24 January 2006.

supported by the election results: the top ranked candidate, the incumbent president, won 329 votes, and the lowest ranked candidate, number 30 on the list of challengers, won 200 votes. The top ranked challenger came in at number 7, with 310 votes – only a few votes less than the president. The lowest ranked incumbent was placed number 50 in the rankings, with 235 votes. This suggests that the core vote of the incumbents was 235, the core vote of the challengers was 200 and that the remaining 158 votes were available for the taking. Some imam were resentful of attempts to get them to vote for whole teams of candidates, rather than for the most capable and respected individuals on the ballot paper. As one argued: 'We'd like to select the whole team but can't because we also know people from the other team. I believe in the individual.'[47] Seng Mali, one of the members of the challenging team in Pattani, acknowledged that voting for individuals was actually a wise way of voting.

The challengers accused Den of paying waverers up to 10,000 baht each to support his team (at the time 40 baht = approx. US$1).[48] Those supporting the incumbents argued that the challengers had used funds from the military to buy support from the same group. Even the challengers admitted that on 23 November, the night before the election, they had taken over 200 imam to stay in a 'safe house', a hotel in Hat Yai, to ensure that Den's 'Republican Guard' could not get to them during the 'night of the howling dogs' and persuade them to change their minds.[49] In fact, the challengers invited 400 imam to join them, but half of them declined. Some actually boarded the buses to go to the hotel, but got off after receiving threatening phone calls. The imam who went to the safe house were taken directly from the hotel to the polling station in buses provided by the challenging team the following morning. The challengers claimed they had actually consulted Panu Uthairat, the governor of Pattani province, about this procedure and he had assured them it was perfectly legal and above board. The challenging team also admitted that many imam from the three provinces had been invited to a series of seminars organised by the military in places such as Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Phang-na, Krabi, Nakhon Si Thammarat and Tak in the months prior to the election. Some leading members of the challenging team had been among the speakers at these seminars, but they had also included other community leaders as well as imam. These seminars reflected the close ties between Nideh Wabah and senior army officers, but

47 Issara News Centre, 'การเมืองแทรกคัดเลือกกรรมการ อิสลาม' [Political interference in the Islam council elections].

48 Interview, 24 January 2006.

49 Interview, 24 January 2006.

the challengers argued that they did not involve any vote-buying and were perfectly legitimate training activities. Critics suggested that these seminars were part of an orchestrated attempt to buy support from participants in the run-up to the Islamic council elections, and in some cases the content had been entirely tokenistic – participants were taken to a resort, given a sum of money for 'expenses', and urged to vote for certain candidates. According to some rumours, the military donated up to 10 million baht to the challengers to try and oust Den's team;[50] the challengers claimed, however, that they had used a total budget of only 500,000 baht, which they had raised from their own resources.[51] Other sources suggested that the challenging group was closely allied with the Democrat Party – rivals of Den's for political power in the province – and made use of their canvasser networks to try and secure a successful electoral outcome. The main campaign manager for the challengers was said to be a well known Democrat Party political organiser who had previously served as secretary to a couple of MPs.[52]

The aftermath of the election was intriguing. The bitterly contested Pattani council was the last in the southern border area to select its chairman. There was no surprise when the incumbent was reappointed, but many observers were disappointed that all the other administrative posts on the council were monopolised by the old team. Had the incumbents extended an olive branch to the challengers by giving them at least one token post as deputy chairman, relations between the two sides would have been placed on a better footing. Instead, the incumbents chose to dominate power, making no concessions to the fact that a large proportion of Pattani's imam had favoured the other team. Many observers argued that this was not a proper Islamic way of behaving,[53] but instead treated the council as if it were a national parliament divided into government and opposition groups.

Analysing the election outcomes

The Pattani Islamic Council elections were illustrative of widespread problems in the way Islamic councils were selected, problems that assumed different forms in different provinces. In Narathiwat, for example, a new team assumed control of the council, led by the former vice-president. The former president and two of his associates retained their seats, but the remaining 27 seats were taken by the

50 Interview, 6 January 2006.
51 Interview, 24 January 2006
52 Interview, 6 March 2006.
53 Conversation, 7 March 2006.

Former Narathiwat Islamic council president and NRC member Abdul Rahman Abdul Shamat (photograph Ryan Anson)

challengers. The Narathiwat victors handled matters differently, appointing the ousted president to the honorary position of adviser to the council. This proved insufficient to placate the ex-president, Abdul Rahman Abdul Shamat, however, who had been completely taken aback by his defeat. He complained that his opponents had spread malicious rumours about him and his team, and had threatened imam in the area and had claimed that some of the religious teachers among his allies were not socially accepted – apparently code for harbouring separatist sympathies.[54] He refused to attend meetings of the new council, and would not meet the new president.

One imam from Narathiwat admitted that he had been paid around 300 baht to attend a seminar organised by the challenging group, but argued that this was normal procedure at such meetings.[55] Another religious leader from the province claimed that the winning team had made use of political networks created by an influential former MP, and that both sides bought votes extensively.[56] The challengers were reportedly unhappy with some of the outspoken political statements made by the former president, who was the most vocal of the Islamic council leaders in the three provinces.[57] Some believed that the military was also behind the victory of the new team in Narathiwat,[58] and that their goal had been to remove all three of the incumbent Islamic councils in the southern border provinces. They were successful only in Narathiwat, however, because there was no powerful politician in the province capable of shaping the outcome. Nevertheless, in an interview the former Narathiwat president insisted that he did not believe that the military had supported the moves to oust him.[59]

In Yala the contest went more smoothly: a few independent candidates challenged the incumbent group, but none of them was successfully elected. The winning clique was close to former Interior Minister Wan Muhamad Nor Matha, another leading figure in the Wadah group. These connections were mediated through a key Wan Nor ally, the chair of the Yala provincial administrative organisation, who was also a member of the Yala Islamic Council.[60] In Songkhla there was no contest at all: only 30 candidates stood

54 Issara News Centre, วิกฤตครอบครัว การศึกษา ศาสนา ซ้ำเติมปัญหาไฟใต้ [Crises in the family, education and religion worsen the situation of violence in the south], 22 November 2005.

55 Interview, 21 February 2006.

56 Conversation notes, 15 March 2006.

57 Conversation notes, 7 March 2006.

58 Interview, 3 December 2005.

59 Abdul Rahman Abdul Shamat interview, 7 June 2006.

60 Interview, 25 January 2006.

for the 30 seats on the council. In Satun, control of the Islamic council was seized by a group of *se*, businessmen involved in the business of organising haj tours who enjoyed close beneficial relations with local imam.

Overall, Islamic council elections in the southern border provinces were heavily politicised, and became inextricable from power struggles involving local politicians. The military clearly sought to displace incumbent members of the council in Pattani, and possibly elsewhere, lending direct or indirect support to the challengers. These developments led to extensive debate among Muslim academics and commentators in the deep south. Ahmad Somboon Bualuang, a leading Muslim academic, argued that the politicisation of Islamic councils dating from the 1999 Act was undermining respect for them, and was disappointing for many people.[61] Worawidh Baru, a Pattani academic who was later elected to the Senate, declared that the Wadah group had won most of the Islamic council elections in the three provinces, and called upon the government to find ways of reducing political interference in the system. Various interviewees argued that respect for imam was declining rapidly: villagers were well aware that their religious leaders had sold their votes in Islamic council elections, and believed they lacked integrity and moral standing.[62] One secular community leader even argued that the introduction of more and more elections was part of a deliberate plan by the Thai authorities to create internal division within Muslim communities, allowing them to exercise a policy of divide and rule.[63] Some Muslim leaders argued for the use of a *shura* system, which would nominate Islamic council members by consensus rather than by voting.

Facing a chorus of criticism over the election outcome – most of it implicitly directed at him personally – Den responded by giving an interview in which he accused other forces of politicising the elections for their own purposes.[64] In an earlier interview he had argued that any process of selecting the Islamic councils would involve some politicisation – the new system was the best way forward.[65] Similarly, an imam in Narathiwat argued that

61 Issara News Centre, Ahmad Somboon Bualuang, special interview 'วัดระดับคลื่นการเมืองสนามเลือกตั้งกรรมการอิสลาม' [Measuring the political involvement of the Islamic council elections'], 20 November 2005.

62 Interviews, 7 December 2005, 3 March 2006; conversation, 15 March 2006.

63 Interview, 7 December 2005.

64 Issara News Centre, 'วาดะห์ ส่งสัญญาณการเมืองแทรกองค์กรอิสลาม' [Wadah gives a signal of political interference in Islamic councils], 27 November 2005.

65 Issara News Centre, สำรวจเลือกตั้งกรรมการอิสลาม 3 จังหวัดใต้ [Scrutinising the Islamic council elections in the three southern border provinces], 24 November 2005.

elections were unavoidable: Islamic council members could not be selected by some sort of village-style consensus.[66]

Conclusion

In theory, electing provincial Islamic council members in Thailand was supposed to promote and secure a form of civil Islam, with socially engaged Muslim communities working within a democratising political order to represent their interests to the Thai state. In practice, the 2005 elections illustrated the extent to which this experiment was going awry. On the one hand, especially for Pattani political veteran Den Tohmeena, Islamic councils could offer a site of resistance to the power of the Thai state, an area within which an alternative mode of politics could be constructed. This resistance was largely rhetorical; this chapter does not suggest that the Pattani Islamic Council had become a direct source of militant or separatist activity, but that the council formed part of the political arena that resisted subordination to the will of Bangkok. In the context of the growing political violence in the southern border provinces since January 2004, this resistance was highly salient.

In response, other political actors, ranging from local Muslim leaders of other persuasions, to rival political parties and elements of the security forces, moved to plan counter-measures to oust Den, the Wadah group and other local 'players' from positions of influence over Islamic councils in the southern provinces. The military sought explicitly to 're-coopt' Muslim leaders on behalf of the Thai state. The determination of these actors to suppress the 'resistance' represented by Den and others was played out in the use of vote-buying, intimidation and electoral manipulation by both sides. The result was an unravelling of civil understandings of the nature of the selection process. Provincial Islamic council elections ceased to be mainly about choosing the best Muslim leaders for the area, and became essentially a power struggle between actors aligned with the state, and other actors who wished to maintain a degree of distance from Bangkok's political suzerainty.

But having won re-election, Pattani President Waeduramae Mamingchi turned on Den, claiming for himself the province's reserved seat on the national Islamic Council – a prize that Den had demanded for his own nephew. As Waeduramae explained, the two men had gone their separate

66 Interview, 21 February 2005.

ways.[67] The Pattani president had discreetly forged close ties with Pichet Sathirachawala, and once he won re-election, he moved explicitly into Pichet's camp. Pichet took over from Den as secretary-general of the Islamic Council of Thailand.[68]

Den then failed to secure his daughter Pechdau's election to the Senate in April 2006; he believed he was undermined by the president of the Pattani Islamic Council, who failed to deploy the patronage resources under his control to support her. Den was later also unsuccessful in his bid for a Pattani parliamentary seat in the December 2007 elections. The Pattani Islamic Council elections were not just a simple clash between two rival groups of Islamic leaders, but a multi-layered contest involving forces aligned with Thai Rak Thai (Pichet), Den Tohmeena's bitter personal struggle to preserve his political base, elite links to the monarchy and the Democrats (through Nideh Wabah) and the ongoing machinations of the military. As the Pattani president argued, the elections eventually became 'a sporting matter'.[69] Following the death of Sawas Sumalayasak, a new Chularajamontri was named in May 2010: Aziz Pitakkumphol, from the southern province of Songkhla.

The Islamic council elections of 2005 illustrated several disturbing trends in the deep south: a breakdown in relations between the Thai state and Muslim leaders; the subordination of religious issues to partisan political agendas; the commercialisation of the process by which Muslim leaders were selected and the unravelling of an imagined 'civil Islam' as previously construed on the basis of Thailand's 1997 process of political reform. After the Thai military staged a coup d'état on 19 September 2006, the Pattani Islamic Council president was appointed a member of the National Legislative Assembly, a sham parliament: having apparently failed to block his return to the post, the military now sought to bring him on board. Overall, the elections contributed to a process of dividing and undermining Muslim communities, reducing popular confidence in their leaders and themselves. In 2007, the National Legislative Assembly debated a new act of parliament under which elected Islamic councils would be abolished.[70] A replacement system would have established a national Islamic affairs office within the prime minister's office, and Islamic leaders at all levels would be appointed following care-

67 The Pattani president stressed that he still respected Den, who had been close to his father. Interview, 1 September 2006.

68 Den accused Pichet of using 'an enormous amount of money' to secure election to this position, including having 'bought' the Pattani chairman with a million-baht bribe. He stated that he no longer had anything to do with Waeduramae. Interviews, 12 and 22 August 2006.

69 In Thai, เรื่องกีฬา, Interview, 1 September 2006.

70 See Imtiyaz Yusuf, 'The role of the Chularajamontri', pp. 48–49.

ful screening. In the event, proposals were dropped following protests by elements of the Muslim community and demands for public consultation.

Thailand's Islamic council elections also illustrated the close relationship between secular electoral politics and the politics of religious organisations. Where religious organisations are obliged to adopt representative structures and systems that parallel those of the wider society and political order, parallel shortcomings seem likely to emerge. The introduction of elections for members of religious bodies such as Islamic councils may open the door for increasing politicisation of these bodies. This politicisation may have the effect of undermining the credibility and legitimacy of the religious organisations concerned: precisely the opposite of the purported aim of the reforms. In the end, replacing an unaccountable and remote religious body with one selected through problematic mechanisms did not amount to a democratic gain for Thai society. At times of violent conflict, Muslim leaders whose loyalty to the state has been openly questioned may be particularly vulnerable; they are torn between top down pressures to conform to state demands and the need to retain the respect and support of their own communities. As the example of Thailand's Islamic councils shows, politicising the bodies that mediate between states and religious communities is a short-sighted and potentially dangerous step, especially during times of national division.

CHAPTER 4

National Reconciliation[1]

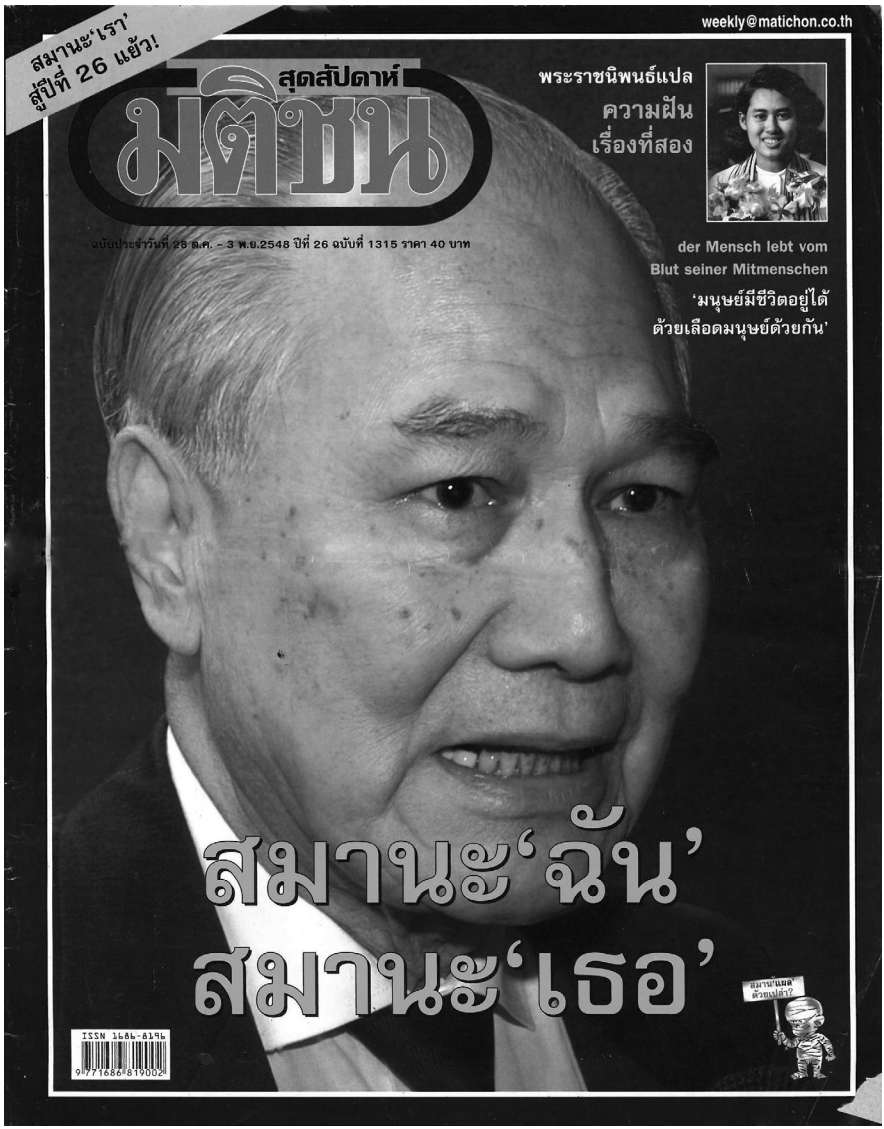
The report itself to me is just something out there. Anyone can do what they want with it. I think it has some ideas in there that can be discussed further, but it's certainly not a definitive analysis of the whole overall picture and all the variables involved, because many things people just didn't dare include, tiptoeing around, because you can't talk about the south without talking about, like, the monarchy. It's just not possible. And so no one wants to talk about that so it's not going to be a full report. And everyone accepts that, no one is pretending it is. The people who did it know that.[2]

The unravelling of civil order in Thailand's southern border provinces from January 2004 onwards did enormous damage to the regional and international standing of the Thaksin Shinawatra government. In advance of the 2004 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) meeting in Vientiane, Prime Minister Thaksin declared that he would not hesitate to walk out of the summit if any of Thailand's neighbours questioned his government's handling of the Tak Bai incident. This was a far cry from Thaksin's heyday as the host of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in October 2003, when he had been hailed as a new regional leader of the calibre of Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Lee Kuan Yew.[3] Thaksin was furious when Mahathir publicly called for the southern provinces to be granted autonomy, and was further incensed by the new and unwelcome

1 An earlier version of this chapter was first published as 'Thailand's National Reconciliation Commission: a flawed response to the southern conflict', in *Global Change, Peace & Security* 22: 1 (2010): 75–91.

2 Interview, October 2006.

3 See McCargo, 'Can Thaksin lead Southeast Asia? Only if he first wins over the region's Muslims', *Time,* 7 February 2005.



NRC Chairman Anand Panyarachun on the cover of *Matichon Weekly*, November 2005

attention Thailand was receiving from the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). While Thaksin was able to fend off calls for international monitoring of the southern conflict, he also had to contend with criticism from civil society groups within Thailand. More telling, he was repeatedly reprimanded by members of the revered King's Privy Council – notably its president Prem Tinsulanond, and former army commander Surayud Chulanont

– who called upon the government to adopt a more conciliatory approach to the crisis. In retrospect, the pressures generated by the Tak Bai incident triggered the forces that eventually led to Thaksin's ouster in the 19 September 2006 military coup d'état staged by forces loyal to the Thai monarchy that were exasperated by Thaksin's lack of respect for royal authority and prerogatives. Despite his landslide victory in the February 2005 general election (during which, ironically Thai Rak Thai lost all its seats in the southern border provinces), Thaksin was under pressure to make some sort of concession to his critics. His solution was a classic political ploy: he created a high level committee, in the hope of kicking the problem into touch.

Creating the National Reconciliation Commission

The NRC was established at the beginning of March 2005 by then prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Chaired by former premier Anand Panyarachun,[4] the NRC arose from proposals by a group of academics critical of the Thaksin government's handling of the southern crisis. The NRC was broadly aligned with a royalist perspective on the south, one that emphasised King Bhumibol Adulyadej's advice 'Understand, access, develop', as opposed to a more hardline security-based approach. Facing a hostile backlash in the wake of the February 2005 general election, Thaksin created the Commission as a concession to his critics. The NRC had 50 members, drawn from a variety of sectors: 17 came from 'civil society in the area' (including Islamic council presidents, Muslim scholars, and academics), 12 from 'civil society outside the area' (including several prominent figures linked to the Bangkok NGO community), 7 from the 'political sector', and 12 from the civil service and security forces. In practice, some of these categories were rather blurred. The Commission was charged with investigating the upsurge of violence in the southern border provinces and making policy recommendations to the government. There was no obvious precedent in Thailand for such an initiative. One model for the NRC was other 'truth and reconciliation' commissions created in the aftermath of political violence in various parts of the world, most famously that of South Africa.[5] A second model was the kind of public

4 Anand served two short but distinguished terms as prime minister during the turbulent period 1991–1992, appointed first by a military junta and later apparently as the personal choice of the King. He is best known internationally as the former chair of Kofi Annan's United Nations reform committee, known as the 'High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change', 2003–2004.

5 Other commissions were created in Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala and Sri Lanka; see NRC, *Overcoming violence through the power of reconciliation,* Bangkok:

inquiry or 'royal commission' created by the governments of many developed countries in response to demands for in-depth analysis of complex issues, such as the 9/11 Commission in the United States, or the Franks Committee which examined the causes of the Falklands War.

In practice, however, the NRC differed significantly from both the truth and reconciliation and public inquiry formats. These models typically emphasised the importance of witness testimony, using a quasi-judicial model of proceedings. The core members of these commissions were normally few in number; in the royal commission model, the report was generally drafted primarily by a single prominent individual. Yet nor did the NRC go down the road of trying to balance a wide range of stakeholders, using some kind of representative formula. Most members of the NRC could not be seen as representatives of the various parties to the conflict, and two-thirds of them were from outside the southern region. Fifty members meant too many for a cabinet meeting, but insufficient for a parliament. From the outset, the main task of the NRC was to draft a report, and Anand seemed intent on completing this process as quickly as possible. Yet alongside the largely technical task of crafting a set of policy recommendations, the NRC also had to deal with the realities on the ground. People in the border region expected the NRC to follow and to respond to unfolding events; they looked to the Commission for the sympathy, understanding and support that was often lacking from the state authorities. Locals often had an unrealistic understanding of what the NRC could achieve, and were quick to blame the NRC for failing to ameliorate the shortcomings of government policies. Many people could not wait for the report: they wanted the NRC to have an immediate impact on the way the state was handling the conflict. One obvious example was the creation of the NRC Fund, which distributed small sums of money – usually 5,000 baht – to the families of victims of violence to help them with funeral and other immediate expenses.[6] The children of deceased victims were eligible for longer term support in relation to educational expenses. Volunteers and staff from the NRC Fund went to see families in the day or two following any incident, and wrote detailed reports about what they found: in practice, however, these notes were compiled simply to justify the outlay of funds, rather than to inform a better understanding of the violent conflict.[7] They were often the first 'official' visitors to victims of the violence, but as a rule visited the victims only once.

NRC, 2006, pp. 132–3.

6 Fieldnotes, visit to NRC local office, Pattani, 7 December 2005.

7 Trip with NRC Fund staff to victims' families, 9 February 2006, notes by Bhatchara Aramsri.

The NRC held a total of 28 main meetings between 8 April 2005 and 3 April 2006; most of these took place in Bangkok, but four were conducted in the southern provinces. Much of the detailed work of the Commission took place in its sub-committees: Truth, Justice and Human Rights; Conflict Management through Peaceful Means; Development Approaches for Human Security; Power of Cultural Diversity in Thai Society; Unity and Reconciliation in the Area; and Communication with Society. This last sub-committee was created as an afterthought, and included a number of journalists and specialists who were not members of the main Commission. The sub-committees all ran their own projects; many of these were pet enthusiasms of individual NRC members and sub-committee chairs, and were only tangentially related to the core work of the Commission.[8]

Less visible than the sub-committees, but arguably more important, was a 'working group' of around a dozen members – including the chair, vice-chair, three secretaries and the research director[9] – which put together the agendas for main meetings, and thrashed out some important issues. This group usually met before each full meeting. But even this group was too large to do the core work of report drafting, which was largely delegated to research director and Thammasat University academic Chaiwat Satha-Anand. Many of the NRC's meetings were devoted to reviewing the nine drafts of the report, the first of which was presented at the 11–13 November 2005 Pattani meeting, only six months after the Commission's first gathering. Chaiwat's initial drafts were criticised by other members of the NRC for their academic language and format, and their somewhat idealistic tone. While the report was informed by a set of research papers commissioned by Chaiwat, the broad thrust of the report was shaped by discussions among the NRC's members. While some members had extensive knowledge and experience of the region, others – including Anand himself – started from a very basic understanding.

The politics of the NRC

The large size of the NRC meant that much of the discussion was dominated by a small number of confident and assertive individuals, many of

8 For example, Prawase Wasi's 'southern news desk' project, which became the Issara News Centre.

9 The three secretaries were Gothom Arya, Bowornsak Uwanno and Surichai Wan'geo, all prominent figures based in Bangkok. The research director, or technical director, was Chaiwat Satha-Anand. None of the six leading members of the NRC came from the south, and only one of the six sub-committees was chaired by a 'local', former Fourth Army commander General Narong Denudom.

them members of the Bangkok elite.[10] Malay Muslims from the southern region were often less comfortable speaking in Thai, and found the presence of so many senior figures – including leading security officials – rather intimidating. In some cases, Malay Muslim participants used sympathetic fellow NRC members (such as Gothom Arya or Mark Tamthai) as informal spokespeople to make their points. Used to chairing cabinet meetings and a high level UN committee, Anand did not systematically ensure that all perspectives were represented, and tended to assume that silence indicated consent, which was not always the case. Some members were extremely busy and could not attend all – or even many – of the meetings (one was a deputy prime minister, for example). Achieving some sort of consensus or substantive breakthrough would have taken longer, and was perhaps impossible given the number and diversity of commissioners.

From the outset, the NRC was characterised by a range of fissures. The body comprised a mixture of locals and outsiders, and brought together conservative government officials and more progressive academics and civil society activists. Promoting an open dialogue between these various elements was not always easy. One commissioner argued that the NRC was only really warming to its task by about the seventh or eighth month – in other words, around October 2005 – when the first draft of the report was completed. Just as the various members began to grow comfortable with one another, the substantive work of shaping the report was already done. Local NRC members were generally hesitant to speak out too loudly, partly because they lacked confidence in their Thai language ability, and partly for fear that their critical perspectives would brand them as separatist sympathisers in the eyes of the security officials who were also members of the Commission: some of those around the table had been involved in investigating local commissioners in the past. One NRC member observed that some of the security officials said practically nothing, except to veto certain more progressive proposals; this seemed to be their primary function on the Commission.[11] The large size of the NRC often militated against serious discussions of sensitive matters, and some of the most interesting meetings were actually those of the various sub-committees: but the work of the sub-committees was often a sideshow, which did not always directly inform the report itself.

In a presentation in late 2006, one NRC member argued that the Commission had faced a fundamental choice between two different directions, determined by two different views of the conflict: was the conflict fundamentally a struggle over issues of justice, or was the conflict an expression

10 NRC member interview, 16 November 2005.

11 NRC member interview, 21 May 2006.

of political aspirations by the Malay Muslim community?[12] Interviews with members of this community suggest that many favoured some form of autonomy, special zone or substantive decentralisation to give them greater say in their own affairs, but few were willing to articulate this publicly for fear of being labelled as separatists. Justice was a very important concept in Islam, and no reasonable human being is opposed to promoting justice; justice therefore readily became the ground on which conservative government officials and local Muslims could most easily meet. Talking about justice was much easier than talking about governance, since the justice agenda allowed for a focus on implementation, and the cataloguing of specific grievances, while blurring core questions about how power was organised. Justice thus became the lowest common denominator upon which everyone could agree. The argument hinged upon a series of 'ifs': if there were more equality of opportunity, if the police and other agents of the Thai state behaved better, if 'good' officials predominated in the three provinces and 'bad' officials were transferred out of the area, then, so the argument went, the main wrongs would be righted and the violence against the state would decline. This argument was attractive to people such as Anand and Prawase – conservative royalists of liberal inclinations, who believed that Thailand's problems could be addressed if 'good' individuals were placed in the right positions of power. It was also attractive to liberals such as report drafter Chaiwat Satha-Anand, whose philosophy of non-violence emphasised precisely such a quest for common ground, maximising the number of 'winners' in any given proposed solution. But as one NRC member (who spoke for many Malay Muslims) argued:

> I thought it was really nothing to do with justice. You could have a completely redone justice system and you are not going to stop violence if you don't answer the representation problem.[13]

The NRC faced two major challenges during its existence.[14] The first and most serious was the Thaksin government's abrupt promulgation of wide ranging emergency legislation in late July 2005, a decree explicitly intended to counter the growing violence in the south, but a measure apparently introduced without informing – let alone consulting – Anand and the NRC.[15] Ironically, Bowornsak Uwanno, one of the NRC's secretaries, was

12 Presentation at EWC and IDSS workshop on southern conflict, CS Pattani Hotel, 30–31 October 2006.

13 NRC member interview, 30 October 2006.

14 NRC member interview, 21 May 2006.

15 For details, see ICG, *Thailand's emergency decree: no solution*, Asia Report no. 105, 18 November 2005, www.crisisgroup.org (accessed 25 November 2008).

a primary author of the legislation. The emergency decree demonstrated that Thailand actually had two parallel policies on the south: the nominal exercise of research, consultation and reconciliation under the NRC, and the de facto policy of securitisation controlled by Thaksin himself. These policies reflected a wider split in the Thai state and society, between forces and groups loyal to the prime minister, and those whose primary loyalty lay with Thailand's revered King. Anand and other leading figures in the NRC were closely associated with 'network monarchy', and saw their task partly in terms of carrying out the royal injunction 'Understand, access, develop'.[16] Tensions between the palace and Thaksin gradually increased until Thaksin was ousted in a military coup in September 2006.

In the immediate aftermath of the emergency decree promulgation, many members of the NRC wanted to resign, and were only dissuaded from doing so by Anand's personal pleas:

> On the day of the special decree announcement, almost all the commission members thought of quitting the NRC, because this was not at all a peaceful method. We didn't have any problem with martial law, but needed to see the draft first. We'd been asking for that, but the decree came out right after the blackout in Yala. It's very *kamhua* [disrespectful] towards the NRC. Many of us felt upset and wanted to quit; only Khun Anand told us not to do so. Then the government would say that we got *jainoi* [touchy] and didn't want to do the job. We decided to stay. From then on, our relationship with the government has gone downhill.[17]

At the same time, the relationship between the NRC and the emergency legislation was a complex one. Addressing the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand (FCCT) in May 2005, Anand had spoken of the need to replace martial law with more appropriate legislation.[18] The government may have believed, or chosen to believe, that the NRC had already given the green light for a new bill along these lines. It is striking that the NRC never directly called for the emergency legislation to be repealed.[19]

16 For discussion of the concept of network monarchy, see McCargo, 'Network monarchy'; for Thaksin and the NRC as representing two alternative modes of power in Thailand, see McCargo, 'Thaksin and the resurgence of violence in the south: network monarchy strikes back', *Critical Asian Studies* 38, 1 (2006): 39–71.

17 NRC member interview, 21 May 2006.

18 Anand speaking at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand, 18 May 2005, DVD 2, Bangkok: Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand, 2005.

19 In an interview published in โพสต์ทูเดย์ [*Post Today*], 24 July 2006, Anand stated that though he was unhappy with the emergency legislation, it was too late to change it.

Anand urged members to stop responding to the day to day violence and instead to concentrate on producing their report. While actively discouraging individual NRC members from speaking to the media – a request many of them resented or simply ignored – he also went on a publicity offensive by proposing a special joint television appearance with Thaksin, which was broadcast live from Government House on 28 July 2005. Though billed as a show of unity – in effect, reconciling the NRC with the government that had created it – the broadcast starkly highlighted the differences between Thaksin and Anand: Anand spoke about cultural diversity and the need for tolerance, while Thaksin talked about the need to apprehend masterminds behind the violence.[20] Worse still, Thaksin sat in the centre of the room, so displacing the clearly pro-government moderator, and kept on interrupting Anand in mid sentence. The broadcast may have been a symbolic victory for the NRC, but relations between Thaksin and Anand never recovered from the fallout over the emergency decree, and the Commission was left demoralised and by-passed by the turn of events.

More was to come. A cruel attack on Wat Phromprasit, a Buddhist temple in Panare, Pattani, in October 2005 left an elderly monk and two temple boys dead. The sangha committee of Pattani province responded by issuing a 20-point declaration calling for the NRC to be abolished, arguing that the Commission was siding with militants and had shown little sympathy for or interest in the plight of Buddhists in the region. Such views were elaborated in interviews given by leading local monks to the Issara News Centre. The first of these was given by the head of the sangha in Pattani, Phra Maha Thawin Khemkaro, the abbot of Wat Lak Muang, who argued that the rhetoric of human rights did not seem to apply to the rights of murdered monks.[21] In similar vein,

> Phra Maha Pusit Thitasiri, a well known monk at Wat Prasrimahaphoe in Pattani, said that when the problems occurred, Thai Buddhists were never asked and paid sufficient attention to. However, Thai Muslims were treated differently. Too much attention was directly given to them over such problems as Kru-Ze and Tak Bai. He said that many Thai Buddhists told him that they were ignored and unequally treated. What he could do to help them was just to console them and to teach them not to be afraid of death.[22]

20 TV Channel 11 [Thailand] สถานีวิทยุโทรทัศน์แห่งประเทศไทย ช่อง 11, การสนทนาพิเศษเรื่องการสร้างสันติสุขใน 3 จังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้ [Special conversation about peace-building in the three Southern border provinces], broadcast on 28 July 2005 at 20.35.

