In late July 2007, the Thai army spokesperson told the press that since June 2007, the combined force of Civilian-Police-Military 47 had moved in to arrest some 1,930 terror suspects in Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat. Thai security officials believed that though most of the people arrested were fronts for the insurgents, some three hundred among them were the real thing. The military believed that the situation had significantly improved because there had been no resistance to the arrests, nor had any relative of those taken come out to protest.\(^1\)

Around the same period, Supara Janchitfah, an award-winning investigative journalist who has long followed violence in the area, traveled with the Committee on Justice and Peace to examine several cases of unexplained violence in the south, including the case of one Kayariya Paomani from Bannang Sata who was arrested by the Thai authorities and later shot to death. In the official record, this man was killed by the insurgents while being taken to a military camp. But empirical evidence suggests otherwise since none of the officials who guarded the prisoner was injured in any way while later forensic examination concluded that the cause of death was something very heavy crushing his lungs before shooting started. Talking with the man’s family, Supara reported that they did not want to reopen the case. The dead man’s wife was worried about how to carry on raising her children alone, while the second daughter’s concern was about the family’s safety, if they chose to bring this case before the court of law.\(^2\)

This Thai journalist also recalled her experience while on a recent visit to probe “the truth” about violence in southern Thailand. On the way out of a particular troubled area, some ten armed officers stopped her group, and searched both the luggage in the car’s trunk as well as what they were carrying. The group
informed the officers that they had earlier obtained proper clearance from the authorities. She tried to be rational with them, asking why they would not let the group out of the area after they had permitted the group to enter? There was no answer. Though the point is not made explicitly, her readers could sense the journalist’s feeling that what had happened to her and her colleagues was incomprehensible because the officials’ act seemed irrational. When asked, the question was met with silence. More importantly, “this incomprehensibility” has co-existed with violence since the day the new round erupted with the attack against the military armory on 4 January 2004. In her own Violence in the mist, Supara wrote in the introduction that a lot of people asked who were behind the recent violence in southern Thailand. She pointed out that there is no clear-cut answer as to “who are the villains?” in the many stories told about violence in Muslim-dominated southern Thailand. Part of the reason for this is because “southern Thailand” today is not unlike a “land in the mist” which makes it next to impossible to see things at any distance with a sense of clarity.

Yet when people—both civilians and officials, Buddhists and Muslims—have fallen like leaves as victims of violence, a question can be raised as to what the authorities, tasked with protecting the lives of the country’s citizens, have been doing? Can’t they solve anything? There are many who attempt to come up with answers. Surachart Bamrungsuk, a noted academic specializing on military and security affairs, believes that the main problem is a lack of uniformity of thought between “the hawks and the doves” in the Thai security community which results in a lack of concrete and integrated policy and practices by Thai officials. There is also a discrepancy between policy and practice in solving southern violence. Another security specialist, Panithan Wattanayakorn, believes that the Thai state cannot solve this problem because instead of relying on “existing” Thai strategy, it has imported “other people’s strategy,” especially that of the sole super power, and this strategy is inflexible, based on a completely different rationality, and at times self-contradictory. By contrast, some local Malay Muslim academics maintain that the government has been unable to solve the problem of southern
violence because of its lack of understanding of how Muslim society in the south has evolved through time and how it is connected with global society at present. These are some academics’ opinions on southern violence in Thailand. They are not really based on research. Recently the Institute of Public Policy Development under the Prime Minister’s Office published its own research on solutions to violence in the south. After pointing out that previous governments’ assimilation policies were based on different paradigms and contrasted understandings of Thai political history, the Institute argues that the state has not tried to understand the problem, and has refused to accept the reality of cultural diversity in the area. The state can get away with this because Thai society is weak in knowledge and understanding. Another significant research project on government policies in relation to the present southern violence was led by Uthai Dulyakasem and funded by the National Research Council. This project questioned whether government policies on southern Thailand had been “good policies”; to what degree had policy implementations been in line with changes of the time; and how have policies been evaluated during the past decade. The researchers found that government policies, formulated at the national level without much understanding of local specificities, have been part of the problem since they have engendered conflict, mistrust, and fear.

Nidhi Eoseewong and the academics of Midnight University have written much about the Malay Muslims of southern Thailand since the re-emergence of “unrest” in 2004. They argue that the continued escalation of violence has resulted from “the government’s naïve management, dedicated unwillingness to learn, and use of incompetent officials.” These factors are the product of “Thai society’s ignorance and unwillingness to learn,” accumulated through “studying distorted national history, constructing a national culture with unequal space for diverse peoples, jingoistic nationalism, development policies that have always been prejudiced against the marginalized in the country, media and education that lull the majority into ignoring injustice, governments that allow officials to use their authority at will, and so on.”
I am curious to know whether policy and implementation in southern Thailand have been this pathological. This research is an attempt to raise several questions. Has the Thai state always faced southern violence, and especially the new escalation, without any comprehensive policy? Has it worked in ignorance, without any willingness to learn about the Malay Muslims, their ways of life and history? Or have those who have to deal with the issue of southern violence, especially on the side of the Thai state, imagined this land and its people as a “special space,” and then translated this imagination into policies and practices that “do not go far enough, nor see things with clarity”? Have both the insurgents and ordinary people become victims of this failure of understanding?

My introduction begins by pointing out connections between main research questions and the nine projects that constitute the nine chapters in this book. Then I underscore the key research findings, especially those which have surprised me in relation to governments’ attempts to solve the problems. Finally, I discuss some theoretical issues that have a bearing on the solution of the southern violence and on further research.

I would argue that any examination of the Thai state’s understanding, policy making, and implementation needs to be based on knowledge gained from field and documentary research, and not mere general opinion. Through knowledge, it might be possible for the Thai state to find new directions for overcoming the southern violence by moving beyond the dominant myths clouding Thai society.

**Research questions and researchers**

This research project begins with questions common among critics of how the Thai state has tried to “solve” the problems of violence in southern Thailand. I have transformed these common, and seemingly plain, questions into the following research questions.

Does the Thai state have any security policy designed to deal with problems of violence in southern Thailand? If these policies do exist, to what
degree are they capable of responding to changing conditions? More importantly, have these security policies been formulated with some knowledge about the southern provinces? If, as some academics have criticized, Thai society is mired in “ignorance” about the land and peoples of the southernmost provinces, then on what grounds have these security policies been based?

Are there discrepancies between these policies and their implementation? If so, how do such gaps persist? If the Thai state is aware of them, has anything been done to curtail this problem in the future?

It is said that, since the dramatic explosion in 2004, not only has the new violence robbed ordinary people of their lives and properties, but has also adversely affected the once normal relationship between the majority Malay Muslims and the minority Buddhists in the area. Apart from rumor and hearsay to that effect, has this relationship been radically changed? Has it soured so badly that people have to leave their houses to find new homes elsewhere as generally believed?

The southern violence exists in a global context of conflicts and violence in an age when the American empire has unilaterally declared war against terrorism and has tried to reshape the world in its own image. It is important then to understand the place of Thailand’s southern violence in the American imagination. Due to the geographical nexus between the Thai south and maritime Southeast Asia where Islam and Malay culture are dominant, it is also important to understand the geopolitical location of southern violence in the imagination of the Muslim world.