21 Issara News Centre,เปิดใจ'เจ้าคณะจังหวัดปัตตานี', กอส.เอาใจฝั่งตรงข้าม [The head of Pattani monks speaks out].

22 Ibid., เมื่อพระต้องพูด! เสียงสะท้อนจากชายแดนใต้' [When monks have to speak!].

Another monk, Phra Chaiyut Chotiwangso, secretary to the abbot of Wat Burapuram in Yaring, complained that the NRC had not included local monks among its members, and was dominated by groups such as Muslims from Bangkok or other outsiders who were not well placed to understand local problems.[23] This complaint was at the core of the protests; whereas all the presidents of the Islamic councils in the three provinces had been included on the NRC, there was no equivalent representation from sangha councils. Anand was paying the price for not having included prominent local monks on the NRC, and failing to take other steps to reach out to the Buddhist community. Actions were quickly taken to remedy the matter; during the November 2005 NRC meeting in Pattani, Anand and other leading Commission members visited both Wat Phromprasit and Wat Lak Muang. During the February meeting in Narathiwat, NRC members visited another Buddhist temple in Sungai Padi, and hosted an interfaith dialogue session with leading monks and Islamic leaders. It later emerged that sangha protests against the NRC had been backed by elements of the military;[24] furthermore, by no means all monks were in agreement with the 20-point declaration, some 'signatories' even claiming that their names had been added without their consent. But the overall effect of the protests was to put the NRC on the defensive, further weakening the Commission's appetite for controversial recommendations. The NRC adopted a lower profile, and was largely ignored by the government.

Between April and September 2005, the NRC made a series of proposals for alleviating the violence in the short term, 14 of which were issued in a 25 July 2005 press release. Full details of the various intermediate proposals and resolutions made were later published along with the main NRC report as a separate volume, which received little attention.[25] This additional volume

23 Ibid., 'พระมหานิกายวอนกอส.รัฐบาลเปิดเวทีรับฟังความเห็นคณะสงฆ์' [Mahanikai monks as National Reconciliation Commission].

24 NRC member interview, 21 May 2006.

25 NRC, *Overcoming violence through the power of reconciliation: NRC recommendations to the government* (April-September 2005), Bangkok: NRC, 2006. The recommendations included: the release of the Kru-Ze and Tak Bai reports; a request that proceedings be expedited over those charged in connection with Tak Bai; comments on the dismissal of Dr Waemahadi Wae-dao's legal case; a resolution that the government pay special attention to the question of disappearances, including that of Somchai Neelpaijit; a proposal for a special committee to examine justice issues in the region; action on specific justice issues such as the right of suspects arrested under emergency legislation to see their lawyers; creating a legal assistance centre in the region; urging the security forces to use peaceful methods; ensuring that firearms are kept out of private hands; creating village peace committees; blockades created by villages should be dealt with peacefully; rapid investigation of the Tanyonglimo incident of September 2005; criticism of the 2005 emergency legislation; calls for a

reflected the early period of the NRC's work, when much of the focus was on day to day responses to the violence, often reflecting the concerns and priorities of commissioners from the region. Yet some of these recommendations were actually more radical than anything appearing in the final report, notably those in Chapter 2, 'Reduction of violence and the use of peaceful means'. A striking example was the recommendation that private ownership of guns in the region should not be permitted,[26] which contradicted high profile projects sponsored by the Queen to arm local Buddhists and teach them all to shoot.[27] Another recommendation stated:

> The security branch should perceive situations where people gather and deny the authorities access to an area as peaceful gatherings in which the people feel victimised by the violence. Only peaceful means should therefore be used towards these people.[28]

Since the practice of sealing off villages and other locations was clearly a systematic militant tactic,[29] the NRC's characterisation of these actions as mere responses to victimisation appeared terribly na¨ıve, fuelling criticism and mistrust of the Commission by the security forces and Buddhist communities. But in many other cases, there was little difference between the supposedly 'short-term' recommendations in the additional volume and the main recommendations in the report, which might have been better integrated. The decision to publish the earlier recommendations separately, in a volume with the same main title as the NRC report, was probably a mistake.

return to the principles of benevolent public administration outlined by King Rama VI on 6 July 1923; reporting on meetings between Anand and the present and former Malaysian prime ministers; looking into a problematic passage on Buddhism in a primary school textbook; requesting that the policy on recognising overseas medical qualifications be reviewed; improved security for teachers and schools; supporting the teaching of local Malay; assistance to business owners in the region; ensuring fairer use of local resources, for example concerning fisheries; recommendations on zoning for vice establishments; and the creation of the NRC Fund.

26 NRC Recommendations 2.2, 10. This recommendation was one of the 14 measures proposed by the NRC on 25 July 2005. The other 13 measures were approved by a Cabinet resolution the following day; this one was set aside for further consideration.

27 For the full text of the Queen's original speech on this topic of 16 November 2004, see http://j5.rtarf.mi.th/heart/Southqueenspeech161147.htm, accessed 17 May 2011 English language newspaper discussions of the speech are compared and contrasted at www.2bangkok.com/news04u.shtml accessed 7 May 2011..

28 NRC Recommendations 2.4: 12. The relevant recommendation was based on an NRC resolution at their 5 September 2005 meeting.

29 The development of this tactic has been examined in ICG, *Southern Thailand: the impact of the coup,* Asia Report no. 129, 15 March 2007, www.crisisgroup.org accessed 20 November 2008.

The NRC report

The NRC finally published its 132-page report on 5 June 2006. The report had been essentially complete for over two months, but Anand was loath to submit the report to a caretaker government; he apparently hoped to present it to a prime minister other than Thaksin. However, the annulment of the April 2006 election and the postponement of new polls until late 2006 meant that the NRC was obliged to hand the report to a government that had long since lost all interest. Thaksin himself claimed that his eyes were too sore to read the report; and deputy premier Chidchai Vanasatidya – who was supposedly running the country while Thaksin took a 'break' from office – insisted that he had not read it, even though he was himself an NRC commissioner.[30] As one Commission member put it: 'I think that as long as the TRT and Thaksin are still in office, the NRC's proposals will be entirely meaningless.'[31]

Linguistic choices were a highly salient feature of the report: early on in the proceedings, the NRC decided on the term 'Malay Muslims of Thai nationality', in preference to the more conservative 'Thai Muslims of Malay ethnicity'; this convoluted formulation was used in preference to the more succinct 'Malay Muslims'. In similar fashion, 'militants' was generally preferred over 'separatists', though both terms did appear in the report; it was proposed that Malay should be a 'working language' in the border provinces, not the more contentious 'official language'; and 'dialogue' with militants was preferred over 'negotiation'. Most important, however, was the distinction between 'decentralisation' and other terms such as 'self-governing region', or the politically charged 'autonomy'. The NRC report studiously avoided these latter terms.[32] Each of these language choices reflected the sensitivity of the topics, and the need to bring on board different constituencies within the Commission's membership. One early idea was to link every major point in the report to a particular clause in the 1997 Constitution, which would offer a source of legitimacy and 'protection' for the argument and findings; in the end, this proved unworkable.

30 Avudh Panananda, 'NRC report could be left on shelf', *The Nation*, 21 June 2006.

31 NRC member interview, 21 May 2006.

32 The NRC report mentions 'decentralisation' five times; four of the usages are on pages 104–7, and refer in very general terms to the remit of two proposed new bodies, the Southern Border Provinces Peace Strategy Administration Centre (SBPPASC) and Council for the Development of the Southern Border Provinces Area (CDSBPA). The appropriate form of decentralisation is not discussed in the report, but the policy is left to these new bodies to 'promote' (SBPPASC) and 'provide recommendations' (CDSBPA). The word 'autonomy' does not appear once in the report, while there is a single reference to 'special administrative zone' (p. 58), as something the militants were rumoured to have opposed.

The report's primary author, Chaiwat Satha-Anand, argued at a workshop in Bangkok that the NRC had found the Thai state in a critical condition in the south, with a diminished capacity to govern, and a range of groups seeking to produce ungovernability for different purposes.[33] Most importantly, the Commission had found evidence of failed communities in the area, communities no longer able to provide basic protection for their members, or even for hostages such as Juling Pongkanmoon, a Narathiwat teacher who was seized and badly beaten in May 2006 and later died of her injuries. The NRC report followed a medical model, providing a diagnosis and prognosis for the southern violence, and proposing some therapeutic measures.[34] Religion, argued the report, was not the cause of the violence; rather it was one justification invoked to legitimise violence.[35] The prognosis offered was somewhat pessimistic. Unless urgent action was taken, more violence, more civilian casualties and explosions, and a deterioration in the economic situation of the border provinces would follow. Important recommendations included:

- Establishing Shanti Sena, an 'unarmed army', as a special unit to defuse tense situations by non-violent means;
- Adopting Pattani Malay as a working language in the deep south;
- Creating a new agency to oversee the administration of the area, to be known as the Peaceful Strategic Operation Centre for Southern Border Provinces (in effect, re-establishing the positive features of the old Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre);[36]
- Creating a regional development council;
- Establishing a fund for reconciliation and healing;
- Devising procedures to deal quickly with complaints against government officials in the region; and
- Promoting dialogue with militant groups.

One NRC member complained that whenever he asked people whether recommendations like these would really be sufficient to address the problem:

> the answer I got is that this is just a starting point. They would be lots of other teams that would continue the work . . . This is really annoying. Why

33 Chaiwat comments at Bangkok workshop, 12 July 2006.

34 NRC, *Overcoming violence.*

35 Ibid., p. 3.

36 For a detailed discussion of the SBPAC, see Matt Wheeler, 'People's patron or patronizing the people? The Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre in perspective', *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 32, 2 (2010): 208–33.

> don't we do it when we have the chance? At least try to lay out certain steps . . . This is nothing at all.[37]

NRC members themselves were generally rather ambivalent about the report; those really happy with it could probably be counted on the fingers of one hand. Many others were unconvinced by the tone, arguments and recommendations of the document. At Anand's insistence, the flyleaves of the report featured quotations from speeches by the King and Queen, apparently deployed to demonstrate the loyalty of the NRC to the monarchy. The report opened with a curious anecdotal chapter entitled 'The story of Yosathorn and Ammana', recounting the stories of two child victims of the violence in the south. The story adopted a didactic and moralising tone, even stating: 'To be sure, there are bad people in this land, and they should be arrested and brought to justice according to the law. But the evidence from all sides indicates that they are few in number.'[38] This story started the report off on a peculiar note; the claim that the violence was the work of a small number of 'bad people' was a disappointing reading of a complex political and social conflict. The opening story was only the first of a number of curious passages to be found in the text, many of which reflected the enthusiasms and hobby horses of individual commission members.

Reactions to the report

The NRC's report pleased few commentators.[39] The reactions to the report in wider Thai society mirrored the feelings of members of the NRC itself. For conservative, security oriented readers, the NRC was far too conciliatory and gave too much ground to the militants. The idea of making Pattani Malay a working language was criticised by Privy Council President Prem Tinsulanond,[40] who insisted that Thai was the only national language.[41] NRC members tried vainly to explain that a 'working language' was not the same thing as an 'official language', but this distinction was lost on many Thais, for

37 NRC member interview, 21 May 2005.

38 NRC, *Overcoming violence*, p. 3.

39 NRC member presentation, Pattani, 30 October 2006.

40 Some commentators privately speculate that Anand and Prem enjoy a degree of unspoken rivalry.

41 'Prem not happy with NRC's idea', *The Nation,* 26 June 2006.

whom any such change would represent a national loss of face.[42] The proposal for an 'unarmed army' was mocked in the popular Thai press; while for those who had seen the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC) as part of the problem, reviving it in new clothes was no real solution.

Barun, the pseudonymous author of an important book on the southern conflict, circulated a more sustained critique of the NRC report in which he argued that 'if the NRC denies that religion has anything to do with violence, they have been wasting all our time'.[43] He deplored the failure of Islamic religious leaders to adopt an unequivocal public stance against violence, and argued that deep rooted political violence could not be addressed in the long term by using the criminal justice system. Barun argued that the misguided teachings of Islam had to be confronted directly. Barun's arguments resembled those of some commentators who accused the NRC of being unwilling to address the real nature and origins of the southern violence. For him, the Commission's rhetoric about injustice and reconciliation glossed over the inconvenient fact that radical Muslims were committing most of the violence.

For other readers, however, the NRC report simply did not go far enough. Even some NRC members had been disappointed that proposals for a political solution to the problems of the south had been ruled off limits by NRC chairman Anand Panyarachun. Anand and deputy chairman Prawase had tested the waters back in April 2005 with a proposal for a 'Pattani Metropolitan Authority', and backed off when they met with hostile reaction from the press.[44] All talk of autonomy or a 'special administrative zone' in the south was subsequently off limits for discussion, even at closed door NRC meetings.[45]

> The idea of autonomy or a special zone became a taboo in the meetings. They would limit that as much as possible. Anand or Prawase would immediately intervene when this was brought up. I have the feeling that they already fixed on that idea.[46]

42 The NRC member noted in his 30 October 2006 presentation that he also saw no significance in this distinction, which appears to have served primarily as a face saving measure.

43 Barun (pseud.), บะรูนห์, มองประวัติศาสตร์ด้วยตาเหนือ [Seeing history through northern eyes], *Fa Diao Kan* 4, 2 (2006): 107–11.

44 NRC member interview, 21 May 2006.

45 Anand recounted to me that when he met militant leaders in Malaysia, they informed him that autonomy was not one of their demands (Conversation, 7 September 2006). He told an interviewer that following two or three meetings with 'this group' he did not believe separatism or an independent state was the aim of the movement either. See โพสต์ทูเดย์ [*Post Today*], 24 July 2006.

46 NRC member interview, 21 May 2006.

As another NRC member argued:

> Autonomy, in the way it is used in Thai, is a critique of the monarchy, and so no one will do it. Not that they don't want to do it out of fear, they sincerely do not think it's right.[47]

Privately, many Malay Muslims wanted to see some form of regional autonomy for the three provinces, but were reluctant to express this view in public for fear of being labelled 'separatist', or of wanting to question Thailand's constitutional status as a unitary state: Article 1 of the Thai Constitution states 'Thailand is one and indivisible kingdom'.[48] Some NRC members had hoped that Anand and Prawase – whose loyalty to the monarchy and the Thai state was unimpeachable – might have helped them advance ideas of devolution and self-rule. Yet a number of NRC members believed that Anand was acting on instructions 'from above' to ensure that these ideas did not find their way into the Commission's report.[49] Even Anand and Prawase were not immune from censure; speaking at the FCCT, Anand recounted his own experiences in the 1970s – when he was accused of being a communist – and attacks on him by rightists during the drafting of the 1997 Constitution. The failure of the NRC report to make bold proposals for governance reform in the three provinces meant that an opportunity to pull the ground from under the feet of the militants had been missed. While well intentioned, the NRC report had failed to grasp the nettle.

The Nation journalist Supalak Ganjanakhundee, co-author of an invaluable book on the conflict,[50] accused the NRC of not going far enough – in his view, their recommendations should have been bolder.[51] The proposed new administrative body lacked sufficient local participation, and did not offer a special set of governance arrangements for the three provinces. He argued that the Commission should have staked out a strong position on the crucial governance questions, rather than tailoring its proposals to what the Thaksin government might find acceptable: Thaksin might soon be gone, whereas the southern conflict was a long-term issue. For Supalak, the NRC

47 NRC member interview, October 2006.

48 For a detailed discussion, see chapter 7.

49 This point draws on several interviews and conversations with NRC members. It is also equally possible that Anand received no actual instructions 'from above', but sought nevertheless to ensure that the NRC report accorded with the known or assumed preferences of the palace.

50 Supalak Ganjanakhundee and Don Pathan, สุภลักษณ์ กาญจนขุนดี และ ดอน ปาทาน, สันติภาพในเปลวเพลิง [Peace in flames].

51 Supalak Ganjanakhundee, 'สุภลักษณ์ กาญจนขุนดี: กอส. ไม่ได้ล้มเหลว, แค่สูญเปล่าเท่านั้นเอง' [Interview with Supalak Ganajanakhundee: the NRC was not a failure, it was just pointless], 19 June 2006, www.prachatai.com accessed 25 November 2008.

was too willing to think 'realistically' and too willing to accept limitations on debate framed by ill-informed public opinion. He was also critical of the Commission's reluctance to 'name the problem', seen in the report's avoidance of serious discussion about the militant movement behind the violence. Supalak also claimed that the NRC had made little effort to expose the truth behind controversial episodes in the region. Although the Commission had made public the Kru-Ze and Tak Bai reports during its early months, there had been no follow-up on the Saba Yoi killings, or the issue of 'disappearances' at the hands of the authorities.

Some interesting critiques of the NRC appeared in a book of interviews published by the Commission itself. Iam Thongdee, an academic at Mahidol University, accused the NRC of lacking definitional and linguistic clarity, beginning with a failure properly to define the term 'reconciliation'.[52] He argued that the NRC remained very attached to state thinking, had failed to show real independence, and did not dare to make explicit the implications of its own findings. He described the report as over emotional, and accused the NRC of refusing to clarify the causes of the violence, or focus explicitly on the question of agency. There was insufficient discussion of the role of religious and 'natural' leaders in Muslim communities. The recommendations of the NRC were tepid, simply calling for the revival of the SBPAC in a new form.

Elaborating a similar perspective, one Buddhist monk took issue with the report's wording concerning the culprits behind the Wat Phromprasit attacks:

> Although the assailants captured by the authorities were Muslims, many Thai Muslims did not believe it possible that someone who so brutally took the lives of religious persons could be a Muslim, as it utterly contradicted the principles and teachings of Islam.[53]

Phra Maha Charat Uchujaro cited this passage as an example of the NRC's lack of even handedness, the tendency of the report to treat Muslims with kid gloves, and reluctance to accept that some of the violence was perpetrated by Muslims.[54] Another critique came from a very different direction: Pattani lawyer Anukul Awaeputeh, a prominent defence attorney for numerous

52 Iam Thongdee, เอี่ยม ทองดี, สิ่งที่ กอส. ไม่ได้อธิบาย คือ ความหมายของคำว่า 'อิสระ' และ 'สมานฉันท์' [What the NRC did not explain was the definition of 'independent' and 'reconciliation'], in NRC Working Committee on Communication and Society, คณะทำงานการสื่อสารกับสังคม กอส., วิพากษ์รายงานคณะกรรมการอิสระเพื่อ ความสมานฉันท์แห่งชาติ [Critiques of the National Reconciliation Commission Report], Bangkok: NRC Sub-Committee on Communication and Society, 2006).

53 NRC, *Overcoming violence,* p. 52.

54 Phra Maha Charat Uchujaro, พระมหาชรัช อุชุจาโร, 'บนความเสมอภาค' [On equality], in *Critiques of the National Reconciliation Commission Report* (2006).

Malay Muslims accused of security offences, expressed dissatisfaction with the NRC's recommendations on justice.[55]

Chaiwat observed that the NRC report had been framed by the prevailing political realities and constraints, including 'the history and agonies of the chair himself' – the difficult balancing act that Anand was required to perform. At root, public reaction to the report showed that most Thais remained unable to grasp the idea that Siam had acted as a colonial state, and failed to understand the degree of difference between the Malay Muslims of the southern border provinces and the rest of Thailand.

By the time of the 19 September 2006 military coup, a clear divide had emerged between two broad approaches to the southern conflict. For most members of the NRC, along with a narrow circle of academics, journalists and activists, the crisis was essentially a political problem that demanded a rethinking of Thailand's ethnic relations. This rethinking involved questions of justice, equity, identity and governance. Underpinning such a rethinking lay a more nuanced understanding of Islam, and recognition of Pattani's distinctive history and cultural differences. But for the security community, the violence remained essentially a security problem. Tough legal measures such as the 2005 emergency decree or the systematic arrest of 'ringleaders' and frontline militants were the only way to confront the problem head on. Despite the fact that security approaches had proved largely ineffective, and that failed communities were proliferating in the three provinces, those who questioned security solutions struggled to mainstream their views.

Media and dissemination

Chaiwat Satha-Anand argued that the way the NRC report was misread and misunderstood was revealing about the nature of Thai society.[56] Various misunderstandings of the proposals could be traced back to criticism in the popular press, notably a column in *Thai Rath* newspaper dated 8 June 2006, which had expressed unease at the proposal to make Malay a working language, and argued that an 'unarmed army' would play into the hands of 'bad guys'.[57] While English-medium newspapers such as the *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* took a broadly sympathetic view of the NRC's proposals – or even argued, like Supalak, that they did not go far enough – the popular

55 Anukul Awaeputeh, อนุกูล อาแวปูเต๊ะ, ปฏิรูปกระบวนการยุติธรรม [The reform of justice], in *Critiques of the National Reconciliation Commission Report* (2006).

56 Chaiwat Satha-Anand, comments at Bangkok seminar, 12 July 2006.

57 The *Thai Rath* 'ไทยรัฐ column, known as '*Samnak khao hua khiao*' 'สำนักข่าวหัวเขียว'[Green-headed News Office] was written by 'Mae lukjan' 'แม่ลูกจันทร์'[pseud.]

press was deeply mistrustful of the NRC's conciliatory approach towards the Malay Muslim community in the south.

The NRC had not done a good job of promoting its mission and disseminating its message.[58] A core problem was that the NRC did not have an official spokesperson: Anand had insisted on acting as his own spokesman, a role for which he was singularly ill-suited. At his most charming and polite when speaking to the international media, Anand was frequently offhand or downright rude to the local press. A press conference following the November 2005 NRC meeting in Pattani revealed Anand at his worst. Before he spoke, an official listed various kinds of questions that Anand would be unwilling to answer, including 'hypothetical' questions about the report. When questions met with his disapproval, Anand berated the questioners, accusing them of stupidity or professional failings. This was no way to build a media strategy, especially since most of those attending the briefing were broadly well disposed to the work of the commission. Other senior figures in the NRC sometimes had to go around trying to placate the press and undo the damage Anand had wrought. While a series of 'Meet the Press' events were held with groups of journalists, Anand was not willing to visit the offices of major newspapers to promote the NRC's approach. While Anand might have considered it beneath him to visit, for example the offices of *Thai Rath* – Thailand's bestselling and most influential newspaper – such visits could have done wonders for the NRC's coverage. An avid reader of the *Bangkok Post*, Anand was sometimes unduly preoccupied with English-language media that had little impact on the mainstream Thai news agenda.

Thais in other parts of the country continued to post hostile messages about southern Muslims on websites, apparently completely untouched by the NRC's work. Many viewed the NRC as 'pleasing Muslims' rather than addressing a deep rooted problem. With hindsight, it seems clear that the NRC should have waged a much more effective media campaign, using events such as public hearings to communicate its findings.

The Issara News Centre (INC) – which aimed to promote alternative understandings of the southern crisis in the media – failed significantly to influence the mood of wider Thai society.[59] The INC was a project strongly supported by NRC vice-chair Prawase, who seems to have envisaged it as the de facto news service of the Commission, and helped the INC secure funding from Thailand's Health Promotion Fund. The INC worked by

58 Interview with Supalak, 'The NRC was not a failure'.

59 For detailed discussions of the Issara News Centre, see chapter 5 of this book; and Supapohn Kanwerayotin, 'Peace journalism in Thailand: a case study of Issara News Centre of the Thai Journalists Association', MA dissertation, MA International Development Studies, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, 2006.

supporting short-term secondments of Bangkok-based journalists to an office in Pattani, from where they filed stories onto a website which could be re-published freely by any newspaper. It was backed by the Thai Journalists' Association, but in practice was generally viewed as the informal domain of four major newspaper groups: *Post* Publishing, *Matichon, Nation* Group, and *Phujatkan* (in that order). The main users of INC copy were *Post Today*, *Matichon,* and *Krungthep Thurakit*. Accordingly, it received virtually no support from the mass circulation *Thai Rath* and *Daily News*,[60] and remained a structurally marginal player in Thai media circles, one with the character of a pet project and innovative example of 'alternative media', rather than an effective means of mainstreaming and popularising the NRC's ideas and approach. As Supapohn's study showed, the INC's effectiveness was highly contingent on the presence of strong Bangkok-based reporters, most of whom were withdrawn from their secondments after February 2006. From the outset, a body such as the NRC needed both an explicit media strategy, and a professional spokesperson working with a dedicated public relations team, but neither of these was put in place.

The 2006 coup and beyond

On the night of 19 September 2006, the Thai military staged a coup d'état against the Thaksin government, ousting him from power. Reasons cited for the coup included allegations of corruption and abuse of power by the Thaksin government, and claims that Thaksin had acted disrespectfully towards the monarchy.[61] In no small measure, Thaksin's mishandling of the south had contributed to his downfall, by poisoning his relations with the security forces and displeasing the palace. The leader of the coup group was General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, Thailand's first ever Muslim Army Commander, who had harboured deep misgivings about Thaksin's handling of the southern conflict. It was an open secret that palace players and Privy Council President Prem were supportive of the coup, which had been staged by royalist military officers furious at Thaksin's lack of respect for the

60 Supapohn ('Peace journalism', pp. 46–7) notes that *Thai Rath* did use some INC materials in one major September 2005 story. A source at *Thai Rath* told her that the newspaper 'does not oppose the INC project,' while a *Daily News* staffer explained that their paper received sufficient coverage from a dedicated local correspondent.

61 For discussion and analysis of the 2006 coup, see Michael K. Connors and Kevin Hewison (eds), 'Thailand's "good coup": the fall of Thaksin, the military and democracy', special issue of *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, 1 (2008); and James Ockey (ed.), special issue of *Crossroads* 19, 1 (2007).

monarchy. 'Network monarchy', arguably the main force behind the NRC, was now in direct control of the Thai government. General Surayud Chulanont, another former Army Commander, was appointed prime minister by the coup group, and had to take the unprecedented step of resigning from the Privy Council to assume the post. Sonthi and Surayud both spoke favourably about the work of the NRC, and declared a willingness to implement most of the Commission's proposals. The new prime minister swiftly reinstated the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre, and appointed as its new director the younger brother of privy councillor Palakorn Suwannarat, himself a former SBPAC director. Surayud also made an important symbolic gesture by apologising for the Tak Bai episode in response to questions at a forum in Pattani on 2 November 2006. Yet this move was not followed up by any action: there was no reinvestigation of the incident, and no effort to hold accountable those responsible for the deaths of 78 Malay Muslim men.

Surayud and Sonthi expressed a desire to engage in a dialogue with the militants, hoping to broker a political deal that would bring the conflict to an end – but a deal which would involve no substantive concessions on the part of the Thai state. Both men visited Malaysia for high level meetings, seeking to repair a bilateral relationship that had been extremely poor during the Thaksin era. To a large extent, the language and approach of the new power group mirrored the royalist discourse of the NRC, placing an emphasis on justice and understanding, rather than imposing security solutions on the rebellious region. It was ironic that while an elected civilian government had preferred military solutions to the southern crisis, the new military government appeared more in favour of political initiatives. Yet it soon became obvious that simply replacing Thaksin with Surayud was not about to solve the problems of the deep south. At times, Surayud seemed personally pained that the violence had not ceased: did the militants not understand that the 'bad guys' were no longer in power? In the event, the Tak Bai apology led to an immediate spike in violent incidents, as the militants sought to repudiate the new government's conciliatory gestures.

Convinced that they had gained the upper hand against Thai security forces, militants pressed on with bolder and bolder attacks, especially in Yala. Whole Buddhist communities were driven out of their homes and the Border Patrol Police was forced to withdraw from one of its bases, while all of the government schools in the three provinces were completely closed for a time at the end of November 2006. As the security situation deteriorated rapidly, reconciliation now appeared less likely than ever. The modest palliatives offered by the NRC report looked increasingly inadequate. The more controversial of these – the 'unarmed army' and the promotion of Malay as a working language – were shelved. The primary emphasis of the Surayud

government was on the revived SBPAC, which included a special unit to monitor complaints against errant government officials. All this smacked of an attempt to revert to the pre-Thaksin status quo ante, an unrealistic goal. In the final weeks of the Surayud government, as a newly elected administration led by Thaksin 'nominee' Samak Sundaravej prepared to take power, the outgoing premier placed SBPAC under the control of the military's Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) in a misguided attempt to insulate the agency from political interference, which had the effect of incorporating SBPAC firmly into the security apparatus.

In 2004, Thaksin Shinawatra had invoked the weary and discredited ASEAN doctrine of non-interference, so dismissing the opportunity to frame the southern Thai conflict within a wider regional context, and thereby taking the heat off the beleaguered Thai government. His actions had fanned the flames of the insurgency, while the Commission he later set up to propose solutions was too unwieldy, conservative and timid firmly to address the causes of the crisis, the question of agency, and the need for a political settlement. Sadly, the NRC was to prove a lost opportunity, its thin recommendations becoming less relevant with each passing day. More than ever, Thailand needed a bold and imaginative set of ideas for addressing the southern insurgency. The lineaments of such a solution could involve understanding the conflict as a regional, not simply a domestic, problem; and thinking seriously about alternative forms of substantive political devolution.

The NRC in comparative perspective

In an appendix discussing the 'special nature' of the NRC's work, the Commission's report observed that various conditions normally related to work of such bodies were essentially absent in the Thai case.[62] Most other such commissions were set up after a period of violence had ended. Well known examples included South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (generally considered the model for most such bodies), the Argentinean National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons, the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation, the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador, Guatemala's Commission for Historical Clarification and three commissions established to investigate removals and disappearances in Sri Lanka. Among others not mentioned in the NRC report were the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, the National Unity

62 NRC, *Overcoming violence*, pp. 131–4.

and Reconciliation Commission of Rwanda, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone, the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor, Morocco's Justice and Reconciliation Commission, and the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission.[63] Such commissions were generally focused on uncovering the truth concerning extra-judicial killings or other serious abuses of power by previous regimes.[64] The violent episodes they addressed normally involved a clearly identifiable set of protagonists, unlike the conflict in southern Thailand. And unlike in many of these cases, the NRC's quest for truth was not shared by Thai society generally. The sense of a binding force uniting different groups of people in the region was being eroded rather than firmed up during the period of the NRC's work: the NRC was not part of a 'healing process' as conventionally understood.

As the NRC report itself argues, the effectiveness of such commissions may be evaluated by using a number of criteria. One of these was the extent to which they were able to make 'society in general' see matters differently, or accept things it had not accepted before. Another was the quality of the report produced by the commission: how credible was the 'truth' it presented, and how realistic were the proposals for supporting victims and reforming the system? A third concerned the long-term impact of the commission's work: did perpetrators of violence see the error of their ways? How successfully was the commission's work disseminated and received by society? And how far were the key proposals implemented? In addressing these criteria, the NRC faced a combination of ideological and practical problems.

Outside Thailand, no other commission relied solely on 'reconciliation' as the core word of its title; elsewhere 'reconciliation' was generally twinned with 'truth' or some other abstract noun. While uncovering some version of 'truth' is relatively straightforward – a commission report can draw on witness testimony and other evidence to provide a detailed account and analysis of events – promoting or achieving any form of 'reconciliation' is an ambitious task for any official body. The concept of reconciliation has been criticised as conservative, vague, illiberal, question begging, assimilative,

63 Other commissions include the Greenboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission (concerning the death of five anti-Klu Klux Klan demonstrators in North Carolina in 1979) and the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, set up to examine the childhood experiences of former school students.

64 For comparative discussions of the early wave of truth commissions, see Robert I. Rotberg and Dennis Thompson (eds), *Truth v justice: the morality of truth commissions,* Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000, and Priscilla Hayner, *Unspeakable truths: facing the challenges of truth commissions,* New York: Routledge, 2002.

quietist and exculpatory. Underpinning these criticisms lies the view that reconciliation is essentially ideological, privileging the existing social order.[65] Schaap argues that reconciliation 'tends to inscribe an enforced commonality'. From the Malay Muslim community, the NRC faced persistent suspicion that it would produce a liberal cover-up of the political realities in the region. Yet since such a liberal reading was itself inimical to the more conservative perspectives of most Thais, any unenforced commonality was a very tall order.

Many of the other commissions worked full time for three or more years on their tasks, supported by a professional secretariat. By contrast, the NRC was an essentially part time body, a large committee of volunteers, meeting mainly at weekends, and supported by officials borrowed from the prime minister's office. The NRC had no office or even meeting rooms of its own, generally convening at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or at various hotels. Even a cursory comparison of the NRC with counterpart commissions in other countries suggests that the Thai body adopted an over ambitious mandate, and was under-resourced in terms of personnel and duration for the task in hand. In the event, the NRC flunked the first two of the tests it had set itself, in the short term failing significantly to change the way Thai society viewed the southern conflict, and failing to produce an impressive report which was generally admired and appreciated. Given these shortcomings, the NRC seemed unlikely to succeed in advancing its agenda over the longer term either. Though neither a failure nor 'pointless', Thailand's NRC proved a disappointing and rather ineffective attempt to address a complex violent conflict.