The researchers who worked on these projects transformed these questions into their own more focused research agendas in accordance with each researcher’s expertise and specific circumstances. The researchers who come together in this project include: Mark Tamthai, a renowned philosopher, who traces the evolution of government policy; Rattiya Saleh, an authority on the Malay language
in the south, who looks at relations between Muslims and Buddhists; Zakee Phithakkumpol, a young Muslim researcher from Hat Yai, who studies migration away from the troubled area; Phrae Sirisakdamkoeng, a Silpakorn University anthropologist from Yala who conducted a rather thorough survey of the literature; Decha Tangseefa, a Thammasat University political scientist who approaches government officials’ manuals from a freshly unusual theoretical perspective; Matthew Wheeler, an American researcher formerly at the Rand Corporation who places the southern problem in the context of US policy; the Islamic scholar, Imtiyaz Yusuf, an Indian Muslim born in Tanzania and educated in the North America, who looks at the southern problem in the context of the Muslim world; Somkiat Boonchu from the National Security Council who appropriately studies security policy with Mark Tamthai; Colonel Pimonpan Ukoskit from the Chulachomklao Military Academy who explores how different military units in the area performed their functions; and Rungrawee Chaloemsripinyorat, formerly with Associated Press, who used her access to local officials to study human rights violations. It is evident that researchers in this project come from diverse backgrounds. Some are from the capital and others from the south. Some are Thai, others foreign, some senior academics and others first time researchers. Some work in the universities, while others do not. Some have previous experience in this field, while others come fresh to the area. They come from various disciplines: philosophy, anthropology, language studies, communication, Islamic studies, and political science. It is perhaps this fantastic diversity that has led to different and exciting answers to the research questions.

**Addressing the research questions: nine studies, data, and findings**

The first chapter is a comparative study of national security policies. Mark and Somkiat found that there have been several security policies since 1978. Each has a different emphasis, but central to most is a shared understanding of security as “territorial defense” and an attempt at “consolidating state power.” Both policy formulation and evaluation have been Bangkok-centric. The most
distinctive policy, however, was that in force from 1999 to 2003 because there was public participation in the process of policy formation, and because the policy adopted a comprehensive notion of security covering how the Thai people’s ways of life could be protected. This policy attempted to broaden “ownership” of national security work to include the ordinary citizens of the country. But when there was a discrepancy between how “national security” was understood at the policy level and its definition in the hearts and minds of those working in the field, there was an escalation of violence in the last years of this most unique security policy.

Mark and Somkiat argue that, despite a common belief that there was a lack of policy uniformity in solving problems in the south, there was indeed a “strong uniformity” about the use of violence and the priority of defending the state’s power. The problem therefore is not a lack of uniformity. Rather, it is unfortunate that this uniformity is not about pursuing ways for ordinary people to lead normal and peaceful lives which should be the state’s most important goal. Pursuing a goal of peace through violent means never bears fruit.

Chapter two is an attempt to assess whether Thai society has any “knowledge” concerning the southern provinces. Phrae Sirisakdamkoeng’s survey of literature covers theses and research reports written in Thai and English between 1978 and 2004, beginning with the year of launching the first southern security policy discussed in chapter one, and ending with the year of the dramatic rise in violence. During these twenty-six years, there were 337 pieces of academic writing on the subject, of which ninety-two focus on private Islamic schools and pondoks (traditional Islamic boarding schools), while the rest are on politics, government, and culture.

Phrae points out that research on southern Thailand lags behind other regions, particularly the action research on community development in the north, especially in terms of participation from problem formulation through analysis to evaluation. Much knowledge that might contribute to national policy is missing. There has been little study of the international context and international re-
lations of the south. There is almost no study on the effects of economic development on the local population. Patani history was studied only in the context of national Siamese history, not as a location with its own specific identity and past. While the southern border provinces, always in the margin of the cultural, exist at the margins of national history, Narathiwat is at the margin of the margin. It has no place either in the Thai national history nor in local Patani history. There seems to be no place for a history of Patani that does not conform to the plot of dominant national history. It simply cannot emerge in the context of the nation-state historiography whose main plot has been compiled almost wholly by state institutions.

Chapter Three begins the process of addressing the problem of discrepancy between government policy and implementation. Rungrawee is interested in the criteria used to recruit security officials, the implementation of policy on the ground, and the trends in human rights violations. She finds that the violation of human rights exists both at the structural and policy levels. For example, violations occurred under the 2005 Emergency Law, under Thaksin Shinawatra’s earlier policy of forceful apprehension which at times led to arrests of ordinary citizens without sufficient evidence, and under a judicial system which is still unfair to suspects.