The post-2006 coup period proved to be an era of policy drift in relation to the south. Thaksin's two responses to the violence – securitisation and the creation of the NRC – were arguably contradictory and misguided, yet the governments that followed his similarly lacked both clarity and focus in their approaches. The Surayud regime, while adopting the language of reconciliation, concentrated on massively boosting security budgets and bringing the south firmly under the control of the Internal Security Operations Command, a military agency. The elected Samak Sundaravej and Somchai Wongsawat governments of 2008 were short-lived, both preoccupied with ensuring their own political survival in the face of mass protests from the yellow-shirted, pro-royalist People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD). The subsequent Democrat administration led by Abhisit Vejjajiva faced major protests from pro-Thaksin red-shirted demonstrators that

65 See Andrew Schaap, 'Reconciliation as ideology and politics', *Constellations: an International Journal of Democratic and Critical Theory* 15, 2 (2008): 249–64.

made any focus on the south difficult. While claiming that he would preside over a politically led approach to the southern conflict, Abhisit soon proved a prisoner to elite interests, including the military and elements of his own party.[66] In retrospect, the 15-month tenure of the NRC coincided with an unusually long period of relative political stability in Thailand, offering an extended opportunity for study, reflection and policy advocacy that was largely squandered.

66 See Supalak Ganjanakhundee, 'Military alone cannot solve problems in the deep south', *The Nation*, 18 June 2009.

CHAPTER 5

Communicating Conflict[1]

Amidst criticisms that the media sold sensational headlines through reporting of daily attacks which further fuel the southern fire, Issara News Centre was born. The Thai Journalists Association with co-operation from various newspapers sent a group of reporters to work with their southern counterparts. Truth, knowledge, opinion and feelings have subsequently surfaced in the media, brought forth by team members working across organisational boundaries, as independent and courageous journalists.[2]

On the evening of 20 September 2005, two local Malay Muslim men were killed while sitting at a teashop in village 7, Tanyonglimo, Narathiwat, southern Thailand. The victims were shot dead by unidentified assailants from a pickup truck. Villagers were convinced that the killings had been carried out by the security forces. Two marines who went to the village shortly afterwards were taken hostage. During a tense standoff, the security forces surrounded the village but were confronted by barricades erected by the villagers. Not only did the villagers refuse to let officials inside; they also refused to allow Thai journalists entry to the village, and requested that foreign – assumed to mean Malaysian – journalists come and cover the incident. Early in the afternoon the following day, it emerged that the marines had been tortured and then killed.

The events at Tanyonglimo shocked the nation. Most media coverage focused on the brutal murder of the marines. Yet for journalists, the idea

1 An earlier version of this chapter was first published in the *Journal of International Communication* 12, 2 (2006): 19–34.

2 Pattara Khumphitak, President of the Thai Journalists Association, 2006, quoted in Supapohn, 'Peace journalism', p. 25.

Tanyonglimo demonstrators call for Malaysian media to report incident', 21 September 2005 (photograph Anon.)

that Thai reporters were unwelcome in their own country was deeply disturbing. Journalists tend to believe that they are working in the public interest, and that they are on the side of the people. The Tanyonglimo case raised fundamental questions about the way the Thai media operated. Implicitly, the villagers were suggesting that the media was acting on behalf of the Thai state, representing the interests and views of the country's Buddhist majority, and failing to show the requisite degree of objectivity.

Understanding the villagers' request involves entering highly contested territory. According to one villager from Tanyonglimo, the request for the Malaysian media to attend was made by a group of around ten youths who played a leading role in the events, and who fled after the incident.[3] In other words, this was not a request articulated by 'ordinary' villagers. But the request also reflected a general feeling in the village that 'some stories will not come out' in the Thai press – especially stories implicating the authorities in extra-judicial killings or other illegal behaviour. The community did not

3 Tanyonglimo villager interview, 1 February 2006.

trust the Thai media to report accurately about the teashop shootings, which they regarded as highly suspicious.

The security services, by contrast, viewed the request for Malaysian journalists to attend the incident simply as a psychological ploy on the part of the militant movement, helping those against the Thai state to gain the upper hand in the propaganda struggle. Security sources have argued that the intention of the militants behind the Tanyonglimo incident was to provoke the authorities into storming the village, hoping that the resulting scenes of bloodshed would be broadcast on international television, and so embarrass the Thai government in the eyes of the world community.[4] According to their explanations, the militant movement deliberately shot the teashop customers in order to blame the authorities and whip up a frenzy of hatred for the state.

Both the villagers and the security services saw the media as a potentially partisan political player, open to exploitation and to manipulation. While such arguments could be applied to many cases and countries, they have particular salience in the context of Thailand. Thailand's media has long suffered from a number of crucial shortcomings that impede the coverage of complex political and social issues.[5] The electronic media remains captive to state interests: 13 years after the bloody events of May 1992, which purportedly saw the armed forces vanquished from their former dominance over Thailand's political order, the military continued to control the airwaves. Television news was notoriously superficial, partial and conservative, and radio was little better. Under the first Thaksin government (2001–2005), control of the electronic media by the state and the ruling party increased considerably.[6] While the early to mid 1990s had seen a flourishing of the vociferous – if often unprofessional – print media, Thailand's newspapers were hit hard by the 1997 financial crisis, and then suffered considerable pressures at the hands of the Thaksin administration.[7]

4 Notes taken during lectures by military and police instructors at Yala police academy, 16 March 2006.

5 See Duncan McCargo, *Politics and the press in Thailand: media machinations*, London: Routledge, 2000; Bangkok: Garuda Press, 2002.

6 Ubonrat Siriyuvasak (ed.), อุบลรัตน์ ศิริยุวศักดิ์, ปิดหู, ปิดตา, ปิดปาก: สิทธิเสรีภาพในมือธุรกิจการเมืองสื่อ [Shut your ears, shut your eyes, shut your mouth: free speech in the hands of media as political business], Bangkok, Kobfai, 2005.

7 Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, Copenhagen: NIAS, 2005.

Journalists, peace and conflict

The problems faced by Thai journalists in dealing with the southern conflict were far from unique; they mirrored a standard set of issues faced by media practitioners in many corners of the world. One commentator has argued that the media cannot be trusted to cover wars properly:

> Why, then, should journalists utterly ignorant and inexperienced in the history, language, organization, methods and technology of the subject they are covering . . . be permitted to roam about at will and report without effective supervision?[8]

William Kennedy argues that the 'city room organizational model' based on a culture of cut-price generalist journalism prevents western news organisations from properly understanding and reporting on the nature of modern wars.[9] Most media coverage tends to focus on a limited number of wars between states – such as the first and second American invasions of Iraq – yet the overwhelming majority of the world's armed conflicts are localised civil wars within developing countries.[10] Misgivings similar to Kennedy's must apply to low intensity clashes such as the southern Thai conflict, which are both under-reported and inadequately understood by the media.

While from a military perspective journalists may often seem too critical and too naïve to cover conflicts reliably, those interested in promoting peace frequently see the media as the eager accomplices of warmongers. Although typically media coverage is intimately linked to bad news, and so may serve to reinforce and stimulate violent conflict, some practitioners and media analysts have called for a reform of media practices in order to facilitate dialogue between opposing groups. Michael O'Neill has argued that the media should develop what he terms 'preventive journalism', in which 'reporters would reach down into neighbourhoods to discover all the daily life teeming beneath the political surface, to explore the smaller cells of human stress that often tell larger stories than acts of state'.[11] Better educated journalists are needed to deal with murky issues occluded by conventional journalism, notably those

8 William V. Kennedy, *The military and the media: why the press cannot be trusted to cover a war*, Westport CT: Praeger, 1993, p. 11.

9 Ibid., p. 29

10 Prasun Sonwalkar, 'Out of sight, out of mind? The non-reporting of small wars and insurgencies', in Stuart Allan and Barbie Zelizer (eds), *Reporting war: journalism in wartime*, London: Routledge, 2004, pp. 210–11.

11 Michael J. O'Neill, 'Developing preventive journalism', in Kevin M. Cahill (ed.), *Preventive diplomacy: stopping wars before they start*, New York: Routledge and CIHC, 2000, p. 74.

involving 'ethnic, racial, religious and cultural turmoil'.[12] But O'Neill himself recognised that implementing 'preventive journalism' would involve a huge and expensive shift in the organisational cultures of news producers.

Other writers have argued for a new practice of 'peace journalism', which involves a commitment on the part of journalists to the resolution of conflicts. Majid Tehranian describes peace journalism as simple to define but 'difficult to enact'.[13] He refers to the work of Jake Lynch for definitional discussions.[14] However, Lynch's own 'basic definition' of peace journalism is somewhat disappointing:

> Peace Journalism (PJ) is a broader, fairer and more accurate way of framing stories, drawing on the insights of conflict analysis and transformation.
>
> The PJ approach provides a new road map tracing the connections between journalists, their sources, the stories they cover and the consequences of their reporting, the ethics of journalistic intervention.
>
> It opens up a literacy of non-violence and creativity as applied to the practical job of everyday reporting.[15]

Although it is relatively easy to identify good and bad journalistic practices in relation to conflict situations, promoting 'peace journalism' suffers from problems of both definition and implementation. While currently prevailing forms of news coverage are clearly inadequate to penetrate the nuances of complex modes of uncivil warfare, developing viable alternatives is another matter. The Thai case illustrates both the challenges and opportunities available.

Thailand's media – the need for reform

The major shortcomings of the Thai media in covering complex stories such as the southern violence cannot be blamed solely on external interventions, or on the problematic relationships between media owners and other power-holders in Thailand's state and society. Rather, the country's media suffered from a series of structural problems that were largely of their own making.

12 Ibid., p.75.

13 Majid Tehranian, 'Peace journalism: negotiating global media ethics', *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 7, 2 (2002): 74.

14 See Jake Lynch *Reporting the world*, London: Conflict and Peace Forums, 2002 and extensive additional materials by Lynch and his colleagues at http://www.transcend.org/

15 Annabel McGoldrick and Jake Lynch (2000) 'The peace journalism option', http://www.transcend.org/ accessed 19 July 2006.

At the root of these problems was a failure to create a culture of critical, reflexive journalism.[16] The Thai print media employed a crude distinction between reporters – charged with reporting 'news', comprising mainly of direct quotations from powerholders – and columnists, whose role was to express opinions and thus to engage in a dialogue with powerholders. No one in a Thai newspaper had the central role of analysing developments, of pulling together facts and interpretation so as to make sense of complicated issues. As soon as an issue became difficult to understand or to follow – in effect, anything above the level of an open and shut crime story – the Thai print media offered the reader little help in understanding it. Only by the close daily reading of both front page 'news' and inside page columns, could anyone hope to gather enough information for form a judgement on key developments. This was difficult enough when Thailand faced a conventional political crisis – such as the sale of Thaksin's family company, Shin Corp, to Singaporean investors under controversial circumstances in early 2006.[17] The media was ill-equipped to offer analysis of such a complex set of financial transactions. But when the issue concerned was a long-running and apparently intractable low intensity 'uncivil war',[18] the Thai press (let alone the hapless electronic media) had very little to offer its audience. Other problematic issues included the widespread use of strong language by the Thai print media, especially in headlines designed to dramatise and exaggerate issues; and the related deployment of offensive visual images, including gruesome pictures of crime and accident victims calculated to generate newspaper sales.

All of these issues reflected structural problems in the working practices and sales-driven editorial policies of the Thai press. Under these conditions, reporters were not well trained in the writing of more critical, analytical stories tailored to complex situations. Furthermore, Thai journalists had little experience of reporting conflicts and wars, since the Thai armed forces – though politically very significant – had no real security or combat roles to speak of. Never having been trained in covering violent conflicts, Thai reporters really struggled to deal with the conditions in the deep south.[19]

16 See McCargo, *Politics and the press*, chapter 2.

17 The many questions raised by the Shin Corp. sale were summarised in Manok and Denokkrop [pseudo.], ม้านอกและและเด็กนอกรอบ, 25 คำถามเบื้องหลัง ดีลเทคโอเวอร์ชินคอร์ป [25 questions behind the Shin Corp. takeover], Bangkok: Open Books, 2006.

18 The term 'uncivil war' is used here in the sense described by Silvio Waisbord: 'localized, unstructured, scattered violence that lacks the logic of conventional civil wars' in 'Antipress violence and the crisis of the state', *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 7, 3 (2002): 100).

19 Bhatchara Aramsri, personal communication, 23 April 2006.

O'Neill notes that media practitioners are generally 'notoriously resistant to change'[20] and Thailand is no exception. Calls for reform of the media were widespread during the late 1990s, reflecting agendas advanced by Dr Prawase Wasi and other leading social activists who also advocated constitutional, educational, health and other reforms. At the core of the movement for media reform was a demand for a more responsible, less sensational media which would articulate more 'positive' and socially useful news agendas. In particular, the reform movement sought to curb the aggressive language and images favoured by mass market Thai language dailies. At the same time, it was not always clear that media reformers really grasped the central problem: the need for more analytical and critical coverage of complex issues. To some extent, the media reform movement was clouded by intellectual confusion, by a moralistic set of understandings about what ought to be newsworthy.

Media shortcomings and the south

The shortcomings of the Thai media were perfectly shown up by their inability to report properly the dramatic upsurge in southern violence which was heralded by a landmark raid on a Narathiwat army camp on 4 January 2004. To date, no group has claimed responsibility for the violence: theories, plausible and far-fetched, are legion, rumours are rife, and the state has sought to 'manage' truths about events in a variety of ways. Two closely related wars were afoot in Thailand's southern border provinces: a battle for control of territory; and a battle for 'hearts and minds', a psychological war between different parties to the physical conflict, and between competing ideas of identity and nationhood. As part of this war, both militants and the Thai authorities distributed anonymous leaflets aimed at raising support for their causes.[21] In the face of such intensely partisan and misleading messages, both Thai Buddhists and Malay Muslims needed high quality journalism, rich, critical, analytical and in-depth perspectives on the unfolding events. Instead, they were subjected to a daily diet of glorified crime reports, and a mishmash of muddled columns and editorials. Where light was badly needed, most of the Thai media was supplying only heat.

The challenge to the integrity of Thai journalists from ordinary villagers in Tanyonglimo was a painful rebuke.[22] Yet criticism of an inept and biased

20 O'Neill, 'Developing preventive journalism', p. 79.

21 Duncan McCargo, 'Patani militant leaflets'.

22 Somkiat Juntursima, editor of Issara News Centre, interview, 21 April 2006.

media was not confined to Malay Muslim villagers. The language used by the Thai media in covering the southern violence typified the biased and sometimes offensive discourse of the Bangkok-based national press. Leading media analyst Ubonrat Siriyuvasak has argued that the Thai press had failed to convey to the wider public any sense of the deep hostility many Muslims in the southern border provinces felt towards the government.[23] Former prime minister Anand Panyarachun, appointed to head a National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) to propose solutions to the crisis in the south, was extremely critical of the media's performance.[24] At a press conference following a Commission meeting in Pattani, he heatedly berated journalists for misrepresenting the complex and delicate politics of the reconciliation process, at one point instructing them: 'Just write down my words exactly'. He went on: 'Excuse me for saying this, but some of the news really gives me a major headache. The Thai media still can't separate opinions from facts.'[25]

The southern conflict, like many other complex issues, fell between news desks. Much day-to-day reporting was the terrain of the crime desk; most events took place in the provinces, and were therefore under the oversight of the provincial desk;[26] yet many of the underlying issues were political, and came under the jurisdiction of the political desk. The political desk oversaw coverage of military issues, while police matters were generally handled by the crime desk. Issues relating to religion often had no specific desk in the Thai context, while the socio-economic underpinnings of the conflict were notionally the responsibility of reporters covering the economic, agriculture, and sometimes environment beats. All over Thailand, most provincial news was covered by local stringers who were very close to sources of information. A Bangkok-based reporter argued that stringers were often incapable of understanding the bigger picture, seeing incidents in a highly specific and localised context, rather than as part of a much larger and more complex phenomenon.[27] Because they were paid by the story, stringers had a vested interest in reporting every possible incident.

The southern violence, a political emergency with no precedent since the Communist insurgency of the late 1970s and early 1980s, really cried out for a desk of its own, for a team of specialist staff dedicated solely to tracking its twists and turns, and offering deeper insights into the problem.

23 Ubonrat Siriyuvasak interview, 19 November 2005.

24 For more discussion of the NRC's media strategy, or lack of one, see chapter 4.

25 Press briefing by Anand Panyarachun, CS Pattani Hotel, 12 November 2005.

26 It is impossible to overstate the Bangkok-centric news priorities of the Thai press.

27 Bangkok-based reporter interview, 16 April 2006.

Yet no Thai newspaper created a proper southern desk, nor gave any highly experienced reporter the status of specialist southern correspondent. This failure reflected the apparent inability of the Thai press to adapt itself to changing realities and to serve the needs of readers in a serious and timely fashion. The results were twofold: a Thai reading public in the wider country – notably in Bangkok, where most newspapers are sold – which remained woefully ill-informed about the conflict, and a local Malay Muslim population who were sceptical about the integrity and quality of Thai media coverage, and had the potential to become further alienated from the Thai state as a result.

The lineaments of a solution? Issara News Centre

Given the difficulties of reforming the Thai print media, it is unsurprising that the post-January 2004 violence in the south failed to provide the impetus for structural change, even such a modest change as the appointment of specialist southern correspondents stationed permanently in the three provinces. The main move towards reform came not from the owners and editors of Thailand's print media, but from the Thai Journalists' Association (TJA), working closely with other social actors.

A document issued in June 2005 under the name of the 'Working group for the development of media to advance ideas of peace' set out initial thinking on the project. This working group was set up under the auspices of the Sub-Committee for the Peaceful Management of Conflict, one of the five sub-committees of the NRC. Created by the Thaksin government to address the growing crisis in the south and make recommendations, the NRC was associated with a range of initiatives, and was notable for its close ties with NGOs and other civil society organisations. The vice-chair of the NRC, former royal physician Dr Prawase Wasi, had been one of the prime movers behind the 1997 Constitution, and a longstanding advocate of media reform. Prawase saw the southern crisis as an opportunity to return to agendas of media reform that had been largely forgotten during the Thaksin era post-2001. Prawase secured some funding for a project to develop alternative ways of reporting on the south from the Thai Health Foundation, and persuaded the president of Prince of Songkhla University (PSU) to assign the university guesthouse at the Pattani campus for the exclusive use of a new media centre, free of charge. The TJA managed the project with support from the southern Thai Journalists Association. The TJA saw soliciting support from Prawase and the NRC as a means

of 'outsourcing' political pressure on media groups to begin reforming themselves.[28]

The June 2005 document argued that addressing the southern violence could not be left to the government. It exposed a range of shortcomings in different areas of Thai society, and the media was playing a mixture of positive and negative role. There was now a real opportunity to create 'peace media', with five core objectives:[29]

1. Creating a core group of capable people working on peace media in the three provinces
2. Creating a new perspective on media, as a force to contribute to the reform of media in Thai society
3. Setting up an institution to facilitate the building up of knowledge and people in the field of peace media
4. Creating a network of people to work with both media and non-media organisations to offer an alternative understanding of media
5. Creating new forms of knowledge based on an emphasis on the voices, experience, movements, ways of life and ways of working of those involved in media and of local people, as well as those who have been affected by the violence

Clearly, this was an ambitious agenda that went beyond the three provinces itself. The idea was to create some sort of model media operation, one that could inspire reform of the wider media system, and a broader range of social change. To anyone familiar with Prawase's longstanding criticisms of the Thai media, the five objectives had his fingerprints all over them. At the same time, the document lacked a clear definition of 'peace media', and did not explicitly engage with recent academic or practitioner debates about its meaning: the thinking behind the proposal was rather woolly.

The detailed proposal went on to propose the establishment of something called the *To Khao Phak Tai* – the 'southern news desk'.[30] Rather than each individual newspaper creating such a desk within its own organisation, a collective 'southern news desk' would be set up, with an emphasis on conveying 'the truth about the southern situation'. It would set out to cover 'soft news about the security situation', and properly address conflicts relating to

28 Pattara Kampitak interview, 12 November 2005.

29 NRC, คณะอนุกรรมการจัดการความขัดแย้งด้วยสันติวิธี, โครงการสื่อสันติภาพ : ข้อเสนอถึงคณะกรรมการเพื่อความสมานฉันท์แห่งชาติ [Subcommittee for managing conflict peacefully: media journalism project: proposal to the National Reconciliation Commission], Bangkok: National Reconciliation Commission, 2005, p. 1.

30 Ibid., p. 2.

national identity, ethnicity, religion, culture and ways of life. It would aim to develop news sources from the peoples' sector in various areas. Above all, it would aim to mitigate the shortcomings of the existing media.

In August 2005, the Issara News Centre (INC)[31] opened its doors at PSU. The INC was staffed by a rotating team of reporters drawn from a number of Bangkok and local newspapers.[32] It received its core support from just four major newspaper groups: The Nation Group, Post Publishing, *Matichon* and *Phujatkan*. In other words, the mass circulation, *huasi* newspapers *Thai Rath* and *Daily News* – which between them accounted for the great bulk of newspaper sales in Thailand – were effectively boycotting the INC. [33] They did, however, carry links to the INC website on their homepages, and sometimes made direct or indirect reference to its stories in their reports and commentaries. But the non-participation of these leading newspapers in the project certainly undermined the INC's impact, especially since *Daily News* and *Thai Rath* were widely read and circulated in the region – and were often accused of using inflammatory language to promote negative perspectives of the people involved in the conflict. Accordingly, it remained a structurally marginal player in Thai media circles, one with the character of a pet project and innovative example of 'alternative media', rather than an effective means of mainstreaming and popularising the NRC's ideas and approach. As Supapohn's study showed, the INC's effectiveness was highly contingent on the presence of strong Bangkok-based reporters, most of whom were withdrawn from their secondments after February 2006. To some extent, the INC was preaching to the converted, collaborating with those publications already sympathetic to its agendas.

Working rather like a news agency, the INC's eight or so staffers compiled stories which they posted on their website, and made available free of charge to any newspaper wishing to carry them. Initially, the website was seen primarily as a resource for the media, and only gradually became better known to the reading public. By September 2006, more than 1,200 stories had been

31 Named after the legendary Thai journalist, Issara Amantakul.

32 กรุงเทพธุรกิจ, มติชน, บางกอกโพสต์, โพสต์ทูเดย์, คมชัดลึก, ประชาชาติธุรกิจ, ผู้จัดการ, สมิหลาไทม์,โฟกัสภาคใต้ และ ประชาไท *Krungthep Thurakit, Matichon, Bangkok Post, Post Today, Khom Chat Luk, Prachachart Thurakit, Phujatkan, Samilla Times, Focus Pak Tai*, and the *Prachatai* website. This was in fact a shorter list than might first appear, since some of these publications were owned by the same companies.

33 Supapohn ('Peace journalism', pp. 46–47) notes that *Thai Rath* did use some INC materials in one major September 2005 story. A source at *Thai Rath* told her that the newspaper 'does not oppose the INC project,' while a *Daily News* staffer explained that their paper received sufficient coverage from a dedicated local correspondent.

filed – all of them available at www.tjanews.org.[34] The reporters seconded to the INC continued to receive their normal salaries, and were sometimes asked to write 'scoops' for their own publications, but their core work was for the INC. In theory, all reporters working for the INC needed three years' experience. Many of those who came down had some earlier connection to the region – as southerners from the three provinces or elsewhere – or were Muslims from other parts of Thailand who were anxious to learn more about the situation in the south. Reporters and editors were normally rotated roughly every six weeks. A leading role was played by the INC's co-ordinator, the long-serving *Bangkok Post* Yala-based stringer Muhamad Ayub Pathan, who soon established himself as the indispensable element of continuity in its rolling operation. The INC website typically carried two or three main stories each day.

At the core of the INC project was an ambiguity about the real objectives of the centre. Was the aim to present more positive images of the south, to advance the cause of peace, to offer better analysis of the conflict, or to promote media reform? Ayub's main initial focus was on offering alternative perspectives about the south which would offer a different angle from daily news reporting.[35] He was primarily concerned with human interest stories and features on various aspects of daily life. Ayub favoured stories which offered sympathetic, distinctive and unusual insights into life in the southern border provinces, notably those that illustrated cross-cultural interactions in a positive way. He cited stories such as one on Thai Buddhists who taught in *pondok* (Islamic boarding schools), mali flowers grown by Muslims for the Thai market, and Chinese people who spoke fluent Malay as a result of having grown up living alongside and trading with local Muslims. Ayub was concerned that the wider Thai society tended to have negative images of Muslim life and culture, and he was interested in conveying more attractive images of Islam and practices such as Ramadan.

A closely related second aim was that by presenting this sort of sympathetic and engaging image of the south, mutual understanding between the Buddhist and Muslim communities would be promoted. Probably more important than peace-building within the three provinces was promoting a better understanding of the south in Bangkok and the rest of Thailand. Prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra had capitalised politically on his hard-line approach to security issues in the south, and some have argued that

34 Most stories were available only in Thai, but in mid 2006 the INC began translating selected stories into English. Recently the content formerly available at www.tjanews.org has been removed, and it is no longer possible to access the archives of the INC.

35 Muhammad Ayub Pathan, Issara News Centre co-ordinator, interview, 7 October 2005.

he actively promoted Buddhist chauvinism in order to increase his own electoral popularity.[36] Pattara Kampitak, vice-president of the TJA and one of the prime movers behind the INC,[37] argued that:

> Our mission is to understand the social fabric of the restive south, to be a forum for traumatised people and to disseminate our findings to society at large – steps which hopefully will bring peace back to the area . . . our role is crucial considering the high level of distrust that exists between the different sectors.[38]

Nevertheless, Ayub's idealistic agenda to promote a more positive image of the south – and especially of Malay Muslim culture and identity – was not universally shared. Ayub stressed the need to ensure that media coverage of the south did not express emotions or strong feelings,[39] yet this was not always possible – if those being interviewed felt very strongly, how could the media not report this? He also liked to say that the INC did not provide day-to-day coverage of the violence, and ignored heavily reported, scripted 'news events' such as visits to the south by Thaksin. This was actually somewhat disingenuous, since the INC did provide a whole series of invaluable reports on the unfolding events in Tanyonglimo in late September 2005.

Some of the second batch of reporters who arrived to join the INC in early October 2005 were openly sceptical about the value of producing extremely 'soft' feature articles, with potentially propagandist overtones. These reporters wanted to write more incisive articles which would help to explain the roots of the conflict in a more serious fashion. They also complained that they were initially told that they were not allowed to go to dangerous areas, and insisted on reporting directly from 'red zones'. The result was a shift in the perspective of the INC. One feature article described the experiences of two young reporters when they accompanied a military patrol at night in a violence-prone area of Narathiwat province; another described a reporter's experiences staying overnight in a Muslim village. Gradually, the rather idealistic prose of the early months of the INC gave way to a somewhat more hard-headed journalism, and the website started to find its own style. Pattara

36 Ukrist Pathmanand, 'Thaksin's Achilles' heel: the failure of hawkish approaches in the Thai south', *Critical Asian Studies* 38, 1 (2006): 86.

37 Pattara was political editor of โพสต์ทูเดย์, *Post Today* (a Thai language newspaper owned by the publishers of the *Bangkok Post*) and became president of the TJA in March 2006.

38 Supara Janchitfah, 'Balancing the equation', *Bangkok Post*, 21 November 2005.

39 Ayub Pathan interview, 7 October 2005, and his comments at a seminar on media issues, Faculty of Communications, Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani, 5 April 2006.

was adamant that the INC was not presenting only positive news, and was not a propaganda agency. Rather, the INC aimed to offer more sophisticated coverage of the violence, using milder headlines, more in-depth details, and broader perspectives. For example, when border incidents involved tensions with Malaysia, the INC interviewed Malaysian government officials rather than relying solely on Thai sources.[40]

Editor Somkiat admitted that some of the early stories were rather too romanticised, and that this wishy-washy approach was not sustainable.[41] Whereas initially those in charge of the INC were extremely nervous about reporters roving widely around the three provinces, they had now developed a better sense of the geography of the conflict and the parameters of what was safe and possible. Nevertheless, it was extremely fortunate that no reporters working with the INC had so far been threatened or targeted. Violence against journalists is a common problem in uncivil wars around the world, especially in areas remote from capital cities.[42] A single violent incident involving the INC would have been enough to endanger its entire operations, since the supply of volunteer staff could have dried up immediately.

In late 2006, the INC also published a number of controversial interviews with local Buddhist monks.[43] Some of these monks called for the abolition of the NRC, and expressed the view that relations between the Buddhist and Muslim communities were deteriorating.[44] Unlike soft feature articles about positive aspects of local culture, these interviews were widely picked up and reported in the national Thai language press. Ironically, however, these stories did little to promote the cause of peace, but raised the political temperature in the south, in the wake of the brutal October killing of an elderly monk in Pattani. The interviews led directly to a fence-mending meeting between NRC chairman Anand and the chief monk of Pattani province on 10 November 2005.

Yet buoyed by their success in highlighting the controversial Buddhist issues, the INC's reporters tried to seek out new areas of news that they could make their own. A particularly successful series of articles examined the politics behind the November 2005 Islamic Council elections in the three provinces.[45] These elections were barely covered in the mainstream media, yet

40 Pattara interview.

41 Somkiat interview.

42 Waisbord, 'Antipress violence', p. 102.

43 Issara News Centre, 'เปิดใจ เจ้าคณะจังหวัดปัตตานี' [The head of Patani monks speaks out]; 'พระมหานิกายอนกอส' [Mahanikai monks]; and 'เมื่อพระต้องพูด!' [When monks have to speak!], http://www.tjanews.org accessed 19 July 2006.

44 These interviews and arguments are discussed in more detail in chapter 2.

45 See chapter 3 of this book.

were enormously important for a detailed understanding of the micropolitics of the three provinces, especially the intersections between secular and religious power and influence. Another example was the INC coverage of the 2005 by-election in Kelantan, which had seen PAS come within one seat of losing overall control of the state. It was an important story for many people in the three provinces, yet one which the mainstream Thai press had largely ignored.[46] Both of these examples pointed to the need for a more analytical political understanding of the region – a somewhat different objective from the 'peace journalism' envisaged by the initial advocates of the INC.

A further question was the extent to which the INC was really aiming to promote reform of the media as a whole. This was one of the ostensible reasons for the support given to the INC by the TJA. Pattara saw the INC as a place for journalists to gain further professional training, and argued that media organisations ought to educate their staff to be able to work in situations such as the south.[47] He saw the creation of the INC as a 'turning point in the reformation process,' a way of creating pressures on the media to reform themselves.[48]

The INC remained a very distinctive, non-standard entity, with no sustainable income stream. It was dependent upon subsidies from donors and participating news organisations, in the form of both financial support and staff time. Crucially, it reflected the willingness of a small number of media organisations to behave in a non-competitive fashion in the face of the distinctive political conditions that obtained in the south. This non-competitive behaviour could not necessarily be translated into other news contexts. Ultimately, news organisations were unlikely to support the INC in the longer term, unless it could generate a larger number of useable articles for publication, or at least cover more of its own costs. Media analyst Ubonrat Siriyuvasak and economist Ammar Siamwalla both argued that the INC needed to operate on a more robust financial footing.[49] A further problem concerned the supply of reporters; after an initial wave of enthusiasm, it become more difficult for the INC to find volunteers from Bangkok dailies who were willing to spend six weeks away from home. As Supara noted, hopes that the INC could supply news to a wider range of media outlets 'may be realised later rather than sooner, though, because at the moment the INC is running far from smoothly'.[50] The INC later began also supporting shorter

46 Somkiat interview.
47 Supara Janchitfah, 'Balancing the equation'.
48 Pattara interview.
49 Supara Janchitfah, 'Balancing the equation'.
50 Ibid.

visits of four or five days by Bangkok-based reporters who could not commit to a longer stint.[51]

Yet in the troubled conditions of the southern conflict, it was not a simple matter for Bangkok-based reporters to gain access to information. Without knowledge of Patani Malay, communication with many less educated ordinary villagers – especially those over 40 – was often difficult. And any conflict situation naturally produces a fear of outsiders. These communication difficulties were a two-way street. A local reporter argued that because people in the three provinces had limited internet access, the journalistic output of the INC had virtually no impact on the daily lives of people in the three provinces.[52]. Villagers seemed not to have heard of the INC, including one man who was the subject of an article on the INC's website.[53] In this sense, the primary audience for the output lay in Bangkok and other parts of the Thailand, rather than in the three provinces themselves.

The work of the INC provided an alternative approach to the problematic existing system of local stringers, which was a reflection of the location-based rather than story-based working practices of the Thai press. Thai media organisations did not really need reporters based in every district in Thailand; rather, they needed reporters who were ready and able to go to any district in Thailand. But this essential point was often impossible for journalists and editors to grasp. A proper system of regional bureaux and story-driven reporters would quickly make local stringers, with their ham-fisted, police-style crime reports, completely obsolete. Local stringers were often criticised for their proximity to their sources. Because they had to work very closely with the police, district officers, elected politicians and other officials in their districts and provinces, they often found it difficult to write objectively about events. In some ways, the Issara News Centre offered a way forward for the Thai press, though even Ayub argued that it could not be seen as a model.[54]

Continuing challenges

While Tanyonglimo was an extreme example of the breakdown in relations between a Malay Muslim community and the Thai media, it was not a unique event. A Thai television reporter who could not persuade any locals

51 Somkiat interview.
52 Local reporter interview.
53 Supara Janchitfah, 'Balancing the equation.'
54 Ayub media seminar comments.

to speak to him at Tanyonglimo had similar difficulties when attending a subsequent incident in nearby Bo-ngo, in which nine members of the same family were shot dead while sleeping.[55] Villagers checked his press card and Thai identity card closely, giving the impression that they were keeping a blacklist of reporters with whom they would not cooperate. He believed that at least three reporters – including two from a leading international news agency – were then unable to enter villages in conflict-prone parts of Narathiwat. Even Muslim reporters had problems: anyone working for a Thai news organisation was viewed with suspicion. Reporters from Army-owned television Channel 5 had long since removed stickers from their cars and cameras, because they were seen as too close to the military – a development which exactly mirrored events during anti-Suchinda demonstrations in Bangkok in May 1992. Other television stations had not removed their stickers, however, and some reporters continued to do interesting stories and features about issues relating to the conflict. Yet most electronic media stuck largely to official news sources, relying mainly on security and government officials for their perspectives.

The INC was not the answer to all the shortcomings of the Thai media in dealing with the conflict. It remained an alternative form of media (*sua thang luek*), rather than a mainstream platform, and enjoyed an ambiguous relationship with Thailand's large media organisations.[56] Because most large Thai organisations are rather heterogenous and contain pockets of creative and liberal minded people, experiments such as the INC can often flourish on the margins. The bigger challenge is for those experiments to begin changing the core beliefs and practices of Thai news practitioners, and this showed little sign of happening. Nevertheless, the INC produced a significant number of 'alumni', reporters on various national publications who had done a stint in the south, and were far more aware of the complexities and nuances of the issues here than they were before.[57]

How can journalism promote ideas of peace? The assumption that peace can be encouraged through a focus on 'good news', or by paying more attention to the lives of 'ordinary people', seems a naïve one. What the villagers of Tanyonglimo demanded was the serious coverage of variant perspectives, the detachment of the media from the explicit and implicit clutches of Thailand's de facto Buddhist state. Supporting a small group of liberal minded journalists to offer alternative perspectives via a web-based

55 Television reporter interview, 23 February 2006.

56 For definitions and histories of 'alternative media', see Mitzi Waltz, *Alternative and activist media*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005.

57 Somkiat interview.

news agency is one way to start promoting such an agenda, but until the idea of analytical political coverage is mainstreamed, such experiments cannot be said to have worked properly. The core shortcomings of the Thai media have not changed fundamentally for many years, and the current crisis in the southern border provinces simply serves to highlight structural weaknesses that remain unaddressed. The INC did not really tackle head on the division between news and comment. By officially eschewing 'news' and concentrating on 'features', long interviews, and columns, the INC continued to replicate many of the basic problems of the Thai press. Nevertheless, the INC did practise a new form of empathy between a news organisation and a troubled population, one that offered glimpses of a possible way forward for the Thai media.

With continuing support from the TJA, the INC later broadened into a national operation; some of the editorial team were to be based in Bangkok. This entailed a new organisational structure: from September 2006, the INC was managed by a separate board from that of the TJA. But in 2007, the TJA abruptly cut its budget for the project, and Bangkok-based journalists were withdrawn completely. This change of policy reflected both differences of opinion between the INC's journalists and Bangkok editors, and personality clashes within the two organisations.[58] The project was severely damaged when Pattara Kampitak, who had become president of TJA by the time of the 19 September 2006 military coup, was forced to resign from his posts at the TJA and the INC in October 2006.[59] Pattara, the prime mover behind TJA support for the INC, became embroiled in controversy when he accepted an appointment to the National Legislative Assembly, a facade parliament set up by the coup-makers. By localising its staff, and bringing in PSU students to work as interns, the INC continued its work at a much reduced level, but no longer functioned to train reporters or to pioneer new modes of media coverage.[60] At the very least the challenge of covering the southern violence had provoked elements of the Thai media community into a sustained period of self-reflection and experimentation.

Much of the idealism of the original INC continued in the form of Deep South Watch (DSW), an NGO created to monitor developments in the south in association with local academics, medical professionals and teachers. An increasing emphasis was placed on stories addressing the security

58 See Noi Thammasathien, 'The Thai press and the southern insurgency', *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 32, 2 (2010): 282–5.

59 'President of TJA resigns', *The Nation*, 31 October 2006.

60 Noi, 'The Thai press', p. 284. Coverage from the INC since November 2009 may be found at http://south.isranews.org/

situation.[61] Muhamad Ayub Pathan now became a stalwart of DSW, which was based in the same PSU guesthouse that had previously housed the INC. DSW engaged in research activities that went beyond mere journalism, commissioning its own studies, publishing a regular series of books, and hosting workshops and conferences. [62]

Covering low intensity civil conflicts presents distinctive challenges for news media, especially for where local people regard national governments with suspicion and distrust. Media that are seen as taking sides with government agencies or majority populations will face severe difficulties operating in conflict-ridden minority areas, where they can easily become part of the problem, rather than an element of the solution. Such conditions demand critical reflection on the part of media organisations, and a rethinking of mainstream methods of news gathering and analysis. Since the establishment of the INC, conflicts have spread well beyond the deep south and major protests – sometimes involving violence – have repeatedly occurred in Bangkok. The inability of the media to develop sustainable ways of reforming news coverage to address the southern conflict has wider implications for public debate about a range of other contentious issues affecting Thailand's politics and society. [63]

61 Telephone interview with Pattara Kampitak, conducted by Bhatchara Aramsri, 5 September 2006.

62 For details of these activities see http://www.deepsouthwatch.org/ with some limited English content at http://www.deepsouthwatch.org/english

63 Pravit Rojanaphruk and Jiranan Hangthamrongwit, 'Distorted mirror and lamp: the politicization of the Thai media in the post-Thaksin era', in Marc Askew (ed.), *Legitimacy crisis in Thailand*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2010, pp. 161–95.

CHAPTER 6

Contested Citizenship[1]

Everybody, repeat after me

I, ... pledge my allegiance that,
– I will be loyal to the nation, religion and the Thai monarchy.
– I will repay the Thai land by doing good things and being a good citizen. I will conduct myself righteously according to true religious principles and abide by the Thai national constitution.
– I will conduct myself properly under the democratic system with the King as head of State.
– I will give full cooperation to the authorities, in order to establish enduring peaceful harmony in Narathiwat for ever onwards.
– I will live peacefully with others. I will love and cherish the land where I was born. I will assist in developing the community I live in.[2]

Citizenship is often seen as a simple question of nationality: people either are, or are not, citizens of a given country. This chapter seeks to question that assumption, arguing instead that informal notions of citizenship may loom just as large as formal notions. In Thailand, the Chinese minority experienced forms of 'graduated citizenship' for much of the twentieth century, enjoying Thai nationality but deprived of voting and

1 A version of this chapter was first published as 'Informal citizens: graduated citizenship in southern Thailand', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34, 5 (2011): 833–49. The author thanks Routledge for permission to reproduce the article.

2 Oath of allegiance sworn by 300 Malay Muslim men attending a gathering of former 'surrenderees' organised by the Royal Thai Army in Narathiwat, 27 August 2006. They were told to sing the Thai national song if they knew the words, and if not to stand quietly. Very few appeared to sing. Later, a speaker told them 'You all know what to do now. Adjust yourselves to the system and we can help you.' For more discussion of this event, see McCargo, *Tearing apart the land*, p. 128.

other rights. Today, Malay Muslims in Thailand's southern border provinces are Thai nationals, but do not meet the informally understood criteria for full Thai citizenship.

Malay Muslims and the south

Around 1.3 million Malay Muslims reside in the southern 'border' provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, which have a total population of around 1.8 million. Malay Muslims form a majority within their own quite sizeable region, which Chaiwat Satha-Anand has described (echoing Benedict Anderson) as an 'imagined land'.[3] Yet, despite their majority status locally, Malay Muslims are permanently labelled as a minority within Thailand's 67 million population, which is more than 90 per cent Buddhist. In fact, 'Malay Muslim' is far from being a homogenous category, but a catch-all and constructed identity.[4] These southern provinces have been the site of a major insurgency since 2004, in which more than 4,600 people have been killed; the imagined land is closely associated for many with serious political violence.[5]

Malay Muslims form a minority group within Thailand's wider Muslim minority, numerically significant but structurally marginalised. Malay Muslims are alienated from so-called 'Thai Muslims' in other parts of the country. Thai Muslims are an influential group in Bangkok, closely tied to political and other elites. The Bunnag family, Shia Muslims of Persian descent, played central roles in Siam's administration and the economy for much of the nineteenth century. General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, a Thai Muslim, commanded the Royal Thai Army (2005–2007) and led the 19 September 2006 military coup against the government of Thaksin Shinawatra. Until 2010, the Chularajamontri – the royally appointed 'spiritual leader' of Thailand's Muslims – always came from central Thailand, and before 1945, office-holders were all Shia rather than Sunni.[6] Through institutions such as the Chularajamontri and a structure of provincial Islamic

3 Chaiwat Satha-Anand, *Imagined land.*

4 Timothy Barnard (ed.), *Contesting Malayness: Malay identity across boundaries,* Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2004; Michael Montesano and Patrick Jory (eds), *Thai south and Malay north: ethnic interactions on a plural peninsula*, Singapore: NUS Press, 2008.

5 ICG, *Southern Thailand: insurgency, not jihad*; Askew, 'Thailand's intractable southern war'; McCargo, *Tearing apart the land.*

6 Imtiaz Yusuf, 'The role of the Chularajamontri'. The new Chularajamontri appointed in 2010 is a southerner, but from Songkhla rather than the Malay majority region.

councils, the Thai monarchy and state have sought to secure the loyalty of the Muslim minority and to manage its participation in wider Thai society.[7] Yet, while such mechanisms have been relatively successful in respect of Thai Muslims, they have largely failed in respect of Malay Muslims.

Malay Muslims see Thai Muslims as over assimilated, less devout, and too willing to embrace or tolerate negative features of Thai society. One informant told me that if his daughter married a Muslim from Bangkok, it would be almost as bad as her marrying a Buddhist.[8] The southern border provinces constitute what another informant referred to as a 'dinosaur island';[9] a region characterised by a powerful concoction of pride and parochialism. Viewed as *khaek* (a broadly pejorative term for South Asian or Malay foreigners) by Bangkok Thais, they were sometimes nicknamed 'Thai buffaloes' by Malaysian Malays. Rejected as marginal by both fellow Thai and by fellow Malays, Malay Muslims of Thai nationality have fallen back on their self-generated identity resources, choosing to assert their specific regional characteristics rather than subordinate themselves to broader notions of nationality.

At the heart of the southern violence lie contrasting views of identity and citizenship. Many Western views of citizenship are heavily indebted to T. H. Marshall's arguments, which classify citizenship into three core components: civil, political, and social.[10] Marshall's is a richly historically informed analysis, viewing citizenship as emerging in phases through a series of compromises and developments. However, Bryan Turner has argued that Marshall's view of citizenship reflects his experience in a relatively homogenous society, and does not capture the complexity of a modern state characterised by ethnic divisions. Nor does Marshall distinguish between active and passive citizenship.[11] Turner argues that recent socio-economic and political changes, including globalisation, have led to an 'erosion' of earlier notions of citizenship in societies such as Britain.[12] He calls for a re-expanded notion of citizenship that includes a broader range of rights. However, many countries have yet to construct the kinds of citizenship that are now declining in the developed world. It will be argued here that a legal-rational definition of citizenship, even the kind of updated and highly

7 See chapter 3 of this book.

8 Interview with academic, 6 January 2006.

9 Interview, 3 March 2006.

10 T.H. Marshall, *Citizenship and social class and other essays,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950.

11 Bryan S. Turner, 'The erosion of citizenship', *British Journal of Sociology* 52, 2 (2001): 191.

12 Ibid., p. 203.

The late Chularajamontri, Sawas Sumalayasak
(1916–2010) (photograph Ryan Anson)

nuanced version articulated by Turner, is inadequate to explain the realities of countries such as Thailand. In these countries, Marshall's three elements – which might collectively be termed 'formal' citizenship – fail adequately to capture the relationship between the individual and the state. While some scholars have sought to isolate 'cultural citizenship' as an additional component of citizenship based on ideas of multiculturalism, this model originates in a Western context, and is primarily designed to address issues such as immigration and rights of indigenous groups.[13] In non-Western societies, equal attention must be paid to informal citizenship, notions of identity that supplement legal-rational criteria for being considered a full citizen. While much of the more radically inspired debate about citizenship addresses questions concerning the 'right to have rights', linked to notions of 'inclusive citizenship',[14] such perspectives are often essentially normative. Other authors argue that ethnic and social diversity should be reflected in 'differentiated citizenship',[15] an argument normally linked to calls for special treatment and recognition of marginalised groups and communities. Critics of these calls suggest that differentiated citizenship will undermine national and social cohesion, and have detrimental long-term consequences.[16]

The case of Malay Muslims in southern Thailand offers a means of elucidating issues often occluded in most of the literature on citizenship. While the literature often assumes, rather idealistically, that minority groups would like to exercise full citizenship rights, many Malay Muslims in Thailand are rather reluctant to participate in a broader society from which they feel deeply alienated. Thai Buddhists (generally known in the deep south as *Thai phut*) are distinguished verbally and often in terms of language choice from Malay Muslims (*nayu,* in local Pattani Malay, *khon melayu* in Thai). These linguistic devices illustrate the identity cleavage between the two communities. Thai Buddhists persistently claim that elements of the Malay Muslim community are disloyal to the Thai state, failing to appreciate the benefits of what Buddhists generally construct and perceive as benevolent and positive rule from Bangkok. Buddhists are generally critical of these 'separatist' tendencies, and view religious and social practices (such as veiling) as

13 Toby Miller, 'Cultural citizenship', in Engin F. Isin and Bryan S. Turner (eds), *Handbook of citizenship studies,* London: Sage, 2002, pp. 231–43.

14 Naila Kabeer (ed.), *Inclusive citizenship: meanings and expressions,* London: Zed, 2005.

15 Marion Iris Young, 'Polity and group difference: a critique of the ideal of universal citizenship', *Ethics* 99 (1989): 258.

16 Will Kymlicka and Norman Wayne, 'Return of the citizen: a survey of recent work on citizenship theory', in Ronald Beiner (ed.), *Theorising citizenship*, Albany NY: SUNY Press, 1995, pp. 306–7.

evidence of a policy of differentiation and separation practised by Malay Muslims. Reciprocally, for Malay Muslims the discourse of 'us' and 'them' is one derived from Thai Buddhist attitudes and behaviours. Malay Muslims are invited and expected to partake in a wider Thai society which they find unwelcoming, suspicious, patronising, and deeply unsympathetic. Under such circumstances, it is unsurprising that Malay Muslims are often preoccupied with delineating their own religious and cultural space, seeking to curtail what they see as the intrusions of the Bangkok Buddhist nation-state into their own sphere. For them, neighbouring Malaysia offers an important non-Western example of differentiated, consociational citizenship, in which ethnic Malays and *bumiputera* (Malay: 'sons of the soil', or indigenous peoples) have been granted explicit economic and employment privileges under the New Economic Policy. These policies reflect what former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad termed 'The Malay Dilemma': without some redistributive privileges, ethnic Malays would remain economically marginalised, yet a systematic process of positive discrimination could have negative consequences in the longer term, creating a privileged and enfeebled group.[17] By contrast, Thai Buddhists profess to advocate undifferentiated citizenship, in which there are no explicit ethnic privileges, but in practice, Thailand is characterised by sharply differentiated modes of (albeit, informal) citizenship that privilege certain groups.

Given the predominant discourse of 'Thainess' and the determination of the country's nation-building elite to suppress all notions of ethnic difference, ethnic minorities fit uncomfortably within modern Thailand.[18] Since 'ethnic Thais' (whatever that means) can only constitute a minority in a nation where those of Lao, Chinese, Malay, Lanna (Northern Thai/Lao), Mon, Vietnamese, Khmer, and other groups are so numerous, the construction of Thai identity is a quietly repressive process, forcing much of Thailand's population to conceal, deny, or play down their underlying cultural and ethnic origins. All of these groups have actively or at least passively subsumed their culture and identity to Thainess, which serves as a totalising discourse. Not for Thailand were Indonesian notions of 'unity in diversity'; for most of the twentieth century, the Thai equivalent would have been 'unity in similarity', despite the highly constructed nature of that similarity. However, cultural diversity was widely recognised as official policy in the 2000s.

17 Mahathir bin Mohamad, *The Malay dilemma,* Singapore: Times Books, 1970, pp. 113–14.

18 Michael K. Connors, *Democracy and national identity in Thailand,* 2nd edn, Copenhagen: NIAS, 2007, pp. 128–52.

The contrast with Chineseness

Until recently, there was widespread popular insistence that ethnic differences do not exist in Thailand. In 2000, I organised a seminar in Leeds at which a visiting Thai academic presented a paper on the ethnic Chinese in Northeast Thailand.[19] The seminar was attended by a number of Thai students from the engineering and science faculties, several of whom protested that there were no 'Chinese' people in Thailand: 'everyone in Thailand is Thai'. The students making these claims – mainly university lecturers studying at the doctoral level on government scholarships – all had strikingly Sino-Thai features. The event was an example of the homogenising, totalising form of state and popular discourse about Thainess. Viewed negatively, the episode illustrated the extent to which young Sino-Thais were in denial about their 'real' ethnicity; at the same time, it revealed the remarkable successes achieved by the promoters of 'Thainess'.

While Thailand is often held up as a positive example of Chinese assimilation into a Southeast Asian society, the reality is rather more nuanced and complicated. In fact, Thailand long had a system of 'graduated citizenship' for those of Chinese descent, captured by the differences between terms such as *chuea chat, sanchat,* and *tang dao.*[20] Thai laws on naturalisation and nationality were rather liberal; during the early decades of the twentieth century, locally born Chinese gained automatic Thai nationality and after five years of residence, a Chinese migrant of 'good character' and financially secure could apply for naturalisation.[21] But this was not the whole story: after the end of absolute monarchy in 1932, only those Chinese meeting stringent educational or employment requirements were entitled to vote or to stand for electoral office.[22] During the Phibun era non-Thais, which meant primarily the Chinese, were excluded from various trades and professions. Between 1953 and 1956 short-lived legal changes meant that children born to two Chinese parents were now non-Thai, while those born to an alien father were no longer eligible for military service. Thus the rights to vote, to run for electoral office, to enter military service, and to pursue

19 Nareerat Parisuthiwuttiporn, 2000 'Role of Chinese in Mahasarakham municipal to local politics', Paper presented at the School of Politics and International Studies seminar, University of Leeds, 20 March 2000.

20 I owe this phrase and some of these ideas to a very useful personal communication from Michael Montesano, 15 April 2010.

21 G. William Skinner, *Chinese society in Thailand: an analytical history,* Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1957, p. 250

22 R.J. Coughlin, *Double identity: the Chinese in modern Thailand*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960, pp. 177–81.

particular professions were all contingent and graduated rights, which were not identical with the holding of Thai nationality; even Thai nationality itself was subject to revocation. However, as Skinner tellingly observes: 'It is an interesting feature of Thai psychology that no matter how strong the prejudice against "those Chinese", the Thai are never inclined to reject anyone of Chinese ancestry who speaks and behaves like a Thai'.[23] Thai citizenship might be viewed on two parallel and graduated dimensions: a legal dimension based on formal status and rights, and an informal dimension based on attitude, self-presentation, and behaviour.

Kasian Tejapira has argued that the ethnic Chinese in Thailand suffer from what he terms 'Thai deficiency syndrome': they feel their own identity to be inferior to Thai identity, and are constantly aspiring to increase their own sense of Thainess.[24] At the same time, since the 1980s there has been a resurgence of pride in being of Chinese descent. Many have intermarried with Thais and become *lukjin,* literally 'descendants of the Chinese', a 'culturally intermediate Sino-Thai community'.[25] Prominent historian Suchit Wongthes memorably described this identity as *jek bon lao,* Laoness overlaid with Chineseness.

Michelle Tan has suggested that the wealthy Sino-Thais seek to 'boost' their Thainess through engaging in donations to royal charities, and to leading Buddhist temples (rather than 'Chinese' temples), and through marriage with elite Thais, especially Thais descended from royal lineage or noble families.[26] Chineseness remains an unsatisfactory basis for identity, one in need of modification and refinement. However, through hybridisation, re-branding, and strategic alliances, being *lukjin* has also become a form of cultural asset, one which is essentially compatible with Thainess, although it remains a structurally subordinate form of identity. Kasian Tejapira has discussed how the People's Alliance for Democracy, a pro-monarchist movement which played a pivotal political role between 2006 and 2009, mobilised Sino-Thai support using the slogan *lukjin rak chat* [Sino-Thais love the nation].[27] Implicitly, Sino-Thais were urged to demonstrate their Thainess by defending the monarchy against forces associated with former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, many of whose supporters were Laos and Khmers from the

23 Skinner, *Chinese society in Thailand,* p. 381.

24 Kasian Tejapira, 'The misbehaving jeks: the evolving regime of Thai-ness and Sino-Thai challenges', *Asian Ethnicity* 10, 2 (2009): 271.

25 Kasian Tejapira, 'Pigtail: a pre-history of Chineseness in Thailand', *SOJOURN* 7, 2 (1992): 117.

26 Michelle Tan, 'Symbiosis and subordination: politicising Sino-Thai ethnicity', Unpublished paper, 2009.

27 Kasian Tejapira, 'The misbehaving jeks', p. 264.

northeast of the country. These recent developments support an important argument by Callahan, who previously suggested that 'neo-nationalism now not only includes Sino-Thai but is largely formulated by them'.[28]

As Saskia Sassen has argued more broadly, individuals 'can move between multiple meanings of citizenship'.[29] Some aspects of citizenship 'do not fit the categories and indicators used to capture participation in political life'.[30] This chapter responds to Sassen's call to bridge the considerable distance between theories of citizenship and empirical realities. Ultimately, Thainess is a be all and end all, an identity that trumps mere Thai nationality. Nationality and citizenship are legal notions, but to understand how sense of belonging and affinity actually work, legal concepts are quite inadequate. Most minority groups in Thailand do enjoy legal citizenship rights, but Thainess remains a less accessible status. Other ethnic groups in Thailand experience Thai deficiency syndrome to varying degrees. Northeasterners, for example, often seek to tone down their Laoness, adopting the hybridised, recently constructed identity of *khon isan*, which does not challenge the overarching superiority of Thainess. The Northeast was a site of resistance to Bangkok during the immediate post-war period, but this resistance eventually grew muted and largely rhetorical.[31] Thailand's more than a million speakers of Northern Khmer, who are the major linguistic and identity group in Surin, Srisaket, and Buriram provinces, maintain such a low and subordinated profile as to be virtually invisible.[32] Muslims in Bangkok and in most of Thailand have accepted the hybridised status of 'Thai Muslims', Muslims whose 'Muslimness' is incorporated into a broader Thai identity, which in no way threatens or criticises the dominant group, discourse, and ideology of the nation. But Malay Muslims in the southern border provinces offer a resistance to the hegemonic discourse of Thainess that clearly distinguishes Malay Muslims from all other groups in Thailand. As Jory has argued, in response, the Thai state has simply refused to recognise their distinctiveness, placing them instead within the lumpen category of 'Thai Muslims':

28 William A. Callahan, "Beyond cosmopolitanism and nationalism: diasporic Chinese and neonationalism in China and Thailand', *International Organization* 57, 3 (2003): 510.

29 Saskia Sassen, 'The repositioning of citizenship and alienage: emergent subjects and spaces for politics', in Kate E. Tunstall (ed.), *Displacement, asylum, migration,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 188.

30 Ibid., p. 193.

31 Somchai Phatharathananunth, *Civil society and democratization: social movements in Northeast Thailand,* Copenhagen: NIAS, 2006, pp. 38–52.

32 Peter Vail, 'Thailand's Khmer as "invisible minority": language, ethnicity and cultural politics in north-eastern Thailand', *Asian Ethnicity,* 8, 2 (2007): 111–30.

'within official discourse of Thainess while there is a place for Muslims, it seems there is no place for Malays'.[33]

Managing the Malays

In recent decades, the Thai state has used a combination of approaches to address the issue. Leeway granting was the primary theme of the post-1980s elite pact through which the south was managed, as a result of actions by the Prem Tinsulanond governments of 1980 to 1988. A central plank of this approach was the creation of certain special governance and consultative arrangements symbolised by the establishment of the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC).

At the same time, leeway granting went hand in hand with minority management. While Malay Muslim elites were allowed to benefit from the ownership of private Islamic schools, and to enter a wide range of political roles including those of MP and minister, this granting of leeway did not mean a real diminution of Thai suspicions regarding Malay 'loyalty'. When political violence in the deep south re-emerged in 2004, elements of the Thai state were quick to blame the very same Malay Muslim elites who had been their closest collaborators. Wadah group politicians (who then formed part of the government Thai Rak Thai Party) were widely believed by the Thai security forces to be behind the violence. One Wadah MP, Najmuddin Umar, was actually charged with treason by the Thai authorities, though the charges were later dropped.[34] Especially after 2004, the military engaged in close scrutiny of local elites, who were subjected to regular visits, interviews, and various forms of harassment. Despite an apparent willingness to cut Malay Muslims some slack, the Thai state ultimately harboured deep misgivings about the trustworthiness and reliability even of those it had selected as its primary operatives in the community. Wherever granted, leeway needed to be policed, monitored, and tightly managed.

An alternative approach to the problem was to redefine the nature of the relationship between Bangkok and the deep south with reference to a new doctrine of multiculturalism. Such a doctrine was laid out by former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun, who chaired the 2005–2006 National Reconciliation Commission (NRC), to examine possible solutions to the

33 Jory, 'From "Patani Melayu"', p. 43.

34 Prasit Chaithongpan, ประสิทธิ์ ไชยทองพันธ์, เขาหาว่า (ส.ส.นัจมุดดีน) เป็นกบฏปล้นปืน [Accusation of treason (against MP Najmuddin)], Bangkok: Saiyaiprachatham Publishing, 2009.

southern Thai conflict. In a televised conversation with then Prime Minister Thaksin in July 2005, Anand pointed out that Thailand was characterised by considerable ethnic and cultural diversity: Thaksin was of Chinese descent, and he himself had Mon origins. He argued that embracing and celebrating this diversity would create a more comfortable space for Malay Muslims within Thai society.[35] While the NRC's political proposals for addressing the violence were very modest – and widely criticised – Anand's most distinctive achievement was to shift the discourse towards models of multiculturalism, itself a significant change.

In a September 2005 speech given in Hat Yai, Anand took the argument a stage further. There he argued that Thais had lost many of their traditional values, including notions of 'sufficiency economy' (an important royal theme) and self-help.[36] By contrast, Malay Muslim villages often lived very simple lives that were close to such values, since they 'don't aspire to use more money than necessary, they have a sense of satisfaction in sufficiency, they are not attached to consumer culture.'[37] The clear implication was that Malay Muslims could be more Thai than the Thai, offering a potential 'way back' to Thainess for those who had lost sight of their original identity. Anand's view implied a romanticisation of the village and 'traditional' self-help culture framed by royalist ideas of the sufficiency economy. This was a radical, indeed quite an extraordinary claim which could be evaluated in different ways: as an excess of political correctness, or as a remarkable critical insight. Anand's support for ideas of multiculturalism – always subtly tied to quasi-essentialist notions of Thainess – represented an emerging theme for 'royal liberalism',[38] a stance adopted by leading actors closely affiliated with Thailand's influential monarchy. Nonetheless, as Michael Connors has argued, it was a shift nestled within historical changes that had taken place in Thailand over more than 20 years, and reflected the gradual rise of cultural diversity discourses.[39] In effect, Anand advanced multiculturalism as a re-totalising discourse to replace hardline Thai nationalism, offering a new seating plan for the country's various minority populations. Ultimately, however, Anand's Thai

35 TV Channel 11, 'Special conversation about peace-building'.

36 Anand Panyarachun, 'Building reconciliation', p. 16.

37 Ibid.

38 Michael K. Connors, 'Article of faith: the failure of royal liberalism in Thailand', *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, 1 (2008): 143–65; 'Liberalism, authoritarianism and the politics of decisionism in Thailand', *Pacific Review* 22, 3 (2009): 355–73.

39 Michael K. Connors, 'Another country: reflections on the politics and culture of the Muslim south', in John Funston (ed.), *Divided over Thaksin: Thailand's coup and problematic transition*, Singapore: ISEAS, 2009. pp. 112–13.

style multiculturalism was a top down paternalistic project based on an expanded concept of Thainess. It did not amount to a real acknowledgement of difference, but was more a quest for the lowest common denominator and enlarged shared ground. As Connors has argued, 'Thai-ness cannot escape its origins as an ethno-ideology, and while subordinate identities can flourish under it, none can stand equal to it'.[40]

Subjects, citizens, or what?

In theory, Thais are citizens with rights based on successive constitutions. The 1997 and 2007 constitutions, for example, offer detailed specification concerning citizen rights. However, in practice, the nature of the Thai monarchy perpetuates a sense of subjecthood amongst Thais. Contrary to some claims, Thailand does not have a constitutional monarchy, but an extra-constitutional monarchy in which the palace – which may include royal advisors, courtiers, and an extended network of those who invoke their loyalty to the monarchy – enjoys considerable informal, unspoken, and unwritten authority. Understanding the nature of power and social relations in Thailand involves moving beyond purely legal notions and engaging with more complex, ambiguous, and non-formal realities. I will argue here that this approach involves critically unpacking legalistic understandings of citizenship and engaging with notions of 'informal citizenship'. Being a citizen of a country such as Thailand is not an either/or matter, but a question of degree. All Thai people may be citizens, but some Thai people are more 'citizenly' than others. While the legally constituted graduated citizenship experienced by Thailand's Chinese minority in the 1950s may be a thing of the past, informally graduated citizenship is a persistent reality, especially in the deep south. Malay Muslims have not been exempted from conscription because of fears about their disloyalty – as the Chinese were between 1953 and 1956 – but under an informal policy, conscripts from the southern border provinces were deployed only in other regions of Thailand.[41]

For those living in western countries, citizenship may seem a relatively uncomplicated issue, but for many millions of people in Southeast Asia, citizenship is fraught with ambiguity and complexity. As Stefan Ehrentraut has argued,[42] Cambodians operate on a continuum of citizenship categories,

40 Ibid., p. 113.

41 Interview with Thai military correspondent, 16 April 2006.

42 Stefan Ehrentraut, 'Perpetually temporary: citizenship and ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia', *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 34, 5 (2011): 789-91.

compounded by the lack of proper census data and birth registrations: some genuine citizens have genuine citizenship papers or ID cards; some genuine citizens have fake papers; and many fake citizens have fake papers. Those without proper papers may be subject to harassment, may need to pay bribes, and may be extremely vulnerable to changing regimes of regulation or simply to the transfer of individual officials between posts. Similar concerns apply in respect of many ethnic minority groups in northern Thailand, including hundreds of thousands of 'stateless' Karen, as well as to huge swathes of the Burmese population. For such people, citizenship is always a question of negotiation. Even Thailand's most liberal constitution (that of 1997) explicitly assigned rights only to citizens: non-citizens had no constitutional rights.

The political theorist David Beetham has distinguished between 'procedural' and 'substantive' forms of democracy: procedural democracy is all about elections and parliaments, while substantive democracy involves questions of representation and participation.[43] In essence, democracy is all a matter of degree. I would suggest that citizenship, like democracy, is a concept that operates on multiple levels. In Thailand, it is possible to hold procedural citizenship without substantive citizenship, since full citizenship contains informal elements that are unspoken, and yet are implicitly understood by everyone. Those who hold Thai nationality but do not participate in shared notions of Thainess are merely 'formal' or 'paper' citizens. Full Thai citizenship means holding formal citizenship plus embracing Thainess. Under such conditions, those who do not feel entirely Thai are likely to suffer from at least a mild form of Thai deficiency syndrome, though some may not. We may provisionally distinguish between three categories of Thai citizen: full citizens who feel completely Thai; formal citizens who suffer from Thai deficiency syndrome; and paper citizens who do not suffer from Thai deficiency syndrome.

In the end, Thainess trumps Thai nationality.[44] Some non-Thais successfully 'pass' as Thai, because they speak Thai without an accent, and display outward adherence to the basic principles of Thai identity.[45] 'Real' Thai citizens are supposed to subscribe to shared notions of identity, based on a loyalty to the three-part shibboleth 'nation, religion, king'. 'Nation' here implies the Thai nation as constructed during the reign of King Chulalongkorn: a

43 David Beetham, *The legitimation of power,* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991.

44 Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam mapped: a history of the geo-body of a nation,* Honolulu HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994.