Most important, perhaps, is Rungrawee’s finding that some official practices remain outside the law, despite rules and regulations stipulated by the Southern Border Provinces Peace-Building Command such as an instruction that search and arrest that must be done “gently” in accordance with rule of law, religious principles, local beliefs, and culture. She found that commanding officers working in the field seem to understand the problems facing them well. They have given thought to what kind of officials would be best for the job under such circumstances. A police general remarked: “The problem of violence results from belief and ideology, so people’s ideology and thinking need to be changed, by altering the behavior of government officials, because problems have been created by what officials did in the past.” The “Defense and Resource Development
Force,” for example, was very particular about this. Officers coming to serve in the area had to agree to stay at least three years to ensure continuity. Personal histories were carefully scrutinized. Those with heavy debts, drinking problems, or other bad behavior were not be recruited because the Force believes that local people’s satisfaction is crucial for their operations in this area.

If the policies and attitudes of these commanding officers have been this good and carefully thought out, some with ties to local people in the south might wonder why there have been news and rumors about human rights violations by government officials?\textsuperscript{14} Rungrawee also reports that some policemen told Buddhist youths in Yala that they could shoot suspicious people and the police would protect them.

Perhaps such discrepancy between policy and practice depends on several factors. First, there are different recruitment criteria used by different units in the area. The rangers, for example, prefer to recruit those with “vengeful minds against the terrorists who have slaughtered their families and friends.”\textsuperscript{15}

Second, the organizations tasked with solving the southern violence have not prepared themselves for this complex responsibility. The army’s prime objective is to prepare soldiers to fight conventional wars to defend the country. Most policemen and women have been trained to fight criminals. They have problems dealing with something not unlike guerrilla warfare. The army spokesperson once said that “All this war needs is a Sri Thanonchai, but the soldiers are Panthai Norasingh.”\textsuperscript{16}

Third, the desire to take vengeance for fallen colleagues was important. A junior officer sought permission from his commanding officer to shoot at a suspect whom he believed to be an insurgent. His superior objected to his request by saying, “We are policemen with duties. Death comes. It will never end if they shoot us and we shoot them back. We have to think how to turn people to like us, to love us.” While impressive, the problem is whether such reasonable and honorable words, encouraging the men to be tolerant and to solve the political problem with non-violence, are adequate to pacify the policemen and soldiers.
working in the field who are under immense pressures arising from losses of their friends’ lives. They may have not only a desire for revenge, but also a feeling that respect for human rights has become an obstacle to carrying out their duty in the three southern provinces.

Chapter four continues the issues raised in the previous chapter. Pimonpan Ukoskit describes a soldier asking local children a simple question after the Tak Bai incident on 25 October 2004: “What do you want to be when you’re grown up?” The soldier told the researcher that: “If you ask a Buddhist boy, he will say he wants to be a policeman or a soldier. But a Muslim boy will say he wants to be a bandit. Why? It’s because he wants to kill policemen and soldiers.” The answer reflects how profound the problem in the south has become, both in terms of differences between Buddhist and Muslim children, and contrasting feelings towards soldiers, police, and insurgents. I wonder about the future of a society where such contrasts can exist in the minds of its young members.

This issue indicates that how people approach their work in this area depends on how they construe the problem of violence and how sensitive they are to matters of detail. These factors lead back not only to the recruitment process discussed in Chapter Three, but also to operational procedures that themselves stem from organizational differences.

Chapter four is important because it is based on an understanding of the researcher, a military officer herself, that different military units perform their duties with different levels of efficiency. Though they are all soldiers within a similar military culture, various units have their own organizational cultures. The way that policy is translated into practice depends on the commanding officers’ ideas and experience. Many have served in regions other than the three southern border provinces. Pimonpan finds that the King’s Private Guards from Bangkok carried out their duty with the highest degree of success. As the “King’s Private Guards” or the “King’s Men”, they could change people’s attitudes and make their work more acceptable. Their organizational culture binds them to observe the Royal Guards’ codes of honor very strictly, inhibiting them from any
conduct unbecoming while trying to dutifully serve the people.

In addition, Pimonpan insist that all units must be fully aware that “a military operation does not constitute a war.” As a result, the main weapons are not guns but communication. Crucial for a successful undertaking of their tasks is the military’s own organizational culture that needs to cultivate humility and rein in the soldiers’ own egos.

Chapter five is a study of Thai officials’ training manuals in order to examine the ways in which the Thai state has prepared its personnel for working in the violent context of southern Thailand. Decha analyzed fourteen government officials’ training manuals developed over the past eighty-three years from the time of King Rama VI. Three important questions were raised: what kinds of discourse of the Thai state have been reproduced by these manuals; if these discourses themselves have been responsible for the southern violence, what have been the “prices” paid by the Thai state and society for preserving them; and what are the dangerous implications of treating this area as “special.”

Only one of the fourteen manuals, *Working with Muslim communities*, was produced by something other than a security-related state agency. Of the remaining thirteen, nine were orientation materials for those beginning to work in the southern border provinces, and all appear to be based on two “originals,” one compiled in 1923, and the other in 2000. The rest reproduce similar contents with minor language modifications, or used the whole text unchanged with additional contents.

Upon closer reading, Decha found some traces of alteration. But these changes suggest a decline in the Thai state’s ability to re-imagine its relationship to different peoples, and to accord proper respect and dignity. The 2004 manual advises Thai officials to try to get to know Muslim teachers and religious leaders by engaging in conversation or calling a meeting “just for ceremony.” This is interesting not only because it recommends such superficial contact with Muslim religious leaders, but also because it was copied from the 1923 manual published eighty-three years earlier. Yet there is a slight difference. The 1923 manual rec-
ommended calling a meeting “with suitable ceremony,” not “just for ceremony.” The difference in tone reflected a change in the Thai state’s discourse. Perhaps the new breed of officials who prepared the manual had insufficient knowledge of Thai and therefore failed to see the subtle difference between “with suitable ceremony” and “just for ceremony.” Or perhaps the consciousness that this relationship needed special care no longer exists. Whatever the reason, this discourse helps reproduce the insignificance of the “Others” living in this specific space in the eyes of Thai government officials.

Put another way, the fact that there was little change in these manuals demonstrates the persistence of ways of preparing officials for duty in the southern border provinces despite the basic fact that the local, national, regional, and global contexts have undergone spectacular change over almost a century. The manuals reproduce a dominant discourse of the Thai state with Bangkok as its center, and of a nation-state that is determined to “terminate the historical existence of those who have been made into ‘the others’.” Such persistence indicates that no matter what changes have taken place, the Thai state has not altered its “way of thinking about” the southern border provinces as a strange land at the margin that needs to be accommodated or annexed into the state’s preferred form of imagined community.

The report of the National Reconciliation Commission maintains that the relationship among different peoples is more important than the relationship between state and people because it is the cradle of sustainable national security. Many seem to believe that the strong ties that once bound different peoples have been dangerously weakened because of the violence. Pian in Saba Yoi district, Songkhla, for example, is a community with 10,000 Buddhists and Muslims. They once lived in a cordial relationship, going to one another’s traditional feasts because many believed that both peoples shared the same “grandparents.” But today they are no longer close as they once were, whether trading rice or selling liquid rubber or playing sports together. Even the tea shop has ceased to be a common space.
Chapter six is an attempt to discuss the effects of violence on local Buddhist–Muslim relations. Is it true that these relations have soured so badly as many seem to believe? In this chapter, Rattiya Saleh returned to four villages in the three provinces where she had studied such relationships a decade earlier. In her previous study, she found that local Buddhist–Muslim relations were cordial because both sides accepted “value differences” and co-existed by depending on what she calls “the crystal of productive friendship”—a kind of friendship, born from the womb of the patron-client system and crystallized through time, essential for fostering strong ties among peoples with different religions. This time, however, she found a heightened degree of mistrust among the villagers. They were afraid to deal with strangers. When asked about the surrounding violence, they refused to talk about it. Violent incidents involving both state actors and ordinary people lay beyond the sphere of acceptable conversation. Those who dared to speak at all told the researchers that they wanted to help the government but “hated” the fact that the authorities only listened to some influential people. They were prepared to shame even village leaders who had become unpopular. Not only did they not cooperate with the authorities in apprehending the insurgents, some disenfranchised villagers also chose to side with the insurgents. Although the researcher, who is a Malay Muslim woman with excellent language skills, was very familiar with local informants and those who live in these research sites, she faced immense problems in collecting data because of the fear and lack of safety in the area.