45 A friend with an American father and Thai mother, who holds a US passport but grew up in Thailand, is almost invariably accepted as Thai on the basis of linguistic and cultural fluency.

centralised, unitary state subordinated to the power of Bangkok, in which all subsidiary identities are suppressed. This is problematic for many Malay Muslims, who regard their incorporation into Siam (later Thailand) as recent, arbitrary, and rather unwelcome. Many look back nostalgically to the earlier period of an independent or quasi-independent Patani state, with its own proud traditions as a centre of Islamic learning. 'Religion' actually means Buddhism, the de facto state religion. Non-Buddhists can share Thai identity only insofar as they are willing to accommodate themselves to the dominance of Buddhism, to refrain from proselytising, and to moderate their self-presentation and their religious demands. Of the three words, though, 'King' is the most important. Full Thai citizens are supposed both to feel and to express their unquestioning loyalty to the monarchy. Again, this is a difficult proposition for Malay Muslims living in Thailand. Patani had its own local kings (and, at one time, queens) who were co-opted, incorporated, and suppressed by the Siamese. While most Malay Muslims accept the Thai monarchy, few look upon it with unalloyed warmth. During the June 2006 celebrations of King Bhumibol's sixtieth year on the throne, Thais all over the country donned yellow shirts, wristbands, and other garb – except for Malay Muslims. In Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, with a few exceptions, only government officials and Buddhists wore yellow. Apart from adherence to the notions of 'nation, religion, and king', Thainess also implies a deep attachment to the Thai language. While most Malay Muslims, especially those under forty, have at least a decent command of Thai (virtually everyone watches Thai television), for many, Thai remains a second language, acquired for pragmatic purposes, but not a core element of their identity.[46] To possess Thainess, fluency in Thai is not sufficient: Thai should be one's mother tongue, one's language of first choice. A poor Thai accent should be a mark of shame, rather than, as some Malay Muslims still regard it, a badge of honour.[47] 'Thainess', the informal notion which looms larger than formal legal categories such as citizenship, is essentially incompatible with the 'Malayness' which defines identity for the denizens of Patani. Both Thainess and Malayness are essentialist notions of identity, rooted in mythical understandings and unable to share

46 Hasan Madmarn, *The pondok and madrasah in Patani,* Bangi: UKM Press, 1999, p. 75.

47 Exceptions are made here for half Westerner – half Thais (ลูกครึ่ง); and for celebrities of ambiguous ethnicity, such as former Miss Universe Pornthip Nakhirunkanok and golfer Tiger Woods, who are viewed as Thai because of their status and achievements, despite their lack of fluency in the language. For a relevant discussion, see Callahan, 'The ideology of Miss Thailand in national, consumerist and transnational space', *Alternatives* 23, 1 (1998): 29–62.

space on equal terms. While Kasian has asked publicly why it could not be possible to be both Malay and Thai at the same time – just as it is possible to be both Chinese and Thai at the same time – the answer is clear.[48] The Chinese in Thailand have been willing to subordinate their Chineseness to Thainess, because they saw themselves as immigrants who needed to adapt to the rules and mores of Thai society, and because they suffered from Thai deficiency syndrome. The Malays view themselves as an indigenous people who have been colonised, are immune to Thai deficiency syndrome, and so are unwilling to play second identity fiddle to Thainess. Becoming Thai is actually a dual track process: one track concerns formal citizenship recognition, which has not been a problem for Malay Muslims in the deep south; a second track concerns informal citizenship recognition, which many Malay Muslims have not even sought, let alone been granted.

A second difference between Chineseness and Malayness is that the recent re-legitimation of *lukjin* identity follows an earlier period of repression. For many decades, the Chinese (labelled the 'Jews of the East' by King Rama VI) were obliged to adopt Thai names, banned from entering government service, and forced to kowtow to their Thai 'betters'. Only after they had convincingly proven their loyalty were the Chinese granted full legal citizenship rights, and their participation in Thainess was acknowledged and credited. A period of marginalisation, holding a provisional status as sojourners and interlopers, was virtually a pre-requisite for acceptance and approval. Approval was supported by the growing economic prosperity of China since 1979, as well as the warm diplomatic and trade relations between the two countries.

Yet, in the end, such acceptance and approval was on offer to those who would agree to play the game on Thai rules: the Sino-Thai were in a far better situation than the Chinese in Indonesia or Malaysia, for example, who have lived with historical burdens of formally unequal differentiated citizenship. Malay Muslims, who saw themselves as settled, even 'original' inhabitants of an historic homeland, were unwilling to collude with their own marginalisation. In short, there are two major reasons why you cannot be Thai and Malay at the same time. Firstly, Thais are not willing to grant

48 Kasian Tejapira, เจ๊กและแขกกับสังคมไทย: พินิจปัญหาไทยมุสลิมเชื้อสายมลายูจากประสบการณ์คนไทยเชื้อสายจีน [Jeks and khaeks and Thai society: analysis of the problem of Thai Muslims of Malay ethnicity form the experience of a Thai of Chinese ethnicity], Paper presented at Taksin University, Songkhla, 8 December 2005. When Kasian raised the comparison between the Chinese and the Malays at a Hat Yai conference in 2005, he was criticised by prominent Malay-Muslim politician Dr Waemahadi Wae-dao for failing to appreciate the distinction between an indigenous and an immigrant minority.

Malayness the status of a distinct identity, not even a subordinated one.[49] Secondly, Malays are not willing to accept the dominance of Thainess, and since they feel no deficiency in themselves, they fail to express deference to Thai identity.

Obstacles to recognising difference

Thai Buddhist views of the Malay-Muslim minority form a crucial element of the problem. While the majority population typically accuses Malay Muslims of harbouring 'separatist' tendencies, the exclusionary attitude of Bangkok Thais towards this group has the effect of creating a considerable degree of psychological separation, one which is compounded by the location of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat at the southern extremity of Thailand. Most Thai Buddhists have no reason to travel to the Malay-majority provinces and, indeed, would not dream of doing so. Thai Buddhist designations of Malay Muslims as the 'other' constitute a form of implicit separatism.

In a classic distinction made by Suhrke,[50] Thais tend to classify Malay Muslims into two contrasting groups: loyalists and separatists. In effect, Muslims are viewed in stark, binary, and highly moralistic terms: good Muslims versus bad Muslims. Good Muslims are happy with Thai 'virtuous rule', and are loyal to the benevolence of the monarchy, reflected in the justice system, the bureaucracy, and the security forces. Bad Muslims are untrustworthy, disloyal, and may be tacitly or actively supportive of separatism. Thai Buddhists tend to classify anyone seeking greater political participation for Malay Muslims as 'separatists', making little distinction between decentralisation, devolution, autonomy, and outright independence. 'Separatism', literally a desire to tear apart the land and create a distinct Malay state, has been the central accusation of disloyalty made by Buddhists against Malay Muslims, a catch-all term covering a wide range of political positions. For Thai Buddhists, Malay Muslims are excessively attached to their own language, their traditional system of Islamic education (a major fount of disloyalty), and, of course, to their religion.

49 An Interior Ministry document issued for the guidance of Thai government officials in the region actually banned them from referring to Malay Muslims as 'Malay', on the grounds that the term might 'create dissatisfaction' or 'create division' (Connors, 'Another country', p. 121).

50 Astri Suhrke, 'Irredentism contained: the Thai-Muslim case', *Comparative Politics* 7, 2 (1975): 187–203.

Conclusion

Historically, Malay Muslims in Thailand have been construed and constructed as subjects rather than citizens. Their loyalty to the monarchy has been consistently questioned and contested by the authorities, and they have been forced repeatedly to demonstrate their worthiness and their right to be considered Thai. Being Thai involves a willingness to subsume your ethnicity, language, and religious identity to a dominant discourse and mindset of Thainess. Malay Muslims fail to pass this basic test, and thus are 'not Thai', despite the fact that they are born in Thailand, hold Thai citizenship, and increasingly speak Thai as a first language. Given their ambivalence towards 'Thainess' (a deep unease concerning Thai society's attitudes to sexual promiscuity and drinking alcohol, for example), proving loyalty and demonstrating a willingness to embrace wider social norms is near impossible for most Malay Muslims. In their rejection of Thainess, Malay Muslims constitute the main group resisting Bangkok's political and cultural authority. They are left with an empty choice between 'separatism' and 'loyalty', one which for most of them has no meaning.[51] Informal notions of Thainess trump formal citizenship criteria and illustrate both a basic lack of modernity and the irrelevance of legalism. Malay claims offer a way forward to reconstruct ethno-nationalist notions of Thai identity.

The refusal of Malay Muslims to embrace Thainess is deeply subversive to the Thai state, since it contains the potential to begin unravelling the paternalistic nature of relations between the nation and its subjects/citizens. Malay Muslim demands for control over their own political resources represent a profound challenge to Thai self colonisation and deep rooted paternalism. It is for this reason that even progressive, liberal elites have tried to play down arguments for autonomy and decentralisation. For a minority in Thailand to assert its distinctive identity is to demonstrate disloyalty and is readily constructed as a prelude to overt rebellion. This is even more so when, as with Malay Muslims, that identity is linked to demands for political authority and power. Thai citizenship does not accord rights of active political participation to members of self-proclaimed minorities; such rights belong only to those who have warmly embraced Thainess, and are indeed the primary preserve of Bangkokians.

In the face of an ongoing violent conflict, Malay Muslims remain structurally marginalised. Two major alternatives to the status quo have emerged. One is that Thai society adopts notions of multiculturalism and becomes much less suspicious of Malays and other minorities. More leeway is granted, without

51 Cornish, *Whose place is this?,* p. 113.

the usual accompanying emphasis on micro-managing minorities and especially monitoring the Malay Muslim elite for the slightest sign of imagined disloyalties. A second alternative is that the Thai state proceeds with some form of substantive decentralisation, transferring major responsibilities for governing the deep south to Malay Muslims. Schwarzmantel has argued, as a general proposition, that the global decline of homogeneity can only be addressed through solutions based on devolution and forms of autonomy.[52] Both of these alternatives would mark a complete break with the old models of nation-building and identity suppression that have characterised Thai approaches to ethnic minorities until now. Both routes would involve a more flexible notion of citizenship which would extend informal citizenship to Malay Muslims, over and above the formal, paper citizenship they currently hold. Both routes may have to await a new political order, perhaps in a new reign, before they can be readily pursued. A 'culturally intermediate Malay-Thai community', parallel to the 'culturally intermediate Sino-Thai community' identified by Kasian, has yet to emerge convincingly in the deep south of Thailand.

The southern Thai case highlights the inadequacy of most recent writing about the subject of citizenship. As Sassen has argued, we need to develop a more sophisticated grasp of the available variants of formal and informal citizenship.[53] I have argued here that citizenship, like democracy, is not an either/or, but a matter of degree. Only by understanding citizenship as a continuum can we hope accurately to capture and to analyse how ethnic and religious minorities negotiate their relationships with the state. For much of the world's population, the status, rights, and above all the identity of the citizen remains intensely contingent and contested.

52 John Schwarzmantel, *Citizenship and identity: towards a new republic*, London: Routledge, 2003, p. 108.

53 Sassen, 'The repositioning of citizenship', p. 203.

CHAPTER 7

Autonomous Futures[1]

The moment you try to explain to a Thai the word for autonomy, he would say that's independence. So I warned my commission members, don't bring up this subject publicly. Yet.[2]

A series of recent developments suggest that reformed governance arrangements for Thailand's troubled southern border provinces are becoming more thinkable, though they have yet to gain strong political traction. While autonomy arrangements of various kinds have been adopted elsewhere in Southeast Asia, notably in Aceh and the Philippines, the Thai authorities have been extremely reluctant to explore such options.[3] This chapter examines the background to the debate, recent developments that imply the beginnings of a shift in approach and some options for new forms of governance in the region. The southern border provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat have experienced a simmering violent insurgency for many decades, one that the security forces have persistently failed to suppress.[4] Violence emerged with a renewed intensity in late 2001, and became a major focus of domestic and international concern following a weapons heist in January 2004.

1 An earlier version of this chapter was first published as 'Autonomy for southern Thailand: thinking the unthinkable?' in *Pacific Affairs* 83, 2 (2010): 261–81.

2 Anand Panyarachun, speech to Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand, 18 May 2005.

3 For a comparative discussion of the Thai case, see Michael Vatikiotis, 'Resolving internal conflicts in Southeast Asia: domestic challenges and regional perspectives', *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 28, 1 (2006): 27–47.

4 For background analysis of the southern Thai conflict, see ICG, *Southern Thailand: insurgency, not jihad* and other ICG reports at http://www.crisisgroup.org, last accessed 24 March 2010; Human Rights Watch, *No one is safe. Insurgent violence against civilians in Thailand's southern border provinces,* New York: Human Rights Watch Report 19, 13 (C), August 2007; and Marc Askew, 'Thailand's intractable southern war'.

As Weller and Wolff note, in the post-Cold War period, autonomy has been 'increasingly proposed as the principal remedy for the resolution of self-determination conflicts' rather than as an intermediate stage on the way towards full independence.[5] Despite its shortcomings and even failures, autonomy has become, in effect, a global default option for the resolution of violent separatist struggles. For actors with a more conservative outlook, however, autonomy remains a prospect to be feared and mistrusted: 'a somewhat dangerous concept that a state would only employ at its own peril'.[6] The case of Thailand illustrates a classic stand-off between pre-Cold War notions of autonomy as a threat and post-Cold War notions of autonomy as an opportunity. For much of the Thai elite, comparisons with other Southeast Asian cases, such as Aceh, appear more alarming than consoling. Yet, while the recent emergence of East Timor as a newly independent nation might appear to offer hope to Pattani separatists, the international community is now singularly reluctant to recognise new states and would greatly prefer to see new governance arrangements that stop short of independence.

While decentralisation and proposals for autonomy have generally been seen as undermining state integration in Thailand, elsewhere in the region, post-Cold War notions of autonomy as integrative mechanism have been adopted with a degree of success. The most striking example is that of Aceh, which was granted substantial autonomy in July 2006 after many years of violent resistance to the Indonesian state.[7] One difficulty here lies in the reluctance of the Thai elite to identify with solutions adopted in other parts of Southeast Asia, often viewed by Bangkok as less developed areas with which comparisons are inappropriate or even demeaning. According to Narathiwat politician Najmuddin Umar, Thai government officials are much more receptive to comparisons with cases such as Northern Ireland and the Basque country, which are located within European monarchies rather than Asian republics.[8]

There have been several calls for some form of autonomy to be adopted in southern Thailand since the renewed outbreak of violence during the Thaksin Shinawatra administrations (2001–2006). The first and most vocal

5 Marc Weller and Stefan Wolff, 'Recent trends in autonomy and state construction', in Marc Weller and Stefan Wolff (eds,), *Autonomy, self-governance and conflict resolution: innovative approaches to institutional design in divided societies,* Abingdon: Routledge 2005, p. 262.

6 Ibid., Stefan Wolff and Marc Weller, 'Self-determination and autonomy: a conceptual introduction'.

7 For the context to the Aceh conflict, see Anthony Reid (ed.), *Verandah of violence: the background to the Aceh problem,* Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006.

8 Najmuddin Umar, interview with author at Thai Parliament, tape recording, 27 August 2009.

call was made by former Malaysian premier Mahathir Mohamad in 2004;[9] similar proposals were later supported by former prime minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh.[10] While one of the leading figures behind the 2005–2006 National Reconciliation Commission (NRC), vice-chair and leading social critic Dr Prawase Wasi, had initially made sympathetic noises concerning ideas of autonomy,[11] these were soon dropped in favour of a stance that such language would be unhelpful. NRC chair Anand Panyarachun seemed sympathetic to devolution measures during the early months of the commission, but by 2006 he was arguing that nobody favoured autonomy as a solution to the conflict.[12] Anand told foreign correspondents (and Mahathir) that there was no word for autonomy in Thai,[13] while Prawase insisted at the release of the NRC report in June 2006 that using the term would only fuel further disputes.[14] By 2007, however, no longer constrained by his vice-chairmanship of the NRC, Prawase was talking openly about autonomy as a solution for the woes of the region. Early in the year, Prawase advocated a new form of decentralisation, using the term *monthon*, an old Thai word for 'region,' used earlier in the Chakri period.[15] By November, he was speaking publicly about the need not to assume that talking about autonomy implied any disrespect for the monarchy. In mid 2008, a group of academics, led by Pattani-based political scientist Dr Srisompob Jitpiromsri, produced a detailed, research-based report outlining proposals for reorganising governance arrangements in the southern border provinces. The most important element of the Srisompob proposal was the creation of a new ministry to oversee the region, an initiative later endorsed by a parliamentary committee set up to study the problems of the deep south and adopted as official policy by one political party. Early in 2008, newly appointed interior minister Chalerm Yubamrung had taken up the cause, expressing his support for some form of autonomy in the region.[16]

9 See 'Violence in the south: Mahathir proposes autonomous region,' *The Nation*, 30 October 2004.

10 See Sanitsuda Ekachai, 'The south: consult the locals first', *Bangkok Post*, 18 June 2009.

11 In an early NRC discussion, Prawase suggested the term *nakorn rat pattani* (something like 'Pattani Authority', resembling 'Bangkok Metropolitan Authority'), but this idea was quickly shot down.

12 Anand Panyarachun, conversation with the author, Pattani, 7 September 2006.

13 Anand speech at FCCT, 18 May 2005.

14 See 'National Reconciliation Commission submits plan to achieve peace in the south', *Bangkok Post*, 8 June 2006.

15 He was supported by articles such as 'Thailand commentary – Accept the reality that local government is needed in the south,' *The Nation*, 6 March 2007.

16 For a useful discussion, see Simon Montlake, 'Thai leaders spar over autonomy for south', *Christian Science Monitor*, 19 February 2008.

Although Chalerm was quickly reprimanded by Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej, his calls were supported by a range of commentators, including the normally very conservative *Bangkok Post*,[17] and by leading civil society activist Jon Ungphakorn, and former education minister Chaturon Chaiseng, an ex-NRC member who conducted his own investigation into policy options for the south in 2005. Following a visit to Indonesia, Samak himself was said to have expressed interest in employing an 'Aceh model' to resolve the crisis in the south.[18] Chalerm's call was repeated in November 2009 by former prime minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh. An unprecedented range of credible sources in Thai society was now articulating an interest in exploring some form of substantive decentralisation or autonomy for the far south. This was a rare and important juncture in Thai politics, a moment at which crucial state and non-state actors were beginning to question long-held assumptions about the country's governance structures.

Nevertheless, contestation over the idea of decentralising power to the south needs to be seen in the context of wider political conflicts in Thailand. Since the general election of 2001, Thais have been broadly divided into two camps: those supportive of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (2001–2006), and those critical of Thaksin, his policies and political methods. As leader of the Thai Rak Thai Party (subsequently reborn as the People's Power Party and latterly as the Puea Thai Party), former police officer and billionaire telecommunications magnate Thaksin sought to mobilise mass electoral support to undermine traditional power centres such as the bureaucracy and the military.[19] Thaksin was ousted in a September 2006 military coup which left the country bitterly divided.[20] Thaksin's critics, led by yellow-shirted protestors organising themselves as the PAD (People's Alliance for Democracy), argued that he had expressed disloyalty to the monarchy. Thaksin was later sentenced to a jail term for corruption-related offences and retreated into exile. Thaksin's defenders, led by red-shirted protestors organised as the United Front of Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), accused conservative forces of undermining an elected government and ignoring the will of the people. A series of bitter and sometimes violent confrontations between the two sides in 2008–2010

17 'Autonomy not unthinkable', editorial, *Bangkok Post*, 15 February 2008. It criticised the government for its 'flippancy' and inconsistency over the south, but supported Chalerm's proposal in principle.

18 'Aceh model to be studied, adopted for quelling strife', *Bangkok Post*, 4 June 2008.

19 For an overview, see Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thaksin,* 2nd edn, Chiang Mai: Silkworm 2009, especially pp. 226–368.

20 For the most detailed analysis of the 2006 coup, see Connors and Hewison (eds), 'Thailand's "good coup": the fall of Thaksin, the military and democracy'.

demonstrated the profound lack of political consensus in the country, as national anxiety concerning an impending royal succession crisis grew ever more pronounced.[21]

While the southern conflict cannot be crudely reduced to a microcosm of national level conflicts, many of the same elements are broadly in play: the military, aligned with the monarchy and the Democrat Party, was often at loggerheads with the police and with local politicians linked to Thaksin and his supporters. Under such circumstances, major political reforms such as granting autonomy to the deep south appeared potentially destabilising. Yet, as Michelle Miller has written concerning Aceh, 'windows of opportunity tend to appear during times of national crisis, when key political actors recognise that some critical aspect of the existing system has failed and decide to work towards instituting political change'.[22] Thailand's messy and protracted post-2006 political crisis actually offered new opportunities to review long-held assumptions about the way the country was governed.

Obstacles to autonomy

A number of interrelated obstacles make advancing the cause of autonomy difficult in the context of Thailand's deep south. These include perceived threats to royal prestige; constitutional barriers relating to the preservation of a unitary state; resistance by bureaucratic and conservative vested interests; linguistic barriers reflecting assumed cultural norms and 'invented traditions'; lack of political will from Bangkok; a shortage of 'champions' for a new approach; fears concerning parallel demands for decentralisation elsewhere in Thailand; a reluctance to capitulate to violence; lack of sympathy for Malay Muslims among people in other parts of Thailand; the unwillingness of Malay Muslim elites to speak out on the issue, for fear of being accused of disloyalty; a lack of clarity about the demands of militant groups; and uncertainty about the political aspirations of ordinary citizens in the region. The question of royal prestige is a central one in discussing options for autonomy in the south.[23] Simply put, most Thais believe that the unitary state created by King Chulalongkorn and his associates, notably

21 For a discussion of some of these events, see Montesano, 'Contextualizing the Pattaya summit debacle'.

22 Michelle Ann Miller, *Rebellion and reform in Indonesia: Jakarta's security and autonomy policies in Aceh,* Abingdon: Routledge, 2009, p. 184.

23 For an excellent source on the historical background to these issues, see Tamara Loos, *Subject Siam: family, law, and colonial modernity in Thailand,* Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2006.

Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, holds the key to the nation's success in averting formal colonisation. As British educationalist Katherine Grindrod wrote in 1895:

> The Government at Bangkok is conscious of the great importance of strengthening its control over the hitherto loosely-attached dependencies. Strong efforts in the direction of centralisation have recently been made both with a view to improving the condition of these far-off states and to preventing their absorption by Siam's great European neighbours.[24]

Successive rulers and governments have been deeply reluctant to tamper with these structures. During the long reign (1946–) of the present king, Bhumibol Adulyadej, this winning formula of a strong unitary state was popularly credited with helping Thailand resist communism, achieve remarkable socio-economic development and make progress towards a more democratic and open society. While some of these widespread assumptions privilege national myths over the historical facts, it remains the case that tinkering with Thailand's unitary state is often seen as a potentially treasonous proposition. As the final years of King Bhumibol's reign approach, few Thais are ready to support changes in the structure of the Thai state that might be construed as intentionally undermining the legacy and standing of the Chakri dynasty.[25] Successive Thai constitutions have contained the provision that Thailand is one indivisible kingdom; this provision is frequently cited as a reason why autonomy cannot be discussed publicly. This constitutional stipulation is closely related to the issue of monarchy and to myths of national identity and unity, as summarised in the ubiquitous shibboleth 'nation, religion, king' originally coined by King Rama VI. However, constitutions in Thailand are far from immutable documents (the seventeenth constitution since 1932 was approved in 2007); reifying Thailand's ever changing constitution sometimes serves simply as a cover for conservatives to resist debating substantive political reforms. In any case, the 1997 and 2007 constitutions both included provisions for extensive decentralisation, which is perfectly compatible with the preservation of a unitary state.

Closely related to royalist and constitutional constraints on advancing proposals for administrative and political decentralisation are the vested interests of the Interior Ministry, other Thai government agencies

24 Grindrod, Mrs., *Siam: a geographical summary*, London: Edward Stanford, 1895, p. 61.

25 Nevertheless, the electoral popularity of Thai Rak Thai and its successor parties and ongoing UDD demonstrations do illustrate that a significant element of the Thai population is ready to support parties and causes that royalists consider antagonistic to their interests.

and elected politicians. The current system of dividing Thailand into 75 provinces, in which senior administrative positions are monopolised by bureaucrats assigned by rotation, serves the interests of both civilian and military officials.[26] The large number of provinces, the correspondingly numerous senior posts and the short-term nature of most assignments, combine to maximise opportunities for career bureaucrats to hold top positions, such as provincial governor, in their final years before retirement. Indeed, the number of provinces in Thailand has been gradually increasing in recent years, as a result of persistent lobbying by bureaucratic interests. Any reforms based around either electing provincial governors, as has been done in Bangkok since 1985, or moving towards larger regional units (and so downgrading the importance of provinces) will be fiercely resisted by the bureaucracy, the military and the police. Ministers and members of parliament are also generally unenthusiastic about any such reforms, which would reduce their influence over the bureaucracy; innovations such as elected governors would also challenge MPs' own standing in their constituencies. The Thai print and electronic media have close relations with existing power holders, are very Bangkok-centric and so offer limited support for decentralisation proposals. Overall, few political actors are interested in challenging Thailand's culture of bureaucratic centralism, since rocking the boat will invite criticism from conservative forces, and will neither win votes nor sell newspapers.

Calling for any form of substantive decentralisation in Thailand's southern border provinces is fraught with dangers, since anyone supporting such ideas risks being accused of disloyalty to the nation and the monarchy. Part of the problem concerns the lack of an appropriate vocabulary for ideas of autonomy. There is a perfectly serviceable term for autonomy *khet pokkhrong ton eng* (literally 'self-governing zone'),[27] but many Thais are confused about the exact meaning of this somewhat clunky phrase. The more succinct *ekkarat* might mean either 'self-government' or 'independence';[28] in the Thai context, anyone advocating autonomy for the south has typically been construed as a 'separatist'. A common alternative term is the phrase *khet pokkhrong phiset*, or 'special administrative zone,' often abbreviated to *khet phiset*,[29] but this in turn raises hackles among other groups: why should Malay Muslims receive

26 Many sources refer to 76 provinces, but strictly speaking Thailand comprises 75 provinces plus the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority. Six additional provinces have been created since 1975, and the establishment of another new province was approved in August 2010.

27 เขตปกครองตนเอง

28 เอกราช

29 เขตปกครองพิเศษ, เขตพิเศษ

'special' treatment? The linguistic lacuna surrounding acceptable ways of talking about autonomy in Thai reflects the hegemonic nature of ideas of the unitary state. Ultimately, this is not really a matter of language; rather, discussing alternative models has become not just unconstitutional but also culturally inappropriate. Deep down, Thai officials and political leaders fear that granting some form of regional government to Malay Muslims in the south could lead to the unravelling of the modern Thai state, as other ethnic minority groups in the North (Lanna) and Northeast (Isan/Lao) might demand parallel recognition and treatment. Anxieties about autonomy are closely related to a wider range of anxieties about the end of the Ninth Reign, the impending royal succession, and the future of Thailand as a nation. The series of political crises Thailand has experienced since early 2006 are essentially an end-of-reign politics, the product of a particular set of historical circumstances. Under such highly charged conditions, rational policy debates can be difficult to initiate or to sustain.

A further problem is the general lack of sympathy among Buddhist Thais for Malay Muslims and their grievances against the Thai state. Anti-Muslim rhetoric is widespread in Thai discourse to be found on popular web-boards such as pantip.com, for example, fuelled by incidents such as the murders of monks by militants in the south in 2004 and 2005. Thaksin Shinawatra's landslide victory in the February 2005 election reflected popular approval of his hardline security policies in the region. For understandable reasons, the idea of rewarding militant violence by granting some form of autonomy – over 4,600 people were killed in the south between January 2004 and February 2011 – sat uneasily with many ordinary Thais. Matters were not helped by the lack of clear political demands articulated by the very loosely organised militant movement, based around small cells. Most attacks were carried out by small teams of youths; while some attacks were coordinated, there was little evidence of central control and command. The nameless, 'leaderless' movement persistently declined to issue demands, and those involved in the violence had no clear objectives. However, militant rhetoric and aspirations were indicated through widespread anonymous leaflets and graffiti. Much of the this rhetoric invoked ideas of a separate Patani state (the Malay phrase *Patani Merdeka*, meaning 'free' or 'independent' Patani, was widely used), and one document apparently produced by the movement invoked the idea of restoring the traditional Malay sultans, a nightmare for the Chakri dynasty. Yet at least one self-proclaimed leader has acknowledged that some form of autonomy might be an acceptable outcome.[30] Anthony

30 Kasturi Makota, PULO affairs spokesperson, interview by author, tape recording, Sweden, 10 May 2007.

Malay Muslim youths being searched by Thai soldiers (photograph Ryan Anson)

Davis, a respected security analyst specialising in the conflict, has argued that the militant movement is now moving away from hardline demands for independence and towards ideas of autonomy.[31]

There was no support on either side of the border for Patani to join Malaysia, and the notion of a tiny, resource-poor Malay state sandwiched between Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur was a deeply unrealistic one. Because Malay Muslims were very nervous about articulating any political demands for fear of being labelled separatists, and because Thai-funded researchers were rather anxious about finding out the answers, there was no systematic survey data that directly asked Malay Muslims whether they favoured autonomy, independence or the status quo. Government officials were visibly alarmed if the idea of a referendum was ever mentioned, apparently fearing an East Timor-style mass rejection of Thai rule.[32] One well placed informant suggested that around two-thirds of rural Malay Muslims would support some

31 See Anthony Davis, 'Thai peace process stalls', *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor* 3 (June 2009).

32 In 30 August 1999, the Habibie government held a referendum on the future of East Timor, fully expecting local people to favour continuing as part of Indonesia. Instead, there was an overwhelming 79 per cent vote for independence, which was granted in 2002.

form of autonomy,[33] but such guesstimates were extremely impressionistic, and very difficult to test. Without a clear grasp either of militant demands or popular Malay Muslim political aspirations, the autonomy argument was a difficult one to progress.

Options for new forms of governance

Back in 1947, the leading Pattani Islamic teacher Haji Sulong produced a set of seven points that articulated local demands for changes in governance and justice arrangements for the region.[34] These included the creation of a zone covering four provinces (Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Satun), the appointment of a local governor and the proviso that 80 per cent of government officials in the region should be local Malays. Sulong's points directly challenged three central elements of the status quo. Firstly, the lower south, like the rest of Thailand, is divided into relatively small provinces which are designed for Bangkok's administrative convenience. Many of these provinces do not correspond to local understandings of regions, based on questions of history, culture or religion. Sulong's call for the Muslim-majority lower south to be seen as a coherent unit was radical in the Thai context. Secondly, provincial governors in Thailand are centrally appointed from a cadre of career bureaucrats; they are regularly rotated around the country and are not supposed to have particular links or attachments to the areas where they serve. Sulong's proposal for a local governor was a direct challenge to prevailing understandings of how Thai provinces are to be administered, understandings which have remained essentially unchanged over the past 60 years. Thirdly, government officials in Thailand are appointed to a central bureaucracy. While many low-ranking officials do serve in their home provinces, senior officials in all ministries, the police and the army are commonly rotated during the course of their careers. In practice, a high proportion of senior officials in the lower south have always been drawn from the largely Buddhist provinces of the upper south, notably from Nakhon Si Thammarat, Phatthalung, Songkhla and Surat Thani. Sulong's call for most government officials to be local Malays challenged the entire institutional culture of the Thai bureaucracy and would have resulted in large numbers of non-local officials being transferred out of the area. In short, Sulong's seven points raise

33 Interview with author, 18 August 2006.

34 For more details on Sulong, see Chalermkiat, หะยีสุหลง อับดุลกาเดร์ [*Haji Sulong Abdun Kadir*] 2004, and James Ockey, 'Individual imaginings: The religio-nationalist pilgrimages of Haji Sulong Abdulkadir al-Fatani,' *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 42, 1 (2011): 89–119.

three core questions: how is the area of the lower south to be delineated for the purposes of governance? Who will act as governor and how will the governor be selected? And who will act as civil servants in the area?

In practice, notions that might be broadly labelled 'autonomy' or 'special zone' may be broken down here into three alternative approaches. To complicate matters further, these three alternatives are not necessarily mutually exclusive:

1. Regionalisation. This approach involves rethinking Thailand's historic preoccupation with a centralised state power structure, allowing for the creation of new regional administrations. Regionalisation could mean creating a special region in the deep south and leaving governance arrangements elsewhere in the country essentially unchanged, or it might mean transforming Thailand from a large number of provinces administered from the centre, to a small number of regions with greater authority over their own affairs. This authority might be either administrative, representative, or both.
2. Administrative reform. This approach emphasises the way power is organised at the level of the state. The primary reforms may lie not in establishing new entities at the regional level but in creating special governance arrangements at the national level. Such reforms might involve the creation of a new agency to oversee the south, new budgetary mechanisms or some sort of quota system to ensure that Malay Muslims had direct input into the way the state managed the region.
3. Devolution. Here the emphasis is on creating new representative mechanisms at the local or regional level, on shifting power to the people in a given area. This could be achieved through relatively minor reforms, such as electing provincial governors or the establishment of new representative structures such as provincial or regional assemblies.

Since 2007, a number of proposals have emerged from important sources in Thai society that support ideas of regionalisation, administrative reform and devolution in the south. As Mark Tamthai argued, these proposals did indicate the beginnings of a change in thinking.

> Nothing is working, and even things that before maybe were off limits we have to try. It's not new: what's new is the fact that it's public. Behind closed doors people have talked, but not perhaps in as much detail as now. But now it's actually out, meaning that people can suggest it.[35]

35 Mark Tamthai, former NRC member and Payap University philosopher, interview by author at Thai Parliament, tape recording, 21 August 2008.