Yet in cases where relationships between Buddhists and Muslims remained strong, she found several factors responsible. They included religiosity, kinship that could be traced long into the past, traditional elites who continued to be respected, and older generations who still possessed a communal memory that bound different peoples in some kind of cultural web.

She also found that Buddhists who earned their living from tapping rubber in Si Sakhon, Narathiwat, had no problem whatsoever. They claimed that Muslim villagers took good care of them because, “We are both poor people so we must
help each other. Luckily we both speak Malay, so we can become friends more easily.” Rattiya argues that for those who have a similar level of social power and are able to communicate in the local language, the ties continue to be strong. Using local Malay to communicate between Buddhists and Muslims in everyday life has been common in Thai society since the Ayutthaya period when court officials used Malay to communicate with the Dutch East India company in Batavia (Jakarta today). The use of Malay as an international language in the court was later replaced by Chinese in the Thonburi period.

Rattiya searches hard for those cultural elements, such as the acceptance of diversity of “values” and the patron-client system, that can foster strong ties between the Buddhists and Malay Muslims. But the difficulties she herself encountered in conducting this research, the silence of the informants, and the lack of cooperation among the villagers speak volumes about how the violence has corroded local inter-religious relations. By emphasizing the cultural power of the older generation to hold the communities together, she implies that relations are bound to change with the passing of the old generation and the coming of the new. The violence that at times seems to target older people has not only taken human lives but also weakened the ties that have helped sustain these communities, with their rich cultural differences, for so long.

Common wisdom suggests that with the increase in violence, people will migrate out of the area. In late 2006, a mass daily reported that violence had pressured so many to leave their homes that the number of Buddhist had dwindled from 300,000 to “less than half” of that number. Prior to 2003–4, the number of Thai Buddhists in the area had already decreased despite the fact that their fertility rate was higher than their mortality rate. This would mean that the Buddhists had migrated out of the area even before the new wave of violence exploded in early 2004, and therefore violence alone could not explain the migration. Possibly economic opportunities outside the area were luring the better educated Buddhists away.

In chapter seven, Zakee Phithakkumpol studies violence-related migration
in the three southern provinces including its after-effects on the migrants. His research questions include: “if violent incidents impact upon people generally, why is it that only some people choose to migrate?” Using migration theory and data collected in Hat Yai, he found that violence is only one of the reasons for migration. Economic factors and employment opportunities have been significant as reasons for both Buddhists and Muslims to migrate. Moreover, there are times when official data is misleading, such as when all of a family leaves except the household head and yet the house registration remained unchanged. In cases like this, there is no migration officially, but in reality many people have moved.

It is generally accepted that the southern violence has been an internal problem caused by insurgents who had little chance of receiving “direct assistance” from international terrorist organizations such as JI (Jemaah Islamiyah) or al-Qaeda due in part to pressures coming from the American and Singaporean governments as well as some Muslim countries caught between “aversion to the terrorist groups and an intense dislike of the US.” But it goes without saying that the southern violence has international and global dimensions, partly due to the geo-cultural connection with the “Malay world” or “Malay civilization” (Tamadun Melayu) which is by and large responsible for the production of “Malay identity” through the use of Malay language, and partly through the ties that bind southern Muslims as Muslims with the broader Islamic communities of faith.

The last two chapters in this volume try to situate the southern violence in the imagination of the U.S. and of the Muslim world respectively. Local Muslims as well as some security analysts believe that the U.S. has somehow been connected with the situation in southern Thailand since the new violence erupted in 2004 due perhaps to President Bush’s global war against terror. Matthew Wheeler deals with this problem in chapter eight by arguing that the (official) American position is based primarily on defending American interests in the region. More importantly, he delineates the following criteria that inform the American
basic understanding of the situation:

Violence in southern Thailand is domestic both in terms of its causes and forms.
The causes of violence have been aggravated through the ages, in part by the lack of good governance.
There has been no direct and clear foreign involvement in this conflict.
The use of repressive measures and the violation of human rights will increase the risks that violence will become more intensive, expansive, and protracted.
The expansion, intensity and protraction of this deadly conflict will increase the chance of foreign involvement by international terrorist organizations.

The American government finds it counterproductive to directly intervene in the problem of the southern violence. In fear of being misunderstood, the American government carefully screens its official stances and activities. As a result, all security-related projects designed to assist Thailand have to go through the “label and location test.” There must be no label indicating any direct American involvement in suppressing southern insurgency. These projects therefore take such forms as vocational support for Muslim women in the area, and disseminating information about the lives and rights of Muslims in America. However, Wheeler also points out that some American analysts or international studies institutions maintain that the U.S. government should be more active in helping Thailand deal with this problem. Some have even advocated sending “special forces” to southern Thailand to provide consultancy aimed at strengthening the effectiveness of the Thai security agencies.

Wheeler concludes his chapter with the American trepidation about the Muslim world, and especially about the process whereby activists become militants before finally turning to be terrorists. Many factors contributed to this
process including injustices suffered by Muslim minorities that generate vengeful political anger. The American government has been worried about southern Thailand precisely because it believes that these conditions do exist in the area.

In the last chapter, Imtiyaz Yusuf locates the southern violence within the imagination of the Muslim world. He argues that the root of the southern conflict is ethnic rather than religious. He examines how the southern violence impacts upon relations between Thailand and the Muslim world, both within a long-term historical perspective of the relations between Buddhism and Islam, and within a narrower geographical perspective of Thailand’s relations with her Muslim neighbors and other parts of the Muslim world.

Both the strength and weakness of this chapter stem from the fact that the Muslim world is vast, and incorporates many local cultural worlds with their own civilizational specificities. Besides the theological differences between Sunni and Shi-a, Islam has emerged historically from the soils of different civilizations. The notion of “the Muslim world” itself encompasses Arab, Turkish, Persian, and Malay, among others. Yusuf points out that in Thailand there are “two types of Islams.” First, Muslims who try to integrate into Thai society are scattered from Chiang Rai in the north to the upper south. These Muslims see themselves as members of a minority religion in a country with different faiths yet a dominant Buddhism. Second, the Muslims of lower southern Thailand resist integration and see Islam as constitutive of their ethnic identity as inhabitants of an area forcefully annexed into the modern nation-state only a century ago.²⁴

It goes without saying that to cover the whole “Muslim world” in a chapter is impossible. Yusuf therefore chooses only the cases of Pakistan and Iran to elaborate on the educational links between Thailand and the “Muslim world.” Importantly, however, this chapter discusses two significant issues: past Muslim thinkers’ views on Buddhism, an extremely rare topic even among Muslims in Thailand; and an affirmation of the diversity of Muslims in Thailand in terms of their backgrounds, sources, and streams of faith that glide through the changing religious contexts and global politics.
Yusuf also tries to analyze how the “Muslim world” perceives the southern violence. He distinguishes between the official perspectives of Muslim diplomats and Muslim international organizations on the one hand, and the views in the Muslim print and electronic media on the other. Cyberspace has echoed with sympathy and anger over Muslim brothers and sisters suffering under a repressive non-Muslim regime, while the official discourses—the product of intense negotiation, sometimes involving the Thai Foreign Ministry—consist of carefully chosen words.