Three examples of such suggestions will be reviewed here.

Prawase Wasi: the monthon revisited?

Leading Thai social critic Dr Prawase Wasi was a prominent figure behind the creation of the rather progressive 1997 constitution and a range of parallel reform processes. A former royal doctor, Prawase is a leading figure in Thailand's 'network monarchy', a loose alliance of actors with known links or strong loyalties to the palace.[36] Because of his unimpeachable loyalty to the monarchy, his unquestioned sincerity and his lack of conventional ambition, Prawase enjoys a protected status in Thai society that allows him to push the envelope on a range of social and political agendas. While as vice-chair of the NRC Prawase subordinated his views to the more conservative stance of Anand Panyarachun, during 2007 he began to advance some radically different approaches. In a bold two-page, seven-point statement issued on 24 February 2007, almost exactly 60 years after Haji Sulong's own seven points, Prawase called for a far-reaching reform of governance for the deep south which would involve treating the whole region of *Monthon Pattani* as one large administrative entity, with considerable control over its own social, economic, educational and cultural matters.[37] This fifth point was carefully framed within a set of less controversial suggestions. Using the term *monthon,* first employed during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, invoked royalist connotations and avoided any sense of a 'sell-out' that might undermine the prestige or standing of the monarchy. The full text of the fifth point read:

> Support a new system of local government. At the moment there are around 8000 local government organizations: TAOs, municipalities and PAOs, which are too small to support the building of the economy, society, identity or culture sufficiently. Adjoining provinces which share a common culture should be supported to join together to form large administrative zones (Bangkok governs itself, and has a population of 10 million), perhaps using the old name of 'monthon'. There might be perhaps 14 or 15 monthon, such as Monthon Lanna, Monthon Isan Nua, Monthon Isan Tai, Monthon Isan Klang, Monthon Tawaradi, Monthon Pattani. These monthon would be able to organize matters of economy, education, religion, society, communications and of cultural heritage, within the framework of a unitary state. Creating large regional administrative

36 For an explanation of this term, see McCargo, 'Network monarchy'.

37 Prawase Wasi, ประเวศ วะสี, นายกรัฐมนตรีกับการสร้างความเป็นเอกภาพ ในยุทธศาสตร์ดับไฟใต้ [The prime minister and building unity in the strategy to quell the southern violence], 24 February 2007, 3pp, article 129, http://prawase.com/article.php last accessed 7 November 2008.

areas would be a decisive means of stopping the bloodshed; no one would then seek a separate state.

By proposing the creation of *monthon* all over the country, Prawase sought to avert any criticism that Pattani was receiving special or privileged treatment vis-à-vis other areas of Thailand. He was advocating wholesale regionalisation. He specifically compared the scope and size of these new authorities with that of the well established Bangkok Metropolitan Authority and stressed that they would operate within the framework of a unitary state. But the bottom line was clear: the rationale behind the proposal was to avert violence and bring peace to the south. He did not elaborate on why he believed governance reform would bring about such results, but the clear suggestion was that this kind of decentralisation might undercut militant demands and undermine their support base.

Prawase's title pointed to another key element in his argument; he called upon the Prime Minister (who was at the time the former army commander and ex-privy councillor General Surayud Chulanont, though Surayud was not named in the text) to demonstrate leadership in formulating a bold and coordinated strategy for the south and not to use legal or budgetary constraints as an excuse for inaction. Surayud had won some initial praise in the south when he apologised in November 2006 for the 2004 Tak Bai massacre but had failed to follow up his rhetoric of 'reconciliation' with many concrete actions, despite the fact that as the head of a military-appointed government, Surayud effectively controlled a puppet National Legislative Assembly and could have deployed considerable political and financial resources to reorganise policy in the south. Former Pattani MP Muk Sulaiman later observed that Surayud had missed a golden opportunity to us the junta's interregnum to grasp the nettle of governance reform in the south.[38] Prawase himself pointedly failed to use the word 'reconciliation' in his own proposals; he was clearly calling for bold executive action. In his opening paragraph, he began his list of those involved in shaping strategy for the south with a rare public reference to the Privy Council, reflecting the close interest in the region showed by royal advisors.[39]

If Prawase hoped to provoke a strong reaction from Surayud, he failed. Defence Minister Boonrawd Somtas expressed sympathy for the idea of a special administrative zone, but the Prime Minister made only lukewarm

38 Muk Sulaiman, comments at meeting of the Governance Sub-Committee of the Parliamentary Committee on the Southern Border Conflict, 10 July 2008.

39 Prawase listed those involved in strategy for the *south* as follows: 'the Privy Council, the government, parliament, the military, the bureaucracy, leaders of local communities, academics, the media and civil society'.

comments about the possibility of some form of decentralisation in a July 2007 television appearance.[40] Prawase's attempts to mainstream his proposals bore little initial fruit. He had countered many of the objections raised to decentralisation by articulating proposals which did not amount to special treatment for the region, were compatible with preserving Thailand's unitary form of government and were packaged alongside security solutions, such as deploying commandos and militarising Malay Muslim youth. A further objection that might be raised to Prawase's proposals concerned the viability of the other 13 or 14 *monthon*, many of them in areas where there was little local interest in regional government. To address the problem of the south, the *monthon* system risked adding a whole tier of bureaucracy all over the country.[41]

In a Bangkok seminar presentation in November 2007, Prawase went even further, directly confronting the core taboo surrounding ideas of substantive decentralisation. With remarkable directness, he stated that talking about autonomy for the region was not an expression of disloyalty to the monarchy:

> But we tend to forbid talking about this, because it can't be mentioned, we are afraid of touching on royal powers or something, but I think we should talk about it. Having autonomy does not mean we don't love the King. If there was no democracy, his Majesty would not be happy at all.[42]

Prawase's bold attempt to decouple ideas of autonomy from questions of the monarchy was an important step. He put his finger on a core problem by pointing out that Thais avoided debating decentralisation options for the south because of exaggerated fears that they might be accused of disloyalty to the throne. But given the limits on open debate in Thailand – any public reference to the monarchy in a political context may provoke accusations or criminal charges of lèse-majesté – few media outlets were willing to report the speech, and there was no follow-up debate concerning Prawase's arguments. Though promising, his intervention had no immediate consequences. Nevertheless, Prawase was not given to accidental utterances on sensitive political issues; his statement was apparently intended to help prepare the

40 'Special administrative zone unlikely for the south', *Bangkok Post*, 8 July 2007.

41 Similar debates have been common in England since the creation of the Scottish and Welsh parliaments; logic dictates that the various English regions, such as Yorkshire, should also have regional assemblies – but there is virtually no public support for such initiatives, which were finally abandoned in 2010.

42 Pratchatai On-line 'ประเวศ' หนุนใต้ปกครองตัวเอง ยันไม่กระทบพระราชอำนาจและไม่ใช่ไม่รัก 'ในหลวง' [Prawase: insists self-governance for south does not affect royal pwoers and does not suggest lack of love for the King].

ground for future proposals and discussions, recognising that a long game might be required. Prawase's status as a key player in the monarchical network, his standing as former vice-chair of the NRC and above all his track record of pushing through major reforms including the 1997 constitution, all mean that his stance on regionalisation merits close attention.[43]

Srisompob Jitpiromsri: ministering to the south

In July 2008, a group of academic researchers published a long awaited study of issues surrounding decentralisation in the deep south of Thailand. Lead researcher Srisompob Jitpiromsri of Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani, had been working for almost three years on a wide-ranging study initially funded by Mahidol University's Centre for Peace and Development Studies, through director and former NRC secretary-general Gothom Arya. Srisompob received support from Sukri Langputeh, social science dean at the Yala Islamic University, and further input from Chantana Banpasirichote and colleagues from the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, including former dean Amara Pongsapich. Based on dozens of workshops, focus group meetings, surveys and interviews with key informants in the three provinces, Srisompob's project was by far the most serious investigation ever conducted concerning options for governance reform in the region.[44]

One original impetus behind the project was Gothom's implicit disappointment with the NRC's failure to engage with governance issues and his determination to keep pushing the envelope on proposals for some form of regional decentralisation. Gothom believed that the time was not right for the Thai state to engage directly in rethinking governance arrangements; instead, any initiative on the south needed to come from civil society or academic groups. He was interested in using any such proposals, whatever their detailed merits, in order to open up more 'cognitive space' for debate.[45] Even during his time as an NRC commissioner, he had appeared on TV Channel 9 to promote ideas of decentralising power in the south.[46] As an

43 Apart from the 1997 constitution, Prawase has also been closely associated with various other key reforms, including creation of the Thailand Research Fund; shaping pioneering tobacco control measures; establishing the vast Health Promotion Fund based on hypothecated taxes and education reform legislation.

44 The author joined ten of these workshops and focus groups between September 2005 and September 2006, during fieldwork in the southern border provinces.

45 Gothom Arya, interview by author in Bangkok, tape recording, 16 July 2008.

46 Gothom Arya, interview by author in Pattani, tape recording, 16 November 2005.

engineering lecturer turned election commissioner, and later chair of the National Economic and Social Development Advisory Council, Gothom had wide-ranging personal connections and was a key figure in the liberal wing of network monarchy associated with the intellectual leadership of Prawase. Gothom also had close links with several members of the Strategic Non-Violence Committee of the National Security Council, coordinated by deputy secretary-general Jiraporn Bunnag. Members included liberal academics Mark Tamthai, Chantana Banpasirichote, Surichai Wan'geo and former NRC research director Chaiwat Satha-Anand. While members of this group had different approaches to the political questions underpinning the violence, they all strongly believed that conventional security approaches would not provide a solution to the conflict.

Srisompob and his team began the project with a rather conservative political perspective, envisaging some modest expansion of the role of sub-district administrative organisations and other existing local bodies. Gradually, however, Srisompob's views were transformed by the sheer weight of evidence he assembled in support of a more far-reaching set of governance reforms, which he himself described as a historic opportunity. At root, what will here be termed the 'Srisompob proposal' hinged on one core initiative: the creation of a new small ministry,[47] to oversee the administration of the three provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat.[48] He suggested that the ministry be named the 'Southern Border Provinces Development Administration Bureau,' a title that echoed that of the 'Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre,' the agency currently overseeing policies in the region. Under this structure, the ministry would be headed by an elected parliamentarian selected from among the region's MPs. A permanent secretary would serve as the administrative head of the ministry, while three deputy permanent secretaries would act as governors in the three provinces. Otherwise, the basic administrative structures would remain largely unchanged, except that district officers would be given the less colonial sounding title of 'district directors,' as was already the case in the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority. The new ministry would have authority over budgetary and policy matters in a wide range of socio-economic and cultural areas, including education,

47 In Thai, ทบวง which translates literally as 'bureau,' but is normally rendered into English as 'ministry', because it is headed by a full minister.

48 The proposal is explained in Srisompob Jitpiromsri and Sukri Langputeh, ศรีสมภพ จิตรภิรมย์ศรี และ สุกรี หลังปูเต๊ะ, การปกครองท้องถิ่นแบบพิเศษในจังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้, รายงานโครงการวิจัย การปกครองท้องถิ่นในจังหวัดที่มีความหลากหลายชาติพันธ์ [Special arrangements for local government in the southern border provinces: research report on local government in ethnically diverse provinces], Salaya: Mahidol University Research Center for Peacebuilding, 30 June 2008.

but would not be responsible for security issues, which would remain in the hands of the army and the police. In other words, the new model remained essentially a top-down Thai bureaucratic model, albeit one in which the distinctive status and special circumstances of the region were recognised and accommodated. In order to ensure greater popular participation under the new arrangements, a number of new councils were to be established, including a regional people's assembly made up of representatives from different occupational groups, which was envisaged as a consultative forum rather than a policy-making body.

The beauty of the Srisompob proposal was its evident compatibility with Thailand's continuing status as a unitary state. The proposal was for administrative reform, rather than regionalisation or devolution. There was no call for elected governors or for an elected regional assembly with substantive budgetary powers. Creating a new ministry meant that bureaucrats stood to gain something from the proposal – more senior positions – while elected politicians from the region would effectively be guaranteed at least one cabinet seat. Because the new agency would not be involved in security matters, the security forces had obviously little to lose from the proposals, which had been carefully crafted to maximise their acceptability. For Malay Muslims in the south, the proposal recognised their special place within Thai society, as reflected in a unique set of governance arrangements.

Nevertheless, Srisompob and his colleagues did not have an easy ride when they presented their ideas to the public.[49] Srisompob fared better when he presented his proposal at a meeting of the Governance Sub-Committee of the Parliamentary Committee on the Southern Border Conflict, chaired by government MP Najmuddin Umar of Narathiwat.[50] Najmuddin himself expressed strong sympathy for the proposal. Privately, he admitted that he was uncertain whether the initiative would really satisfy the groups of young militants responsible for the ongoing violence but believed that it marked a clear advance on the current situation and could form a basis for negotiations with the militant movement. Compared with other Wadah politicians, Najmuddin was a very hands-on figure, with a tough guy image. Whereas many of his colleagues were based in Bangkok, Najmuddin spent much of his time in his rural Narathiwat constituency, in the heart of the conflict zone; he could often be found sitting at a large table outside his house in Tanyongmas, available to all callers. He argued that his own views on de-

49 For an English language article summarising the proposals and reactions to them, see Srisompob Jitpiromsri and Duncan McCargo, 'A ministry for the south? New governance proposals for Thailand's southern region', *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 30, 3 (2008): 403–28.

50 Najmuddin Umar, interview.

centralisation had been shaped partly by those of former Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, who served as a mentor for Wadah group Muslim MPs. The Wadah group had formed part of Chavalit's New Aspiration Party from 1991 to 2001; and Chavalit's support for southern autonomy was a matter of public record.[51] For Malay-Muslim politicians such as Najmuddin, one attraction of Srisompob's proposal was that it had originated from a team of predominantly Buddhist academics; the origins of the proposal offered them a defence against any charges of sympathising with separatist ideas.

In the end, the full House Committee on the Southern Problem adopted the Srisompop proposal as the core recommendation of its report.[52] While the committee report received relatively little media or public attention, it represented the most significant attempt to analyse and address the conflict since the lacklustre proposals of the National Reconciliation Commission.[53] Going much further than the NRC had ever dared, the parliamentary report explicitly labelled the conflict a political problem in need of a political solution and placed greater popular participation in governance at the heart of any such solution.

Shortly after the report was issued, Wadah group MPs Najmuddin Umar and Ariphen Utarasint switched parties to join a small newly formed political party, Matubhumi.[54] The proposal for a ministry of the south became official party policy.[55] On 11 August 2009 Najmuddin submitted a draft bill to parliament for the creation of the new ministry, signed by a total of 21 MPs. The Srisompob-House Committee–Matubhumi proposal was a well thought out attempt to offer something that could be presented to Malay Muslims as a form of decentralisation, yet it could be sold to conservative Thai bureaucrats as a relatively minor reform of existing structures and one that kept the region firmly within Bangkok's grasp. The main danger with this compromise proposal was that it could end up antagonising a range of interested parties while not fully satisfying

51 Chavalit made headlines in 2004 when he talked openly about autonomy for the south. See the discussion in Chang Noi, 'Nations and homes', *The Nation*, 5 July 2004.

52 House of Representatives [Thailand] คณะกรรมาธิการวิสามัญพิจารณาศึกษาปัญหาความไม่สงบใน จังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้,การศึกษาปัญหาความไม่สงบในจังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้ [Special committee for the study of the problem of unrest in the southern border provinces], Bangkok: House of Representatives 2009, pp. 9, 32–35.

53 For a fuller discussion of the NRC, see chapter 4 of this book.

54 For some background on the rather shadowy Matabhumi Party, which is linked to former coup leader General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, see, for example, http://siamreport.blogspot.com/2009/08/ sonthis-back-no-coup-this-time.html last accessed 28 August 2009.

55 Najmuddin Umar, interview.

those on any side of the conflict. Nevertheless, it constituted an important contribution to the ongoing debates over autonomy in the south; together with other contributions by Prawase and Chalerm, the new ministry proposal was a further illustration that a major policy shift on the south was becoming more possible.

Former prime minister advocates autonomy

General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh's November 2009 public call for some form of autonomy for the deep south – which he termed *nakhon Pattani* – immediately prior to a planned visit to southern Thailand by Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak, was highly provocative.[56] Chavalit had recently announced that he was joining the opposition Puea Thai Party, a direct descendant of Thaksin's banned Thai Rak Thai. Rather than discussing Chavalit's initiative on its merits, the Abhisit government and most pro-government commentators chose to interpret his proposal as an act of political opportunism, not to mention disloyalty and subversion.[57] Yet this was not a new proposal: the idea had been outlined in a book associated with Chavalit and originally published in 2005.[58] Chavalit had long been accused (like Thaksin) of anti-royalism; despite his high standing within Thai society and his outwardly conventional political career, Chavalit liked to present himself as a radical, even a leftist, whose sympathies lay firmly with the underdog. Malay Muslims in the south of Thailand had long regarded Chavalit as the only major Thai politician who really understood and empathised with their plight as a marginalised minority within an overwhelmingly Buddhist nation. Chavalit's former New Apiration Party had eventually merged with Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai Party, incorporating his 'progressive' views on the Malay Muslim predicament. However, Chavalit's radicalism had been neutralised by the majority stance of the party. The changed conditions of 2009 offered Chavalit an opportunity to re-direct the post-Thaksin political movement in a more pragmatic and creative direction.

56 For details see, for example, 'Chavalit suggests autonomous region', *Bangkok Post*, 3 November 2009.

57 This scepticism even extended to the ICG, which wrote 'Chavalit's remarks appear to have been an attempt to undercut the government rather than a genuine attempt to champion such a proposal' in *Southern Thailand: moving towards political solutions?*, Asia Report, no. 181, 8 December 2009, www.crisisgroup.org last accessed 24 March 2010. No evidence for the ICG's view is offered. There seems no obvious reason to doubt Chavalit's sincerity.

58 See การต่อสู้ครั้งสุดท้าย [The last war] by Boonkrom Dongbangstan, บุญกรม ดงบังสถาน, and authorised by Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, Bangkok 2005, especially pp. 378–99.

Chavalit's move had an important recent precedent. In February 2008, newly appointed Interior Minister Chalerm Yubamrung declared his support for autonomy in the southern border provinces. This was an extraordinary statement, given that Interior had been widely portrayed as a bastion of bureaucratic conservatism and resistance to decentralisation. Chalerm's statement was swiftly repudiated by Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej, who described such ideas as 'dangerous'. Nothing more was heard of the proposal, which had precipitated a backlash of resistance from the military, the police, the palace and from officials within the ministry itself. The People's Power Party, which formed the leading partner in the 2008 Samak government, was a reincarnation of Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai Party, which had been dissolved by a special court established under the post-coup military regime. By speaking out in favour of autonomy for the south, Chalerm was articulating a Chavalit 'line,' very different from that adopted by Thaksin. Thaksin had broadly favoured a hardline security solution to the south, and his approach there ('not one square inch of Thai territory will be surrendered') echoed the nationalist, assimilationist stance espoused by former Thai Prime Minister Phibun Songkram in the 1930s and 1950s.[59] However, insofar as Chalerm's position on autonomy was likely to infuriate the military and the palace, Thaksin may have been happy for him to advance the idea.[60] Nor did the autonomy idea come literally from nowhere. The People's Power Party manifesto for the December 2007 general election had contained little noticed proposals that 'a self-governing zone' be created in the southern border provinces and stated that 'This will not lead to separation.'[61]

Nevertheless, the autonomy proposal was not a well crafted policy position. The Ministry had not conducted any research on the issue, and no document had been prepared outlining the proposal. The idea of autonomy for the south was championed by Chalerm's senior political advisor, Yongyoot Wichaidit, a southerner and former Interior official, who had served as governor in Trang and Nakhon Si Thammarat before briefly becoming the

59 This generalisation aside, some of Thaksin's actions on the south – such as the creation of the NRC – were not consistent with a hardline stance, and some of his security policies were certainly influenced by administration hawks such as retired general Panlop Pinmanee.

60 Calls for autonomy were likely to infuriate the palace because they called into question ideas of royal virtue linked to the shibboleth 'Nation, Religion and King,' which had long formed a major basis for the legitimacy of the Thai state. A modern political order which gave citizens more power over their own governance had the potential to challenge the central role of the monarchy.

61 'Party lines', *Bangkok Post*, 2 December 2007.

permanent secretary of the Ministry in 2002.[62] Yongyoot acknowledged that resistance to the proposals had been enormous, not least from within the ministry itself. Only two people in the Interior Ministry building supported autonomy for the south: he and Chalerm. Their opening salvo – Chalerm's comments to the media – had seen them silenced, and they had been unable to progress further discussions. Nevertheless, the Chalerm proposal demonstrated that support for ideas of autonomy could come from some unlikely sources: a former permanent secretary, and a minister with a tough guy image. The rogue minister's policy outburst showed that some form of autonomy for the south was not an unthinkable notion, but it remained apparently impossible to mainstream such proposals within the bureaucratic and political elite. Chalerm, who suffered from very serious image problems, was fired as Interior minister at the beginning of August 2008, at a time when Samak was trying to distance himself from Chalerm's patron, Thaksin.

While proposals for the south by Chavalit and Chalerm were interesting, they lacked either the political clout or the credibility to progress them.[63] Nevertheless, the emergence of such proposals from the 'pro-Thaksin' faction of Thai politics was an important development, mirroring the parallel proposals emanating from Prawase and those aligned with 'network monarchy'. The Chavalit and Chalerm initiatives illustrated that key figures on both sides of Thailand's political spectrum recognised the need for a radical governance solution for the south.

Conclusion

As the unrest in Thailand's southern border provinces refused to abate, by 2008 there was a growing recognition in certain quarters that Bangkok lacked legitimacy for the existing form of rule in Pattani, and that a political solution might be needed. A way forward had already been articulated by Anand Panyarachun back in 2005:

> Definitely Thailand cannot be a federal structure . . . but we can distribute power, we can give authority, following the principles of governance, principles of participation, they should have certain powers to administer, they

62 Yongyoot Wichaidit, interview with author at Ministry of Interior, tape recording, 9 July 2008.

63 See Don Pathan, 'Chalerm's performance as interior minister not a tough act to follow', *The Nation*, 4 August 2008. Following the dissolution of the ruling People's Power Party in December 2008, Yoongyut was appointed leader of the successor Puea Thai Party. He was widely viewed as a stand-in for Chalerm.

> can leave the defence, they can leave the foreign affairs, they can leave security, whatever, to the central government. But that is perhaps the direction that we may have to think to take in the future if we can get consensus.[64]

Different versions of such views were articulated by a range of actors, including an academic team led by Srisompob Jitpiromsri; by former NRC members including Gothom Arya, academic philosopher Mark Tamthai, and former deputy NSC chief Jiraporn Bunnag; by former NRC vice-chair and leading social critic Prawase Wasi; by ex-premier Chavalit Yongchaiyudh; and by former interior minister Chalerm Yubamrung. Coming to the issue from very different perspectives, each of these prominent individuals had arrived at broadly the same conclusion: security responses, arrests and emergency legislation were unlikely to contain the violence. Governance in the region had to be urgently restructured. Prawase suggested regionalisation, Srisompob proposed administrative reform and Chalerm called for devolution. Nevertheless, expressing such ideas was fraught with dangers. In the intensely polarised atmosphere of post-coup Thailand, in which the country was bitterly divided along pro-Thaksin and anti-Thaksin lines, few were willing to stick their heads above the parapets of conventional wisdom.

Some voices continued to speak out against ideas of autonomy, notably leading academic Chaiwat Satha-Anand, who insisted that it was simply not an option.[65] Nor was Thailand's powerful military yet on board with the emerging agenda, despite the fact that senior security officials in the southern border provinces were increasingly persuaded of the need for a political solution to the conflict.[66] Nevertheless, a corner had been turned, and it was simply a matter of time and opportunity before these actors resumed attempts to mainstream their positions.

At various junctures, including in a major speech in June 2009, Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva made some concessions to the autonomy argument, suggesting that it was possible to talk about some special form of decentralisation for the south. But Abhisit went on to caution that simply changing the form of government would not be sufficient to resolve questions of justice or improve the relationship between administrators and the

64 Anand, speaking at FCCT, 18 May 2008.

65 See Chaiwat Satha-Anand 'When autonomy is not an option? Governing violence in southern Thailand,' in Ranjat Ganguly (ed.), *Autonomy and ethnic conflict in South and South-East Asia*, Abingdon: Psychology Press, 2011.

66 Two senior army officers with extensive experience in the region confirmed that support for some form of autonomy in the deep south was now a significant minority view, even within the military. Interview, 18 August 2009.

governed.[67] In the wake of the Chavalit proposal, Abhisit denounced the idea of 'Pattani city' and criticised Chavalit's opportunism.[68] A number of commentators pointed out that Abhisit had previously adopted a very similar position to Chavalit's.[69] During Malaysian PM Najib Razak's visit in December, Abhisit adopted a more conciliatory tone, speaking of his support for decentralisation (though not autonomy), including measures to allow people to elect their leaders at the provincial and district levels.[70] Abhisit's mixed messages reflected the weakness of his position. Whatever his personal views on the autonomy issue, Abhisit had to tread carefully because of his government's reliance on support from the military, conservative bureaucrats and other elements of the monarchical network.[71]

The standard Thai bureaucratic view of autonomy – as a potential threat to national integration and even national security – echoed widespread pre-Cold War perceptions of the kind described by Weller and Wolff, reflecting the extent to which Thai elite attitudes and understandings remained fossilised in a world view from earlier decades. Yet in many parts of the world, ranging from European monarchies to Southeast Asian republics, proposals of autonomy, regionalisation or devolution have offered potential approaches to the mitigation of violent conflicts. All such proposals have their shortcomings and need to be approached with considerable caution. Nevertheless, faced with an insurgency that claimed more than 4,600 lives in seven years, Thailand does not have the luxury of complacency. Despite its specific characteristics, the southern Thai conflict has much in common with similar 'separatist' struggles around the world, and a resolution of the unrest is likely to require exploring a similar menu of political alternatives. As Miller has argued in respect of the Aceh case, the crucial element now

67 Abhisit Vejjajiva, อภิสิทธิ์ เวชชาชีวะ, ทิศทางการแก้ไขปัญหาภาคใต้ในระยะต่อไปของรัฐบาล [Direction for the future resolution of the southern problem by the government], speech at Miracle Grand Hotel, Bangkok, 30 June 2009. Abhisit commonly sought to deflect discussion of questions of governance towards matters of 'justice' in the south. See also his *Al-Jazeera* interview, 26 February 2009, available on YouTube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8FN2PwrGyQ last accessed 2 October 2009.

68 Issara News Centre, 'นายกดับฝันนครปัตตานี-เลือกผู้ว่า' [PM extinguishes the dreams of Pattani city, electing governors], 6 November 2009, http://www.isranews.org/cms/index.php?option=com_content&id=4954&Itemid=47&limit=9&limitstart=9 last accessed 23 December 2009.

69 'Abhisit was for autonomy before he was against it', *Bangkok Pundit*, 8 November 2009, available http://asiancorrespondent.com/24351/abhisit-was-for-autonomy-before-he-was-against-it/ last accessed 23 December 2009.

70 'Southern conflict is Thailand's internal problem: Malaysian PM', *Bernama*, 9 December 2009.

71 See 'The trouble in between', *Economist*, 12 December 2009.

required is a genuine political will on the part of the Bangkok elite.[72] While Thailand remains deeply divided at the national level, many leading figures on both side of the royalist – Thaksin, yellow–red political divide have come to support a political solution to the country's southern conflict. Thailand's 1997 constitution, the country's most liberal ever, resulted from an unlikely alliance between idealistic royalists and ultra-pragmatic politicians. If the various figures who have proposed some form of autonomy or decentralisation for the south could start to cooperate, Thailand might begin to find a way to transcend the country's apparently intractable political divisions.

72 M. Miller, *Rebellion and reform*, p.183.

CHAPTER 8

Twin Fires[1]

One country, two conflicts: a simmering insurgency on the southern border, and several rounds of violent clashes in the capital city, a thousand kilometres away. But Thailand's two conflicts may have more in common than meets the eye. Both reflect the unravelling of Siam's nineteenth-century form of rule – the domination of royal Bangkok over the untamed hinterlands, and the substitution of internal colonialism for European empire.

The small Malay state of Patani, today wracked by insurgency, was formally incorporated into Siam only in 1909, and relations with Bangkok have been troubled ever since. During the 1960s and 1970s, separatist resistance to the Thai state was led by armed groups, especially the Patani United Liberation Organisation and Barasi Revolusi Nasional. In the early 1980s the government of Prem Tinsulanond successfully co-opted the Malay Muslim elite, including much of the separatist leadership, into a social compact that dramatically reduced levels of violence. But in the early years of the twenty-first century that compact began to unravel. The Thai government has done a wonderful job of talking down the conflict, but an expensive security response – including the deployment of around 40,000 troops from all over the country to the region – has failed to quell the violence.

Trained in conventional warfare and with little history of combat, the Royal Thai Army has struggled to respond effectively to the violence. Successive governments have tried to address the conflict through parallel talk of 'reconciliation' (*samanachan*), a term first popularised by the 2005–2006 National Reconciliation Commission (chaired by former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun, with the distinguished physician and social activist Dr Prawase Wasi as vice-chair). Reconciliation is an essentially royalist

1 A version of this article was first published in *Survival* 52, 4 (2010): 5–12 as 'Thailand's twin fires'.

construct, which starts from the premise that all Thais are bound together by a shared sense of identity predicated on the pillars of 'nation, religion, king'. According to this thinking, the natural condition of Thais is to live in harmony, basking in the warm glow of royal virtue. Where there is conflict, as in the deep south, this suggests there is a virtue deficiency that needs to be remedied. This deficiency is an individual matter. There are two kinds of people in Thailand, good people who love the monarchy and appreciate being Thai, and bad people who reject these values. In one of several curiously moralistic passages, the NRC report declares: 'To be sure, there are bad people in this land, and they should be arrested and brought to justice according to the law. But the evidence from all sides indicates that they are few in number.'[2] The mission of the state is to convert bad people into good: to turn bad Muslims into good Muslims, and to turn those who think of themselves as Malay into people who recognise their Thainess. Malay Muslims (the self-identification of many in the deep south) need to become Thai Muslims (the self-identification of most Muslims elsewhere in the country). The king declared in 2004 that the correct approach to resolving the southern conflict was 'understand, access, develop', reflecting a view of the Malay Muslim minority as misunderstood, underdeveloped and lacking in modernity. This motto may now be seen on the walls and uniforms of virtually every security unit in the south.

The central problem with the reconciliation discourse is its blindness to politics. In the south, talk of reconciliation involves ignoring the political aspirations of the Malay Muslim population. Thailand has 76 provinces: one of them, Bangkok, has an elected governor, while the rest have appointed governors who are rotated and assigned by the Ministry of the Interior. The southern border provinces elect fewer than a dozen members of the national parliament, and will never be able to speak with a loud enough voice to effect any substantive changes. Hailing from a peripheral region of Thailand, Malay Muslims are expected to kowtow to Bangkok, just as their ancestors paid regular tribute to the Ayutthaya and later the Chakri kings.

In place of political representation, participation and control, Bangkok pays lip service to the rhetoric of justice. Harsh government officials who treat local people unfairly should be transferred to other parts of Thailand, so the argument goes, and replaced by more virtuous officials who will practise more benevolent forms of bureaucratic oversight. Unfortunately, this ad hoc, personalised notion of justice fails to satisfy the local population. Where flagrant abuses have been committed, as in the case of 78

2 NRC, *Overcoming violence*, p. 3. For a critical discussion of the commission's work, see chapter 4 of this book.

unarmed Tak Bai protestors who perished mainly from suffocation while in military custody on the night of 25 October 2004, justice has yet to be done. Although the army commander responsible was transferred out of

Army motorcycle patrol outside Islamic school (photograph Ryan Anson)

the south, he was promoted to full general the following year. In May 2009 a Songkhla court reached the disappointing conclusion that there had been no intention to kill the detainees and that security officials involved had simply been carrying out their duties.[3]

Overall, the response of successive Thai governments to the conflict in the south has involved a combination of lofty disdain for the region and its people, especially the Muslim population; a willingness by the military to resort to excessive force; the deployment of royalist rhetoric as a substitute for serious study and analysis; the use of empty promises about justice and reconciliation; the deployment of vast 'development funds' to little obvious effect; and a complete denial of the political nature of the problem.

Battles in Bangkok

Years of conflict in the south bring recent Bangkok protests into sharp focus. In many ways, the story is very different. The national level crisis is essentially a conflict between different elements of the Thai elite, who have mobilised rival patronage-based networks of supporters. On the one side are the ruling Democrat Party, the military and the monarchical network, tacitly supported by the Peoples' Alliance for Democracy (PAD) – the yellow-shirted protestors who occupied Government House and eventually closed down Bangkok's airports in late 2008. On the other side are former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, a flawed and controversial figure who was ousted from power in the anachronistic military coup of 2006 and has since spent most of his time in exile, along with the opposition Puea Thai Party and the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) red-shirt movement. The UDD disrupted the April 2009 ASEAN summit in Pattaya, and occupied central parts of Bangkok between March and May 2010. Clashes between the security forces, tens of thousands of red-shirts and their allies led to over 90 deaths, hundreds of injuries, and a spate of grenade and arson attacks on buildings in central parts of the city. For all the protestors' antagonistic rhetoric, the yellow–red stand-off lacks any deep ideological basis, and the issues of religion, ethnicity and identity that loom so large in the south are far less salient at the national level. And while both sides have engaged in acts of violence, the national conflict is a much more conventional political stand-off where electoral contestation and relatively peaceful protests have generally predominated.

3 For details of the judgement see ICG, *Southern Thailand: moving towards political solutions?* pp. 13–14.

Most of the familiar mantras repeated in the international media coverage of the UDD protests are woefully simplistic. The red-shirts are not all poor farmers, any more than the yellow-shirts are all members of the Western educated elite. Their demonstrations are not spontaneous outpourings of resentment against the Thai aristocracy, despite the fact that some protestors wore t-shirts proclaiming themselves to be slaves (*prai*). The UDD is a set of loose, relatively autonomous networks, mainly but not entirely rural-based, organised around community radio stations and the PTV satellite station.[4] This network exploits the rhetoric of social justice to mobilise voters in support of 'pro-Thaksin' political parties, building on the populist programmes of the Thai Rak Thai era (2001–2006). Many of the local leaders of the UDD are vote canvassers, the grassroots political organisers who form the lynchpin of Thailand's electoral politics. Other key support bases for the UDD include elected members of sub-district administrative organisations, self-employed and semi-skilled workers, low ranking members of the security services, and farmers holding sub-contracts to produce crops for agribusiness. In other words, these are mostly lower middle class people, not those living at the margins of Thai society. The UDD has been shaped and fostered through an extensive system of political-education schools, at least 400 of which have been held in 35 provinces during the past year, aimed at boosting a mass support base. However, most UDD networks lack formal members and often rely on outside financial support from politicians.

Some of those aligned with the UDD are essentially non-political interest groups; others support ideas of social justice or electoral democracy (often conflated with majoritarianism); while yet others openly call for the return of Thaksin to Thailand. But within the UDD, there are tensions between ideas of localism supported by some groups, and the basically state-centric and top down perspective of the movement's leadership. There is often a disconnection between the leadership and ordinary UDD activists, which was clearly seen when red-shirt leaders were booed by the crowd during the final days of the May protests, after they urged demonstrators to return home. Another highly problematic aspect of the UDD was the presence of violent elements, including so-called 'men in black', within or alongside the movement. These elements were associated with a number of serious incidents, including the firing of M-79 rocket launchers at both government security forces and unarmed civilians, and were responsible for a number of deaths and injuries. While UDD leaders

4 Naruemon Thabchumpon, 'Contested political networks: the study of the yellow and the red in Thailand's politics', Paper presented at the International Workshop on Political Networks in Asia, National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, Tokyo, Japan, 14 May 2010.

denied responsibility for these attacks, they never called upon controversial figures such as rogue general Khattiya Sawasdipol, known as Sae Daeng, to withdraw from protest sites.[5]

A hollow response

The response of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva's government to the red-shirt protests had several crucial parallels with the approach of successive governments to the southern conflict. Firstly, trying to discredit the political salience of the issue will not work. For all its ideological incoherence, the militant movement in the deep south is exploiting a real legitimacy deficit in the region, and exposes the hollowness of Bangkok's attempts to impose the will of the centre upon a very diverse and complex modern nation. Simply invoking demands for blind loyalty to the monarchy was no solution to Thailand's political problems; there were real divides that need to be addressed. The red-shirt movement raised similar challenges. Despite the movement's lack of ideological consistency, and the fact that many of the protestors were simply mobilised by pro-Thaksin politicians, the UDD protests reflected a seismic shift in Thailand's political order, the rise of new power networks at the local and national levels, and the emergence of bold and vigorous interest groups that will not just go away. King Bhumibol Adulyadej is in his eighties, and the vexing question of the royal succession looms over all other issues, creating growing levels of national anxiety. Thailand has entered an era of end-of-reign politics characterised by deep social unease, as manifested by years of continuous political crisis since the first yellow-shirt protests of September 2005. Thailand faces the need for a thorough reorganisation of political power, which can only come about through substantive debate and compromise at the highest levels.

Secondly, the two conflicts illustrate the limits of military force. In the south, the deployment of enormous resources on the part of the security sector has failed to address the root causes of the conflict. In similar fashion, although the military has cleared the streets of Bangkok – at the cost of scores of lives, and using tactics that clearly violated international law[6] – the long term consequences of such actions are a further erosion in the standing

5 Maverick cavalry officer Sae Daeng played a key role in providing 'security' for the UDD protests until he was shot by a sniper's bullet on 13 May 2010. He died shortly afterwards.

6 See Amnesty International, 'Military must halt reckless use of lethal force', 17 May 2010, http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/thailand-military-must-halt- reckless-use-lethal-force-2010-05-17.

of the armed forces (already low since the bungled 2006 military coup and its aftermath) and an associated decline in state legitimacy.

Thirdly, both conflicts illustrate the shortcomings of a discourse about justice and reconciliation. Like many Malay Muslims in the deep south, UDD sympathisers believe that the justice system is loaded against them. The Thai state has a poor track record of investigating abuses of power. There has never been any proper accounting for incidents of national level political violence, such as the bloody crackdown on protests against the government of General Suchinda Kraprayoon in May 1992 – let alone for the 2004 Kru-Ze and Tak Bai incidents in the south. Few have much faith that an independent commission will get to the bottom of the scores of deaths during the March–May 2010 red-shirt protests, or that any senior figure from the government or the security services will ever be put on trial, let alone actually punished, for their orders or actions. The term 'reconciliation' in Thai has assumed the connotation of a government slogan, one that is unacceptable to the opposition. While those named by the Abhisit government to head committees for reconciliation and reform were trustworthy and well qualified individuals (including, once again, Anand and Prawase), their committees did not bring together both sides of Thailand's political divide, and so stood a very limited chance of success.

Thailand's two recent violent conflicts both testify to a seismic shift in the country's political landscape. Long suppressed by the Bangkok elite, forces of resistance, based primarily in the provinces, are challenging Thailand's hierarchies and traditional power structures. Major changes in those structures, such as genuine decentralisation to the regions, are long overdue. Instead of empty talk of reconciliation, perhaps the time has come for a real national conversation about the country's emerging political realities – and for an elite pact between the warring factions.

APPENDIX I

Perspectives of Thai Citizens in Virtual Communities on the Violence in the Southernmost Provinces

Phrae Sirisakdamkoeng[1]

The repeated violence in the southernmost provinces of Thailand during the past decades has brought a wide range of studies and research which aim to understand the causes of the violence and its economic, political, social and cultural impact. However, most of these studies do not focus on the feelings or attitudes of either the people of these southernmost provinces or those in Thai society at large. These feelings are an important consideration as they can lead to prejudices which influence people's behaviours and relationships with each other.

Social scientists usually do not take into account emotions and feelings when doing research as these are subjective issues. An exception would be psychologists and anthropologists since they recognise that feelings are shaped by beliefs, norms and social values. Appreciating this limitation, this chapter seeks to observe and examine how violence has affected the feelings of the Thai people by trawling internet forums. Most cyberspace users claim to be 'Thai'. They cling to an imagined Thainess,'[2] viewing themselves

1 Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Archaeology, Silpakorn University.

2 Saichon Sattayanurak, 'The construction of mainstream thought on "Thainess" and the "truth" constructed by "Thainess"', Paper presented at the Second Humanities Research Forum, Bangkok, Thailand, 2005. She states:

> The definition of 'Thainess' originated within the context of the centralised political structure. This construction of 'Thainess' then became the basis of the ideology that maintained the centralised political regime and the hierarchical social structure. Thai people have been dominated by this overarching ideology since the end of the 1950s, since then, the ideology has functioned as an obstacle to prevent Thai people from adapting themselves to the rapid, crucial changes in Thai society. Further, the meaning of this idea of 'Thainess' has been too narrow to create 'social space' for all groups of Thai people to attain justice, freedom and equality. Justice, freedom and

as people who speak Thai fluently, believe in Buddhism, live in Thailand, and have great respect for nation (Thailand), religion (Buddhism) and the monarchy. The violence in the three southernmost provinces affects national security and also threatens Buddhists, especially those in these provinces. This imagination arouses a collective consciousness among Buddhists within and outside the three southernmost areas and also creates a divide between Buddhists and Muslims.

On these forums there is a strong identity of being 'Thai', that is strengthened by the feeling that Buddhists in the three southernmost provinces are victims. However, a Malay Muslim identity has also developed as a result of government control and oppression over the past 100 years. The harsh comments towards Muslims and Malays reflect misunderstanding and rejection of a different religion and culture, which are actually a part of being Thai. Some Thais on the internet show that they have little tolerance for Muslims and Islam, and their actions have brought 'Thainess', 'Buddhism' and 'nationality' closer. As a result, Buddhists' identities are related to politics of identity and ethnic conflicts, as mentioned in chapter 2. Although my research was drawn from internet forums as opposed to Duncan McCargo's fieldwork in these three southern provinces, we reached very similar conclusions.

Methodology

The methodological questions that had to be addressed initially were: How and where could the information be collected? Were there venues and spaces where people could express their feelings and opinions anonymously? After some consideration it was determined that virtual communities or cyberspace provided opportunities for such sharing. Cyberspace is now established as the largest and fastest growing medium through which an enormous amount of information, news or opinions can be shared.

The different forms of communication in virtual communities, include (1) mailing lists – multidirectional, one person-to-many; (2) newsletters – unidirectional, one-to-many; (3) websites – unidirectional, one-to-many; (4) e-mail address contacts – bi-directional, one-to-one[3]; (5) Hi5, Facebook or twitter – bi-directional, one-to-many; and (6) internet forums and/or bulletin boards – bi-directional, many-to-many. These categories of communication

equality are essential for people to access essential resources and to live a dignified life. Therefore, we can say that mainstream thought on 'Thainess' has been one part of the violent structure of Thai society.

3 Birgit Bräuchler, 'Moluccan cyberactors: religion, identity and the internet in the moluccan conflict', *Anthropologi Indonesia* 73 (2004): 40–57.

require us to pay attention to the online interactions that are a new medium of social interaction.[4]

To become a member of a virtual community, one initially participates as a 'lurker'.[5] Then, when he/she is interested in joining this community, he/she joins as a new member and later, as an 'insider'. Forum members post threads, which refer to questions, messages, news, opinion or issues, in order to lead others to comment. Other members respond and share their own views on the specific issue. These opinions vary in number and length, and may be articulate, emotive, helpful, provocative, rude or ridiculous. This means that communication in virtual communities will be determined by knowledge, background and feelings of the group of people at that specific time.

As psychologist Dr John Suler states:

> It's well known that people say and do things in cyberspace that they wouldn't ordinarily say or do in the face-to-face world. They loosen up, feel more uninhibited and express themselves more openly. Researchers call this the 'disinhibition effect.' It's a double-edged sword. Sometimes, people share very personal things about themselves. They reveal secret emotions, fears, wishes. Or they show unusual acts of kindness and generosity. We may call this *benign disinhibition*.[6]

These initiatives are taken under the unique condition of virtual communities: anonymity. No one has worries about the appropriateness of their statements or the reactions of others (invisibility). They can express their feelings without censorship, and leave immediately without waiting for a response. This, of course, cannot be done in the real world of face-to-face interaction as people are not able to talk freely and equally due to the inequalities of status, economics, age and gender. Thus, virtual communities in the internet world are unique spaces of status equality and neutrality.[7]

Suler explains that people release their inner feelings in cyberspace as follows: (1) You don't know me (Dissociative Anonymity), (2) You can't see

4 Samuel M. Wilson and Leighton C. Peterson, 'The anthropology of online communities', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 449–67.

5 'Lurker' comes from cyber world glossary which means a person who views web boards, chat rooms or any groups and communities without participating or sharing opinions.

6 John Suler, 2004. 'The online disinhibition effect', *Cyber Psychology and Behavior* 7 (2004): 321–6, http://www-usr.rider.edu/~suler/psycyber/disinhibit.html

7 Wilson and Peterson, 'The anthropology of online communities'; Oliver Froehling, 'The cyberspace "war of ink and internet" in Chiapas, Mexico'. *Geographical Review* 87, 2 (1997): 291–307.

Figure 1. Pramool website: 'Speak up here if you hate southern assailants,' 6 September 2007.

me (Invisibility), (3) See you later (Asynchronicity), (4) It's all in my head (Solipsistic Introjection), (5) It's just a game (Dissociative Imagination), (6) We're equals (Minimizing Authority), (7) Personality Variables, (8)True Self?

When the virtual community becomes a social space, anthropologists are interested in the cyber world as a specific cultural phenomenon. Some anthropologists focusing on cyberspace, study the identities of various groups in this space. One anthropologist who has done research on relationships of people in online communities is Birgit Bräuchler (2004). She argues that it does not make sense to present 'real' and 'virtual' as in opposition. She focuses on the perception in the local context of the internet users, in this case, Christians and Muslims in the Moluccas, and how they present themselves to the outside world. She found that the conflict in a small community becomes the cyber identity – in this case the political conflict between Christians and Muslims. Both groups try to expand their community and identity through cyberspace. Bräuchler concludes that the internet lifts local conflicts to a global level bringing together different levels of conflict and authority on the same virtual site.

Considering the ideas of such scholars, one might conclude that the virtual community is a free space to express opinions since there is no face-to-face interaction. In the Southeast Asian and Thai cultural context, there are strong rules and prohibitions that shape the content and style of face-to-face relationships and confrontations. Cyberspace provides a special

social space where people can display uninhibited positive or negative emotions. In terms of social relationships, virtual space is also a socio-cultural space, a site of struggle and reconfiguration of the dynamics of politics and identities. Thus it is possible to use internet forums as a resource and tool for investigating the attitudes of Thais about violence and people of the southernmost provinces of Thailand.

Due to time constraints, my case study covers only 9 websites – mthai.com,[8] aromdee.net, news.hunsa.com, sanook.com, pantip.com,[9] pramool.com,[10] prachatai.com,[11] manager.co.th,[12] southpeace.go.th[13] – involving 13 forums, 2,000 comments and more than 3,000 readers. These are: comments posted on forums reveal user opinions from both genders with a diverse range of age and career groups. However, it has to be noted that in the case of Thailand the users are those who have access to a computer and knowledge of its use which reflect their education and socio-economic status.

An interesting common factor amongst the users of MThai, Aromdee, Hunsa and Sanook websites, is that users from different backgrounds usually post a new thread as a result of news they have read online so most new threads are on current topics.

Prachathai and Manager websites focus on political news. Prachathai website continually reports news of the southernmost provinces. I found

8 www.mthai.co.th, www.aromdee.net, www.hunsa.com, www.sanook.com, are web portals where users can obtain news and information easily. These websites provide different kinds of service such as e-commerce, entertainment, forums and forum, and links to other websites. They are well known among new users or those who want to find general information.

9 www.pantip.com is one of the most celebrated web portals in Thailand. Aside from e-market, information pages, chat rooms, blogs and online diaries, its strength is in in its forums, which have categories such as politics, shopping, services, beauty and health, technology, or travel etc. 'Rajadamnoen Room' is where members can discuss political issues in Thailand.

10 www.pramool.com is a website for buying and selling products and services. Users must register to be able post their products for auction. Forums are also available. The main users are male teenagers who play online games.

11 www.prachatai.com is an online newspaper and known among those who are interested in political issues. The strength of this website is in its articles and threads which contain outspoken criticism.

12 www.manager.co.th is an online website of Manager Newspaper Group, focusing on economic and political issues. Forums for sharing political opinions have users of different ages.

13 www.southpeace.go.th is a website of the Internal Security Operations Command of Thailand, comprising the military, police, government officers and civilian. Users can search for organisation information to complain about an organisation. It has forums where users, mostly government officers, share opinions on current affairs.

that many users from the Thai southernmost provinces also posted their comments on the Manager website. 'Rajadamnoen Room' on the Pantip website is where political observers, especially university students and people of working ages, share their views and updates on current news and situations.

On the Pramool website, teenagers exchange views, buy and sell products and services. It had a thread (illustrated here), 'Speak up here if you hate southern assailants', which attracted more than 300 comments in one year from its first post (11 May 2004 to 18 May 2005). Most comments were emotional rather than factual, indulging in invectives on religion and ethnicity.

Southpeace is the only government website in this study. Most of its users are bureaucrats and government officers. This website stipulates avoidance of abusive language that could lead to prejudice and conflicts, or insulting royal institutions. There is also an invitation to share opinions so as to bring peace back to the southernmost provinces.

For this review, I categorise threads from the forums into two groups: the first comprise threads that begin with opinions or conversation, and the second are user responses to current news events. Those which begin with conversations include four forums (Rajadamnoen Room from Pantip website, Manager, Pramool and Southpeace) and six threads. The first two examples are from Rajadamnoen Room. The first thread, 'Southern Muslim's opinion is government and people of different religions oppressed them' (by 'Rebellious Muslim', 31 January 2004) commented that the terrorism in the southernmost provinces was caused by Muslim oppression. There were 17 comments to this thread.

The second thread, 'Muslim, open up and read this' (by Hopeful, 22 September 2005) criticised Muslims who refused to blend with other religions and were obsessed by their own God. Those who were too strict in following their religion 'have disgusting characteristics and qualities. . . . They gather into a group without considering what is moral or immoral. Thai-Muslims who are dull and can't reach the religion's core precepts and requirements brought society frustration and boredom'. There were 35 comments for this thread.

Two threads from the Manager forum were chosen, based on the number of comments (about 30 to 40 comments). The first thread, 'Malayu Muslim would like to blame those who caused damage in southernmost provinces' (by Bangmah U-seng, true Malayu Muslim, 24 January 2004) stated that Muslims have no intention of separating from Thailand. Bangmah, who claimed to be a true Muslim, criticised those who attacked monks. He was afraid that there might be conflicts between Buddhists and Muslims. There were 44 comments on this thread.

Figure 2. Southpeace forum: 'Actions against southernmost provinces and problem solving', 25 March 2009.

The second thread, 'Please understand and show sympathy towards government officers in southernmost provinces' (by Yala Government Officer, 8 November 2005) was posted by a female Buddhist government officer. She stated that she feared for her family as something could happen to them at anytime. The Bangkok administration did not understand or show sympathy towards those who worked in the three provinces. There were 31 comments on this thread.

The thread from Southpeace was headed, 'Actions against southernmost provinces and problem solving'. There were 1,313 readers and 25 comments for this thread. The last example is a thread from Pramool with the title, 'Speak up here if you hate southern assailants'.

The threads which begin with current news about the southernmost provinces comprise five forums and seven news events, from Prachathai, MThai, Hunsa, Sanook and Aromdee forums.

I chose three news items from MThai forum. The first piece was 'Southern assailants blocked border portal police – Teacher Juling seriously injured' (*Daily News,* 24 May 2006). The news item reported on the current situation of Teacher Juling who was arrested and injured. There are 29 comments to this news item. The second piece was '30 assailants killed

2 old men and 1 disabled' (*Matichon,* 7 March 2006). The information stated that 30 fully armed young men attacked a Buddhist village in Yaring district, Pattani, two old men and one handicapped person were killed and burned. Many houses, barns and cars were also set on fire. There were 35 comments on this thread. The last example of a news item is 'Muslim ladies protest stopped after government agreed to release suspects within 1 month' (Bangkok Biz News, *Bangkok Post*, 6 May 2007, MThai.com). The news stated that soldiers investigated Rueprae Mosque in Krongpinang district, Yala, and took 24 villagers to Ingkayut Boriharn Camp. More than 300 Muslim children and women were gathered in front of Krongpinang Mosque on Yala-Betong Road, to request the government release the 24 villagers and withdraw the army from their area. There were 107 comments for this thread.

The Prachathai website reported, 'Southern assailants' agitator surrendered' (17 February 2007). In summary General Udomchai Thamsaroratch stated that the violence in the southernmost provinces had reduced as the government was seeking to neutralise the assailants by separating the agitators, whose strategy was to foment ethnic civil wars out of the current conflict. There were 10 comments on this thread.

Sanook website reported, 'Yala-Betong mini bus attacked, 8 shot dead and 2 injured' (*Khom Chat Luk* [newspaper], 14 March 2007). This was one of the most violent and tragic events in the past five years, drawing 1,317 comments for this thread within two days (14–15 March 2007).

Hunsa website stated, 'Two assailants arrested after shooting teacher' (*Naewna* [newspaper], 25 January 2008). The news report was that police

Figure 3. MThai news board: 'Southern assailants blocked border portal police – Teacher Juling seriously injured', 24 May 2006.

Figure 4. Sanook website: Betong–Hat Yai minibus shooting, 14 June 2008.

arrested two southern assailants who fatally shot a Pattani teacher. The suspects confessed that this was an order from a person in Kokpho District, and said that they were members of Tareegut Group, which wrought violence at Kru-Ze Mosque on 28 April 2004. Later, two assailants were released. There were 51 comments on this thread.

The Aromdee website showed more than 10 images of soldiers who had been attacked and injured on 25 March 2008. There were 60 comments on this thread.

Posts of virtual community members

All the comments from the above mentioned forums and threads have been categorised into the following groups:

Anger and hatred

From my survey, it appears that most users feel anger and hatred towards terrorists and Muslims. Some users displayed negative feelings towards terrorists though without identifying who they are, their religion or

Figure 5. Hunsa forum: 'Two assailants arrested after shooting teacher', 25 January 2008.

ethnicity. Some called terrorists the 'southern assailants' as seen in the following examples:

> When will the government kill all these hell people? Do I have to wait until they kill all innocent people? (Hate Southern Assailants, 7 March 2006, MThai.com)[14]

> Oh, Thai Laws, these bastards hurt Teacher Juling who has no revenge at all. They brutally hurt her even though she is a teacher. They must be put to death only. (Assassin, 25 May 2006, MThai.com)[15]

> This sucks. Get out of my country. You try to divide the country. Next life you won't have the land to stay. (Boorin, 26 March 2008, Aromdee.net)[16]

From the information available to them, members of the virtual community have concluded that southern assailants or terrorists are Muslims. Hence, there are many messages which display hatred towards Muslims and Islam.

14 เมื่อไหร่ทางการจะฆ่าไอ้พวกโจรนรกนี้ได้หมดเสียที หรือจะรอให้มัน ฆ่าคนบริสุทธิ ให้หมดก่อนอย่างนั้นหรือ (เกลียดโจรใต้, 7 มี.ค.2549, mthai.com).

15 กฎหมายไทย เอ๋ยพวกคนถ่อยที่ทำร้ายครูจูหลิงโดยที่เค้าไม่มี ความแค้นอะไร รู้ทั้งรู้ว่า ครูจูหลิงเป็นแม่พิมพ์ของชาติยังลงมือทำร้ายอย่างโหด***มหารุณได้ลงคอความผิดของคนถ่อยเหล่านั้นต้องรับโทษประหารสถานเดียว (ประหาร, 25 พ.ค. 2549, mthai.com).

16 เกลียดที่สุดเลย ออกไปจากประเทศฉันสักที คิดจะแบ่งแยกหลอ ชาติหน้าก็คงไม่มีแผ่นดินให้พวกเธอเหยียบ (Boorin , 26 มี.ค. 2551, aromdee.net).

These feelings are more heated with each passing day. Some use abusive language. Examples include:

> Hypocritical Muslims, in their feeling, there're only Muslims. Others are atheists. Blame it on Muslim schools where they have been educated since they were young. (Ban, 24 January 2004, Manager.co.th).[17]

> . . . they were socialised for ages. It is a very thin line between religion and insanity. Peace is to be used with others, not them. (Stina, 24 September 2005, Pantip.com)[18]

> Loser Muslim. I can't see any Muslim in this world living together peacefully. If they don't fight with others, they fight with Muslims anyway. Son of a bitch!' (H, 9 March 2006, MThai.com)[19]

> They were born in hell. Shot dead one by one? Wish them death. When will someone fight them back? (Evil, 14 March 2007, Sanook.com)[20]

> No prophet wants his followers to worship him by killing or hurting others. Do Muslim prophets and God teach this? Then, I realise I shouldn't respect you (Manga, 28 March 2008, Aromdee.com)[21]

Some comments shower even greater animosity than the examples above. The survey found many examples of emotive invectives and requests to fight against Muslims who were considered the cause of problems. Some comment-posters apparently believed that religion was actually the cause of all violence.

Though most members in the nine virtual communities have negative feelings towards Muslims, some believed that Muslim people are not to be accused. Examples of this perspective include:

17 ปากว่าตาขยิบ สมองพวกมุสลิม ก็มีแต่มุสลิมเท่านั้น คนอื่นคือพวกนอกศาสนา ก็ีรร ปอเนอะนั่นแหละแหล่งปลูกฝังค่านิยมตั้งแต่เด็ก แล้วจะไม่ให้มีความแตกแยกได้อย่างไร (Ban, 24 ม.ค.2547, manager.co.th).

18 ... แต่มันถูกปลูกฝังมาเป็นเวลานาน ชั่วลูกชั่วหลาน มันถูกหล่อหลอม จนแทบจะเรียก ได้ว่าเป็นเนื้อเดียวกัน ระหว่าง ศาสนา และ ความเชื่อที่ผิดๆ มันเป็นเส้นบางๆ ระหว่าง เคร่งศาสนา กับ วิกลจริตดังนั้นสมานฉันท์จึงต้องใช้กับคนอื่นที่ไม่ใช่พวกนี้ (stina , 24 ก.ย. 48, pantip.com).

19 ไอ่พวกอิสลามเฮงซวย สันดานป่าเถื่อนไม่มีอิสลามที่ไหนในโลกอยู่กันอย่างสงบเลยจะบอกให้ถ้าไม่ทะเลาะกันเองก็ทะเลาะกับคนอื่น ไอ่พวกสัตว์เดรฉาน (ห, 9 มี.ค. 2549, mthai.com).

20 พวก...นรกมาเกิด จ่อยิงหัวทีละคนเลยเหรอ คุณ พวกมุสลิม ไปตาย *** ที่ไหนก็ไป เลวนรก อัลเลาะ บ้าน***เหรอ เมื่อไหร่จะตอบโต้มันแบบรุนแรงซะทีเนี่ย (เลว,14 มีนาคม 2550, sanook.com).

21 ไม่มีศาสดาของศาสนาไหนสอนคนให้สรรเสริญพระเจ้าด้วยการ' ฆ่าใครหรือทำร้ายใคร ' ศาสดาของศาสนาอิสลามสอนแบบนี้ใช่ไหม ? จะได้รู้ไว้ว่า คนมุสลิมแบบท่านๆ มันคบไม่ได้ แล้ว (manga, 28 มี.ค. 2551, 28 มี.ค. 2551, aromdee.com).

> I'm a Buddhist who has been living in Pattani for more than 30 years. People here love one another, though there are some conflicts, just like a school where there are both good and bad students. People here respect one another and their religion. We never blame one another. Why don't we suspect that someone from our religion might be the agitator of this problem? Arresting thieves by thieves won't work. (Tani People, 24 January 2004, Manager.co.th)[22]

> Villagers in 3 southernmost provinces must be alert and observe visitors who might bring troubles. Keep an eye on the police and military. They sell drugs and weapons. The agitators are in Bangkok. Whatever the agitators said and ordered, the subordinates would do immediately. (Love Thailand, 24 January 2004, Manager.co.th)[23]

Some Muslims also refuted the accusations in forums saying,

> Do you think what you believe is absolutely right? You only worship statues. This is ridiculous. Muslim people consider others as brothers. When others hurt, we hurt too. I guess you never feel this. (Muslims are Allah's servants, 26 March 2008, MThai.com)[24]

> To the jerk who blamed our God and prophet, do you think you have rights to do so? You have no brains and you should have not been born in this world. Look at your opinions towards Muslim people. If you still think this way, I'm here to tell you that we have no fear for you. If you hurt our family, we won't surrender. Remember this. (God's creation, 27 March 2008, MThai.com)[25]

22 ผมเป็นคนไทยนับถือศาสนาพุทธ อยู่ที่ปัตตานีมา 30 กว่าปีแล้ว ประชาชนในจังหวัดนี้รักใคร่กันดี อาจจะมีพวกก่อความไม่สงบ บ้างแต่เป็นส่วนน้อย เหมือนกับโรงเรียนก็มีนักเรียนดี และนักเรียนเกเร คนที่นี่ให้เกียรติซึ่งกันและกัน นับถือความเชื่อศาสนาของกันและกัน ไม่เคยกล่าวหรือกระทำอันใดที่ก้าวล่วงให้ผู้ที่นับถือศาสนาอื่นเสียหาย ทำไมไม่คิดว่าคนที่นับถือศาสนาเดียวกับเราและมีอำนาจ วาสนา บุญหนักศักดิ์ใหญ่ มีตำแหน่งหน้าที่ใหญ่โต จะเป็นผู้อยู่เบื้องหลัง เอาโจรไปจับโจร คงจับได้หรอกนะ (คนตานี, 24 ม.ค.47, manager.co.th).

23 อยากให้ชาวบ้านแถว 3 จังหวัดภาคใต้ช่วยกันจับตาสอดส่องคนแปลกหน้าที่เข้ามาในพื้นที่ และมาสวมรอยสร้างสถานการณ์ ไอ้พวกสีเขียวกับสีกากีน่ะ ต้องคอยจับตาดูนะครับ ทั้งค้ายา ค้าอาวุธ ฝีมือพวกมันทั้งนั้น บงการมาจากตัวใหญ่ๆ ในกรุงเทพฯนี่แหละ พวกตัวเล็กตัวน้อยเค้าอยู่ในแถวเค้าและไม่เคยขัดคำสั่งนาย นายสั่งฆ่าพระก็ฆ่า สั่งยิงเพื่อนตอนปล้นปืนก็ยิง สั่งจับโต๊ะครูก็จับ สั่งอุ้มใครก็อุ้ม โทษพวกชั้นผู้น้อยไม่ได้ครับเพราะเค้าไม่มีสิทธิ์คิด (รักไทย, 24 ม.ค.2547, manager.co.th).

24 พวกคุณคิดว่าศาสนาที่คุณนับถือกันเป็นสิ่งที่ถูกต้องแล้วหรอ นับถือแต่พวกรูปปั้นเจว็ด น่าขำสิ้นดี ... มุสลิมทุกคนเป็นพี่น้องกันเมื่อผู้ใดผู้หนึ่งเจ็บปวดคนอื่นก็จะรู้สึกเจ็บปวดด้วย คุณคงไม่มีความรู้สึกอย่างนี้นะสิค่ะ (มุสลิมเป็นบ่าวของอัลลอฮ, 26 มี.ค. 2551, mthai.com).

25 สำหรับไอพวกเลวๆ ที่ด่าว่าพระเจ้าและศาสดาของเรา พวกคุณมีสิทธิอะไรถึงมาด่า พวกคุณก็เป็นแค่พวกมนุษย์ชั้นต่ำที่ไม่มีสมองดีๆนี่เอง พวกคุณไม่หน้าถูกสร้างขึ้นมาเหยียบบนแผ่นดินนี้เลย เพราะดูจากความคิดเลวๆของพวกคุณที่จะทำกับมุสลิมน่ะมันเลวยิ่งกว่าสัตว์เดรัจฉานซะอีก หากพวกคุณยังคิดเลวๆอย่างนี้ต่อไปก็ขอบอกให้รู้ว่า เราไม่เคยกลัวพวกคุณเลย และถ้าหากคุณทำร้ายพี่น้องมุสลิมของเรา คุณก็จงรู้ไว้ว่า พวกเราจะไม่อยู่เฉยแน่จำเอาไว้ (บ่าวที่ถูกสร้าง 27 มี.ค. 2551, mthai.com).

Satisfaction

Hatred agitates the commentators leading to feelings of satisfaction when assailants are arrested.

> Serves you right. You should have been beheaded just like what you've done to us. (Golf, 25 January 2008, news.hunsa.com)[26]

Sympathy and admiration

Apart from hatred some comments show sympathy and admiration for government officers, soldiers, police and Buddhists living in dangerous areas. They also received praise when assailants were arrested, for example:

> We will always be here for you though we don't have to fight just like you are doing. We understand and admire how hard you're working under pressure. (Mother, 9 November 2005, Manager.co.th)[27]

> I feel sorry for soldiers and police who are working there, and also for those who are living there. May Lord Buddha bless them and help us solve this problem. (Pat, 15 March 2007, Sanook.com)[28]

Some members showed understanding and sympathy by trying to explain the difference between 'terrorists' and 'Muslim people', in that they are not necessarily the same groups of people.

> Terrorists in southernmost provinces are not 'Muslim'. Islam has the same way of practice as other religions – to do good things and be good people. I think those terrorists believe in no religion. They use religion as a tool for their actions. What I want the media and publicity to do is to omit 'Muslim' from 'terrorism'. I hope this will happen soon. (Buddhist who admires Muslims, 24 September 2005. Pantip.com)[29]

26 สมน้ำหน้ามัน น่าจะตัดคอมันทิ้งเหมือนที่มันทำกับพวกเราชาวไทยนะ สมน้ำหน้าไอ้เวร ไอ้มารสังคม (กอล์ฟ, 25 ม.ค. 2551, news.hunsa.com).

27 เป็นกำลังใจให้นะคะถึงแม้ว่าคุณจะไม่ได้ออกไปจับปืนสู้รบกับใครแต่ก็กำลังทำหน้าที่ ปกป้องประเทศอยู่เหมือนกันค่ะ เห็นใจ และ เข้าใจ ในหน้าที่อันหนักหน่วงค่ะ (แม่นาง, 9 พ.ย.2548, manager.co.th).

28 สงสารทหาร ตำรวจที่งานทางใต้ และครอบครัว คนไทยทางภาคใต้จังเลย ขอให้พระคุ้มครองท่าน ขอให้บุญบารมีใด ๆ ในบ้านเมืองนี้ได้คลี่คลายปัญหาด้วยเถิด (พรรษ, 15 มีนาคม 2550, sanook.com).

29 ผู้ก่อการร้ายในภาคใต้ ไม่ใช่มุสลิม เพราะส่งที่มุสลิมมีเหมือนทุกศาสนาก็คือ อยากให้ทุกคนเป็นคนดี ซึ่งทำให้ผมมองพวกโจรในภาคใต้ว่าเป็นแค่กลุ่มก่อความไม่สงบ ไม่มีหลักคำสอนของศาสนาใดๆอยู่ในจิตใจ แต่เป็นเพียงการนำศาสนาอิสลามมาเป็นเครื่องบังหน้าในการก่อการร้าย สิ่งที่ผมอยากให้สื่อทำได้ตอนนี้คือตัดคำว่ามุสลิมออกจากพวกก่อการร้าย ซึ่งผมหวังว่ามันจะเกิดขึ้นในเร็วๆ นี้ (พุทธที่ชื่นชมมุสลิม, 24 ก.ย. 2548, pantip.com).

> I understand Thai-Muslim people who believe in peace. People of any religion can live together without fighting. I hope Muslim people who love freedom and peace won't fall in the terrorists' traps and join them. May Allah Bless you all. (Thai, 14 March 2007, MThai.com)[30]

> There are lots of good Muslim people. Please don't take religion into account. I hope people in the 3 provinces there understand the officers too. They are obliged to their duty. If you people didn't go anything wrong, officers would definitely release you. I'm really pissed off with this. When will government do something about this? Hurry up before more innocent people are killed. (Matsuo, 7 May 2007, MThai.com)[31]

Buddhist-Muslim divide

Most comments polarised members of the virtual community encouraging people to fight, dividing into 'us' and 'them', and using sentiments such as: We are Thai; We are Buddhists; We are Chinese, and they are Muslim. Later, most comments equated Muslims with terrorists. Some examples are listed below:

> Why don't we Buddhists block Muslim villages? There're more Buddhists than Muslims. If any Buddhists lived in their places and did what they are doing to us now, they would definitely drive us out of their places. (123, 24 May 2006, MThai.com)[32]

> It's time for Buddhists to fight. The more we stay calm, the more people are killed. We need to show them what we can do. (Southern People, 14 March 2007, Sanook.com)[33]

> We Betong people must unite. Though we are Chinese, not government officers, we support suppression policy. Now that these assholes bullied

30 ผมเข้าใจชาวไทยอิสลามที่รักสันติครับ ศาสนาใดก็อยู่ด้วยกันได้ถ้าไม่รบราฆ่าฟันกัน ขอให้พี่น้องอิสลามที่รักอิสระสันติ อย่าตกเป็นเครื่องมือของพวกมัน รักษาระดับกำลังพลของมันไว้เพียงเท่านี้ล่ะ อย่าได้มีส่วนร่วมเข้าเพิ่มกำลังของมันอีกเลย อัลเลาะห์คุ้มครองครับ (ไท, 14 มี.ค.2550, mthai.com).

31 มุสลิมดี ๆ ก็มีเยอะแยะ อย่าเอาเรื่องศาสนามาเกี่ยวข้องเลย อยากให้คนในพื้นที่3จังหวัด ชายแดนใต้ เข้าใจการทำงานของเจ้าหน้าที่ด้วย พวกเค้าก็ทำตามหน้าที่ ถ้าคุณไม่ผิดจริงยังไง ๆ เค้าก็ปล่อยตัวแน่นอน อย่าเรียกร้องเรื่องมาก ชักจะร้าคาญแล้วนะ!!!!อยากให้รัฐบาลเด็ดขาดมากกว่านี้ จะทำอะไรก็รีบทำ ก่อนที่จะมีผู้บริสุทธิ์ต้องเสียเลือกเนื้อไปมากกว่านี้เลย ขอร้องล่ะ!! (Matsuo, 7 พ.ค. 2550, mthai.com).

32 ทำไมคนไทยพุทธอย่างพวกเราไม่ไปรวมตัวปิดล้อมหมู่บ้านอิสลามที่มันสร้างปัญหากับเรา บ้างละคนไทยมีมากกว่าแยะลองมีมีกลุ่มคนไทยที่ไปอาศัยแผ่นดินพวกแขกแล้วสร้างปัญหาแบบนี้ รับรองพวกแขกแม่งรวมตัวขับไล่แล้วละ (123, 24 พ.ค. 2549, mthai.com).

33 ถึงเวลาแล้วที่คนไทยพุทธต้องลุกขึ้นสู้ ขืนมัวแต่รักสงบ สร้างสมานฉันท์ คนไทยก็ตายมากขึ้นเรื่อยๆ ต้องทำให้พวกมันเห็นว่าเราก็มีน้ำยา (คนใต้ ,14 มีนาคม 2550, sanook.com).

> us, it's time for us to fight. I really hate those who stab us in the back. (Come back Communist, 15 March 2007, Sanook.com)[34]

> Be patient, all Buddhists. There won't be peace no matter how long it takes. As long as they think that 'We are Malayu. Our country is Pattani.' Alas. (Breezing, 8 March 2008, MThai.com)[35]

Annoyance and irritation

Members of Thailand's virtual communities exhibit annoyance towards the government, academics and thinkers. Members think these groups are weak, inefficient and pay more attention to Muslims rather than Thai-Buddhists. In the wake of the September 2006 coup, some comment-posters felt that the government was not taking the southern conflict seriously, and others that since the coup leader and president of the Council of National Security (CNS) General Sonthi Boonyaratglin was a Muslim, he would undoubtedly take the Muslim side.

> I would like to ask General Sonthi if what's happening is the Muslims' victory. And I would like to ask the Prime Minister if he ever evaluated General Sonthi's work regarding the southernmost provinces issues. 9-bombings in BKK [Bangkok] showed how efficiently the police work. What about southern assailants who have been creating violence for more than 3 years? I see no change at all. (Savage People, 17 February 2007, Prachatai.com)[36]

> We have come this far. Doesn't the government differentiate who the assailants are or who the villagers are? During Thaksin's time, he said that he knew who they are. You only apologised to them and requested negotiations. It's impossible. The only thing they know is shooting innocent people. (Time to fight, 14 March 2007, Sanook.com)[37]

34 พวกเราชาวเบตงจงรวมพลังกัน เราก็เป็นคนจีนคนหนึ่ง ถึงเราจะไม่ใช่คมน. แต่เราสนับสนุนเต็มที่กับนโยบายโจรปราบโจร ในเมื่อ***พวกชาดเดรัจฉานทั้งหลายมารังแกเราก่อน ถึงเวลาแล้วที่เราจะแสดงความยิ่งใหญ่ของเราอีกครั้ง เกลียดนักพวกหมาลอบกัด (คอมมิวนิสต์จงกลับมา.15 มีนาคม 2550, sanook.com).

35 อดทนไว้ครับ คนไทยพุทธ ทุกท่าน ต่อให้อีกกี่ร้อยปี มันไม่มีทางสงบหรอก ตราบใดในหัวพวกโจร ยังมีแต่คำว่า เราคือชาวมลายา มาตุภูมิปัตตานี เฮ้อ..เป็นกำลังใจให้(ฟิ้วฟ้าว, 8 มี.ค. 2551, mthai.com).

36 อยากถามพลเอกสนธิว่า นี่คือชัยชนะของประชาชน (อิสลาม) หรือเปล่า และอยากถาม นายกรัฐมนตรีว่า เคยประเมินผลงานของ พล.อ.สนธิหรือเปล่าเกี่ยวกับสถานการณ์ใต้ กรุงเทพฯ เพียง 9 จุด ท่านยังประเมินผลงานของ ผบ.ตร.เลย แล้วนี่ โจรใต้ ลอยนวลมา กว่า 3 ปี แล้ว ผมไม่เห็นท่านเด็ดขาดกับก่อการร้ายพวกนี้เลย (คนปา, 17 ก.พ. 2550, prachatai.com).

37 มาถึงขนาดนี้แล้ว รัฐบาลยังไม่รู้เลยว่าคัยเป็นโจร คัยเป็นชาวบ้าน ยังคิดไม่ออกเหรอ ว่าจะกรองคนยังไง สมัยไอ่แม้ว มันยังรู้เลยว่าเป็นแค่โจรกระจอก มัวแต่ไปขอโทษ ขอสมานฉันท์กะพวกมัน มันจะไปรู้เรื่องได้ยังไง ก็มันยังยิงหัวคนอยู่ทุกวัน (ถึงเวลาต้องเล่นกันแรงแล้ว, 14 มี.ค. 2550, sanook.com).

> The thinkers and academics never cared if the Buddhists were attacked. When these southern bastards were attacked, they acted as they were in hot water. (In most cases, they are evil, 14 March 2007, Sanook.com).[38]

> Dear General Sonthi, you released the suspects again. How come you are so kind? I guess the total numbers of killed people don't hit your target. How generous you are. (1, 7 May 2007, MThai.com)[39]

There were also criticisms of the National Reconciliation Commission, and disagreements with its 'reconciliation' policy.

Grievances of the minority group

The last feeling mentioned here was a sense of grievance among Thai-Buddhists who felt that no one was listening to their voices. Those who were in authority, academics and the media only paid attention to Muslims.

> Those people got too many privileges. They don't have to dress as others do. They are living in Thailand, but don't have to study or speak Thai. When they dine, others have to prepare special food for them. Even government officers have to study their language in order to communicate with them. I really wonder why they joined the assailants despite these privileges. (Sikeereeya, 25 September 2005, Pantip.com)[40]

> I used to work in Sungai Kolok as a government officer. The situation there is not ordinary, but no one, not even Ministry of Health takes this matter seriously. Muslims can get whatever they request, but Buddhists can't. The human rights activists must be hired by Muslims, or they might hate Thaksin so much they take this matter for granted. (Bored, 9 November 2005, Manager.co.th)[41]

38 เวลาชาวพุทธโดน พวกนักวิชาเกิน นักสิทธิฯ นักการศาสนา มันพากันนั่งอมสาก แต่พอพวกชั่วนี้โดนมั่งเท่านั้นแหละ พวกเวรนี้ทุรนทุรายเหมือนถูกน้ำร้อนลวก (หลายเหตุการณ์มันทำตัวเป็นพวกชั่ว, 14 มี.ค. 2550, sanook.com).

39 ปล่อยตัวอีกแล้วเหรอครับ ใจดีจังท่านสนธิ สงสัยฆ่าชาวไทยพุทธยังไม่ถึงยอดที่ตั้งไว้ สมานฉันท์ดีจริงๆ ท่าน (1, 7 พ.ค. 2550, mthai.com).

40 การได้สิทธิพิเศษไม่ต้องแต่งกายตามกรอบของสถานศึกษา ไม่ต้องเรียนภาษาไทย พูดภาษาไทย แต่อยู่ในไทย ไปกินอาหารที่ไหน หน่วยงานนั้นๆ ก็ต้องเสียงบเพิ่มเพื่อแยกอาหารให้ ขนาดคนของรัฐยังถูกให้เรียนภาษายาวีเพื่อจะได้พูดสื่อสารกับคนของคุณได้เราดู ๆ ไป คิดอย่างเดียวว่า คนมุสลิมที่ภาคใต้เขาคล้อยตามโจร ได้อย่างไรในเมื่ออภิสิทธิ์ขนาดนี้ (สิคีรียา, 25 ก.ย. 48, pantip.com).

41 ผมก็เคยทำงานที่โกลก เป็นราชการเหมือนกัน ที่ใต้เหตุการณ์มันไม่ปกติ แต่กระทรวงสาธารณสุขใช้เกณฑแบบปกติของที่อื่น มันไม่น่าถูกต้อง เพราะเวลาพวกมุสลิมขออะไรเห็นให้มันหมด แต่ไทยพุทธไม่ให้ พวกนักสิทธิ

> If you were Thai Buddhist and lived there for a month, you would experience how much they suffered. But if you were Thai Muslim, you wouldn't feel anything as you have privileges. You can always turn to your religion when you commit a crime. True suggestions will only come from monks and teachers in those areas. (Southern Thai, 9 November 2005, Manager.co.th)[42]

> You know? People of the 3 provinces are living in fear, but they don't know how to deal with this problem as this is their birthplace. When will this end? I feel sorry for soldiers and police who have to take care of those areas. When will people stop fighting and solve this problem? (Southern People, 7 March 2006, Pantip.com)[43]

Causes of feelings

It is undeniable that most of the outrage felt by Thailand's virtual community members are caused by the violence in the southernmost provinces. These feelings represent conflict between groups of people, and their comments have aroused strong feelings of 'otherness'. Members believe the assailants are not Thais, have no love and respect for country, and have no true understanding of the religious doctrines that they ostensibly adhere to.

> In my opinion, as long as they consider themselves 'Muslims' rather than 'Thais', this problem will never be solved. I guess many organisations and people think this way, that's why they don't pay attention to this problem. (North Assailant, 31 January 2004)[44]

> Why they are so obsessed with violence? There are troubles wherever they go: terrorism, suicide bombing etc. What they announced is totally

มนุษยชนมันคง ถูกพวกมุสลิมมันซื้อไป หรือไม่มันก็ต้องเกียจทักสินแล้วเอาชีวิตของพวกท่านเป็นเดิมพัน (เบื่อ, 9 พ.ย. 2548, manager.co.th).

42 ถ้าคุณเป็นไทยพุทธลองไปอยู่แค่เดือนเดียวก็รู้ความทุกข์ของคนไทยพุทธที่นั่น แต่ถ้าคุณเป็นไทยมุสลิมก็ไม่ว่าอะไร เพราะพวกคุณกำลังได้เปรียบคนไทยพุทธ ทำความผิด ก็หนีเข้าไปพึ่งร่มเงา ศาสนา ข้อเสนอของคณะสงฆ์และของคุณครูคือความคิดเห็นของ คนไทยพุทธในพื้นที่อย่างแท้จริง (ไทยใต้, 9 พ.ย. 2548, manager.co.th).

43 รู้มั๊ยว่าคนใน3จ.อยู่กันแบบหวาดกัวสุดๆ แต่ไม่รุจะทำไง ก็อยู่มาแต่เกิดทำไงได้ยิ่งคนไทยพุทธนะกัวกันสุดๆ ไม่รุเมื่อไหร่มานจาจบซะที ทหาร ตำรวจ น่าจงฉานมั๊กๆคอยลาดตะเวนไม่รุว่ามานจาทำไรเมื่อไหร่ เลิกทะเลาะกันซะทีหันมาดูแลปัญหา3จ.บ้าง (คนใต้, 7 มี.ค. 2549, pantip.com).

44 เท่าที่มอง ถ้าตราบใดเขายังคิดว่า เขาเป็นมุสลิมมากกว่าคนไทย ปัญหาแบบนี้ก็ไม่มีวันแก้ได้ ผมคิดว่าหลายหน่วยงานก็มองแบบนี้จึงไม่ค่อยใส่ใจหรือคิดจะแก้ไขปัญหา (จู่โจมเหนือ 31 ม.ค. 47).

opposite to peace. They only want to rule this world with their only religion. (Rural People, 24 January 2004, Manager.co.th)[45]

Don't call yourself Thais, you are not. Why don't we accept that they are Malayu, and use the same policy as Malaysia use with Thai-Malayu people. This may be working. (Old-Town People, 4 February 2004, Pantip.com)[46]

Why can't you marry someone from a different religion? Why can't you eat what people from other religions cook? Why can't you enter other religions' places of worship? Why can't you accept anything from different religions? This make you narrow-minded. These people are educated, but they never study social science. They only study in religious schools, and these schools' curriculum are absolutely out-of-date. Then, how could they possibly adjust themselves to others? (The Pinky and the Brain, 24 September 2005, Pantip.com)[47]

Those people bow to their God 5 times a day, and believe their God will lead them to heaven. They care for nothing else, no matter if one was brutally killed. They simply return home and go to bed, happy that their people are safe. May God Bless them. (Bantarok, 24 September 2005, Pantip.com)[48]

We will sing our Thai national anthem as loud as possible. We are proud of our independence. If I meet them, I would kill them all. Shit. (Satan_Mafia, 15 May 2007, Pramool.com)[49]

45 ทำไมนิยมความรุนแรง อยู่ที่ไหนก็มีปัญหาไปทุกที่ ก่อการร้าย ระเบิดพลีชีพ เข้าใจยากสิ่งที่ประกาศกับการกระทำมันสวนทางกับหนทางสันติ ลึกๆคือความต้องการครองโลกด้วยศาสนาเดียว (ชาวบ้านนอก, 24 ม.ค.2547, manager.co.th).

46 คุณเป็นคนชาติไหนก็เป็นคนชาตินั้นเถิด อย่ามาเที่ยวแอบอ้างเป็นคนไทย ลูกหลานไทย เลยครับ ... ใครอาจจะคิดว่าทำไมผมจึงไปเรียกพวกนี้เป็นแขก แต่ผมไม่เสแสร้งหรอก ... ทำไมเราไม่ยอมรับความจริงว่าพวกนี้เชื้อสายมาลายู และนำกฎเกณฑ์เดียวกันกับมาเลเซียใช้กับ พลเมืองมาเลเซียเชื้อสายไทยมาใช้บ้าง อาจจะเป็นที่พอใจกันทั้งสองฝ่ายก็ได้ (คนกรุงเก่า, 4 ก.พ.2547, pantip.com).

47 ... ทำไมคุณถึงแต่งงานกับคนนอกศาสนาไม่ได้ กินอาหารที่คนศาสนาอื่นปรุงก็ไม่ได้ เข้าไปศาสนสถานศาสนาอื่นก็ไม่ได้ อะไรที่เกี่ยวกับศาสนาอื่นไม่ได้เลย มันเลยทำให้มุสลิมส่วนใหญ่ โลกแคบรึเปล่า เกาะกลุ่มรึเปล่า ที่คุณว่าคนพวกนั้นไม่มีการศึกษา ผิดมั้งครับ เขาเรียนครับ แต่เขา ไม่ได้เรียนสังคมศาสตร์ เขาเรียนอะไรครับ โรงเรียนสอนศาสนา แล้วโรงเรียนพวกนี้ สอนอะไรแบบ พันปีที่แล้ว แล้วจะปรับตัวเข้าหาคนอื่นได้ไงครับ (The Pinky and the Brain, 24 ก.ย. 2548, pantip.com).

48 แล้วพวกเขาก็พากันไปเอาหัวโขกพื้นวันละ 5 เวลา พร้อมกับเชื่อมั่นว่าพระเจ้าจะพาเขาไป สู่สวรรค์ในที่สุด อย่างอื่นข้าไม่สน ใครจะเดือดร้อนข้าไม่สน ถึงข้าจะอาศัยประเทศนี้อยู่ แต่ขอให้พวกข้าเท่านั้นที่อยู่รอดปลอดภัย ก็บอกแล้ว เรื่องอื่นข้าไม่สน ใครจะโดนฆ่าตายอย่างทารุณ พวกข้าก็พากันเดินนวยนาดกลับบ้านไปนอนอย่างสงบ สุขใจที่พวกเดียวกันไม่เป็นอะไรเท่านั้นก็พอ ขอพระเจ้าคุ้มครองพวกข้าด้วย (บานทะโรค , 24 ก.ย. 2548, pantip.com).

49 เราจะร้องเพลงชาติไทยให้ดังที่สุดเท่าที่จะทำได้ เราภูมิใจที่ไทยเป็นเอกราช ถ้าผมเจอ นายทองเหม็นผมจะให้ท่านวีรชนผู้กล้าบั่นคอโจรใต้แย่จริงให้หมดเลยสาด (satan_mafia, 15 พ.ค. 2550, pramool.com).

Figure 6. Pantip forum: 'Muslims should be open-minded and please read', 24 September 2005.

> You are living in Thailand, but never show your gratitude. You only create mess. Sucks. (- -*, 13 May 2008, Aromdee.com)[50]

These examples show a misunderstanding of Muslim religion and culture, and make people think Muslims they are not Thais. According to these views, Muslims do not have a love for Thailand, unlike Thai Buddhists.

Results of feelings towards problem-solving suggestions

Threads on the various forums also reflect ideas and suggestions concerning what the government should do to solve the southern problem. These comments have been put into three groups: (1) cursing (2) retribution and (3) negotiation and reconciliation.

Cursing

When Thais feel helpless in being unable to fight back, they usually take recourse in cursing the opposite side. Though curses show the negative feelings of people, in their mind it is also good way of releasing anger, which might reduce their frustration.

50 อาศัยประเทศไทยอยู่แล้วยังไม่สำนึกบุญคุณ ทำบ้านเมืองป่นปวนอีก เลวจริงๆ (- -*, 13 พ.ค. 2551, aromdee.com).

> Wish they were in hell forever. (Thai People, 6 May 2007, MThai.com)[51]
>
> They shouldn't live in Thailand if they do this. Wish them all death with their own hands. Wish everyone's curses go to them. (Mongdofah, 25 March 2008, Aromdee.com)[52]

Retribution

Most comments are for retribution as people believe it is useless to negotiate. Suggestions include imprisonment, execution of the assailants, execution of the assailants and their families, or even torture. Some comments consider belief, religion and culture as tools with which to fight and stir violence Examples include:

> Why weren't they shot dead? Why bother investigating? Their testimonies might be false. There should be execution laws like what we had in our days, so their whole families would be executed. (ParNy, 26 January 2008, news.hunsa.com)[53]
>
> They all deserve execution. Sucks. They deserve living in hell. (Journalist, 25 January 2008, news.hunsa.com)[54]
>
> They must be put in pigsties or dog kennel and eat leftovers. Then, shoot them with their own weapons. Blow their heads and let the dogs eat their blood and brains. What about their bodies . . . I have no idea at this time. (<iiug@hotmail.com>, 25 January 2008, MThai.com)[55]

Negotiation and reconciliation

There are other users who believe negotiation and reconciliation is the best approach.

51 ขอสาปแช่งให้พวกมันทุกคนจงตกนรกอย่าได้ผุดได้เกิด (คนไท, 6 พ.ค. 2550, mthai.com).

52 อยู่ในเมืองไทย แล้วทำงี้ จะอยู่ทำ.....ไรวะ ขอให้พวกมันตายทั้งโครต โดย ฝีมือพวกมันเอง ขอให้คำสาปแช่งของทุกคน เป็นผลต่อพวกสารเลวพวกนั้น (Mongdofah, 25 มี.ค.2551, aromdee.com).

53 ทำไมไม่ยิงมันให้ตายไปเรย เก็บไว้ทำไม เอามาสอบสวนไปกี่เท่านั้น ให้การจริงรึเปล่ากี่ไม่รู้ แล้วอีกอย่าง น่าจะมีกฎหมายเอาผิดแบบสมัยก่อนไปเรย ฆ่าทั้งตระกูล จะได้ไม่กล้าทำกันอีก (ParNy, 26 ม.ค. 2551, news.hunsa.com).

54 ต้องประหารชีวิตมันถึงจะสาสมกับที่พวกมันทำ สารเลวนัก ก้อไปอยู่ในนรกถึง จะเหมาะกับพวกมัน (นักข่าว, 25 ม.ค. 2551, news.hunsa.com).

55 เอามันไปขังในคอกหมู1คืน คืนต่อไปขังในกรงหมา แล้วก็ให้มันกินข้าวกับกากหมู สุดท้ายปืนที่มันยิงครูนั่นแหล่ะ ระเบิดหัวมันซะ แล้วเอาเลือดกับมันสมองไปให้หมากิน ส่วนศพมันกี่แล้วแต่..คิดไม่ออกแล้ว (iiuq@hotmail.com, 25 ม.ค. 2551, mthai.com).

> Before things get worse, I'd like all Thai-Buddhists and Thai-Muslims to discuss and argue reasonably. Excuse what one's accused of and forgive each other. This is the Thai way of solving and dealing with problems. (Hopeful, 24 September 2005, Pantip.com)[56]
>
> The conflicts between Thai-Buddhists and Thai-Muslims will vanish if all of us aren't suspicious of each other. If you feel happy to see others' deaths, conflicts wouldn't be gone. Religious and communities leaders must work hard to eliminate fear in their people's hearts, so we all can live together happily. (Bang Win, 17 February 2007, Prachathai.com)[57]
>
> Violence and killing may be terrifying, but it never wins anyone's heart. Virtue and moral are only way to create peace. (Wit, 9 March 2006, MThai.com)[58]
>
> We, Buddhists and Muslims, must unite and search for the assailants, no matter who they are, so all of us can live together happily. We must be true to each other. If you find any bad Muslims or Buddhists, we must eliminate them. This will be good way out for both religions. (Agreed with 1103, 14 March 2007, Sanook.com)[59]

As noted earlier, the views stated above are not representative of the feelings of all Thais towards the southern conflict, since members of these nine virtual communities were a self-selected sample of people who not only had access to the cyber world, but also chose to participate in these topical discussions. However, these extracts do reflect sentiments held in wider Thai society. McCargo argues that 'evidence of widespread anti-Muslim sentiments can be readily found on popular Thai-language internet forums such as pantip.com'.[60] Discussions at the Peace Studies Institute, Prince of Songkhla University in

56 วันนี้ก่อนที่ทุกอย่างจะสายไปผมอยากจะวิงวอน ให้พี่น้องไทยพุทธ – และพี่น้องไทยมุสลิม หันหน้า เข้ามาตำหนิกันและกัน อย่าง ผู้มีสติ แก้ข้อกล่าวหา กันและกัน อย่างผู้มีศาสนา ประดับใจฟัง และ ให้อภัย ต่อถ้อยคำที่อาจจะขัดใจ ความเป็นบุคคลิกภาพแบบไทย ย่อมหมายถึงความแตกต่าง ในการตัดสินปัญหาเมื่อเทียบกับแถบถิ่นอื่นในโลก (Hopeful, 24 ก.ย. 2548, pantip.com).

57 ปัญหาสามจังหวัดชายแดนใต้จะแก้ปัญหาได้ทั้งชาวไทยพุทธและชาวไทยมุสลิมต้อง เลิกหวาด ระแวงกันเสีย ก่อนถ้าชาวไทยมุสลิมตายชาวไทยพุทธยังดีใจ หรือชาวไทย พุทธตายชาวไทย มุสลิมยังดี ใจเหมือนในปัจจุบันก็คงยังอีกนานที่จะ แก้ปัญหาสำเร็จผู้นำศาสนา และผู้นำ ชุมชนในระดับ ต่างๆต้อ พยายามทำทุกวิถีทางที่จะทำให้ความหวาดระแวง เหล่านี้ลดลงและหมด ไปเพื่อกลับไปสู่เหมือนอดีตที่ทั้งพุทธทั้งมุสลิมไปมาหาสู่กันอย่างมีความสุข (บังวิน, 17 ก.พ. 2550, prachatai.com).

58 การใช้กำลังหรือการฆ่าฟันผู้คนอาจทำให้คนเกรงกลัว แต่ไม่อาจได้ใจคนอื่นหรอกครับ การใช้คุณธรรมและความดีงามสิครับที่จะทำให้ผู้อื่นยอมรับเราทั้งกายและใจด้วยความยินดีครับ (wit, 9 มี.ค. 2549, mthai.com).

59 เราต้องร่วมมือกันทั้งพุทธและอิสลาม ค้นหาตัวชั่วร้ายเหล่านี้ไม่ว่าเขาจะเป็นพุทธ หรืออิสลาม ต้องเอาตัวมาลงโทษให้ได้ เพื่อที่ 2 ศาสนาจะได้อยู่ร่วมกันอย่างมีความสุขต่อไป เราต้องมีความจริงใจต่อกัน เมื่อพวกคุณรู้ว่าคนมุสลิมคนไหนไม่ดีก็ต้องกำจัดออกไป ทางเรา หากเจอว่าคนไทยพุทธคนไหนไม่ดีก็จะกำจัดออกไปเหมือนกัน มันจะเป็นทางออกที่ดีทั้งสอง ศาสนาต่อไป (เห็นด้วยกับ 1103, 14 มีนาคม 2550, sanook.com).

60 See the discussion in chapter 2 of this book.

2006, revealed that both Muslim and Buddhist community leaders in the southernmost provinces found that feelings of fear, suspicion and segregation existed among their people. They also acknowledged negative feelings towards assailants, while some Buddhists disliked Muslims because they believed that Muslims created problems for Thai society.[61]

Virtual community and real-world community

There is a process of information syntheses from the real world to cyber world. At the same time, people in the real world are also consuming information from cyber world. Hence, these two worlds are closely related. As Philip E. Agre stated:

> . . . so long as we focus on the limited areas of the internet where people engage in fantasy play that is intentionally disconnected from their real-world identities, we miss how social and professional identities are continuous across several media, and how people use those several media to develop their identities in ways that carry over to other setting.[62]

These distinctive characteristics of the cyber world show us not only how people in Thai society feel towards those in the southernmost provinces but also reflect opinions and relationships between Malay Muslims and Thai Buddhists. In summary, the following conclusions can be drawn from this survey.

Members of virtual communities do not include Muslims as 'Thais'. Thai Buddhist think that they do not want to be Thai because they call themselves 'Malay'. This shows prejudice towards people of non-Thai ethnicity. Conflicts create relationships of opposition among people; for example, assailants versus villagers; Muslims versus Buddhists, government officers, soldiers and police; or us versus them. This also brought opposing feelings, i.e. hatred versus love, anger versus sympathy, or unity versus division. These oppositions show prejudice and fragmented relationships and additionally, create misconceptions of Muslims. 'Muslim' apparently equals assailants, terrorists, separatism, and anti-Thai sentiments, or 'them'; while 'Buddhist' equals casualties, unfair treatment or 'us'. This means most people do not differentiate and recognise that there are also bad Buddhists, good Muslims, Thai-Buddhist assailants, and Muslim casualties. Some comment-posters assert that Muslims are not open-minded and do not welcome others. At

61 Peace Studies Institute, สถาบันสันติศึกษา, *The community leader and peace dialogue,* Hat Yai: Prince of Songkhla University, 2006, pp. 91–8.

62 Philip E. Agre, 'Life after cyberspace'. *EASST Review* 18, 2/3 (1999): 3–5.

the same time, forum comments show that Thai Buddhists may be just as unwelcoming to others who belong to a different ethnicity.

There are few comments from Thai-Buddhists in the southernmost provinces; most comments come from Thai-Buddhists in other parts of the country. There are also very few comments from Muslims, who generally disclose their views only when they are accused of disloyalty or subverstion. This may represent the relationship between the two ethnic groups in the real world. Muslims may not wish to argue over this issue. Considering the amount of research and studies on journalism and the media, I found very few opinions from Muslims in print, on TV, radio or even the internet which is widely accessible to people of all ages, sex, culture and ethnic groups. Many Muslims are able to access the internet and gather virtually on Muslim websites or forums, but there was little traffic or communication between these sites and more mainstream sites inhabited primarily by Thai Buddhists. Members in virtual communities believe that only Thai Buddhists, government officials, soldiers and the police are casualties of the conflict. No one seemed to recognise that there were casualties among Muslims, who suffered more deaths than Buddhists in the southern violence. [63] Why were members of virtual communities seemingly unaware of this important fact? Have miscommunication, wrong information, prejudice and partiality blinded their judgment?

This study can be seen as an evaluation of Thailand's societal relationships: between Thai Buddhists in the three southernmost provinces and other areas sympathy prevails, but the relationship between Thai Buddhists and Muslims is marred by fear and confusion. Muslims and Buddhists in these provinces share a similar grievance, in that each group feels hard done, not given fair treatment or greater attention and believes that the other group has been more privileged.

Virtual communities may considered to be another kind of fieldwork site which will help us better understand the conflicts in the southernmost provinces, especially the relationships between those Thais who do not live in southernmost provinces and those who do. Such research may help inform us about how people feel and have positioned themselves. Do people feel greater animosity or sympathy? Are there any factors which promote better understanding among people in Thailand, so that Buddhists, Muslims, Christians and adherents of other beliefs and religions, can co-exist peacefully?

63 Srisompob Jitpiromsri's research found Thai Buddhists and and Thai Muslims were both casualties of the conflict (see Deep South Watch, 'Updated statistics').

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APPENDIX II

Duncan McCargo's Publications on Thailand's Southern Conflict

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Prachatai www.prachatai.com/category/politics
Pramool www.pramool.com
Sanook www.sanook.com
Southpeace www.southpeace.go.th

Index

bold = extended discussion or term highlighted in text;
italics = photograph;
f = figure; n = footnote.

C

D

E

F

G

H

I

J

N

O

P

R

S

T

U

V

W

Y

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