While Wheeler in chapter eight focuses on the “official” relationship between the U.S. and Thailand, Yusuf in chapter nine underscores the “civil society ties” between Muslims in Thai society and the Muslim world. Though less visible, the relations between Muslims in Thailand and those in the Muslim world, based on membership in a community of faith, have been quite strong. This reality might increase the Thai authorities’ apprehension that such strong ties fostered by the existence of an imagined community of faith have sometimes contributed to events in the south.

**New thoughts and strange findings**

Apart from these analyses and answers discussed above, these researches have thrown up some findings that are new and thought-provoking. Consider the following.

Some of the *pondok* owners refused to register for fear that the government would take over their schools. The document also indicated the government’s concerns about foreign interference in the *pondoks*. The behavior of the principal of a *pondok* in Yaha district of Yala province raised some suspicion. He was a Malaysian who, unlike other teachers, never stayed permanently in one place, but traveled throughout the four Southern provinces to teach at different *pondoks*. Moreover, during the seizure of the... insurgents’ camp in Betong district of Yala ... the authorities
found student identification cards issued by a suspected pondok. In addition, according to the report a common characteristic of the pondoks was the insertion of political teaching in the curriculum.

Many might readily believe this was an official opinion on pondoks in late 2004. But in fact it is taken from note by an assistant secretary general of the Thai National Security Council in February 1967! Only the word “communist” (before “insurgents”) and the year 1966 have been excised. It seems to me that some problems in the south have changed very little, judging from the state’s attitudes and actions.

It is often said that those with authority do not understand the problems and hence fail to overcome them because they don’t have “knowledge” about the area. But the literature survey in chapter two uncovered that General Kitti Ratanachaya, former commander of the Fourth Regional Army responsible for the south, wrote a thesis on relations between Muslims and Buddhists, both officials and civilians, in 1989. He found that the relationship was negative due to misunderstanding and mistrust. In 1999, General Kwanchart Klaharn, another commander of the Fourth Regional Army from 2004 onwards and a member of the National Reconciliation Commission, studied relations in southern Thailand with a focus on the factors conducive to co-existence in a plural society. He found that Buddhists and Muslims could co-exist peacefully, and it was “corrupted government officials” who had caused violence in southern Thailand. A former secretary general of the National Security Council, Prakij Pryojnajjanuek, conducted research on “Southern border provinces: engendering sustainable peace and security” in 1992. Many of those who have served the Thai state in the corridors of power have some knowledge about the problem of southern violence. In fact the nexus between “knowledge” and the formulation and implementation of security policy might surprise critics who faulted Thai policy makers on their lack of knowledge.

But it is the relationship between “knowledge” and government officials’ op-
erations in the field that matters. Chapters three and five discuss the recruitment criteria and training procedures for officials based in the troubled area. When Americans came to train Thai soldiers and civilians on “Legal perspectives on anti-terrorism” in March 2006, they found the Thai participants lacked even basic understanding on the principles of “Rules of Engagement,” a set of guidelines for the use of force by armed state personnel in combat situations. A seminar report published in an American agency’s journal pointed out that the American trainers had to insert a lecture on “Rules of Engagement” before they could proceed as planned.\footnote{25} Not only do Thai officials lack “knowledge” pertaining to local society, culture, and history, but also lack “knowledge” of rules governing acutely dangerous situations. But the fact that the American trainers found Thai officials in the field did not understand “Rules of Engagement” does not mean that there are no rules of engagement currently in use. In fact, the Army has its own “Ten Commandments” on how soldiers should conduct themselves in the field, including rules about not abusing the villagers, and about not exercising discrimination. These commandments became the army’s directives under former Supreme Commander, General Surayud Chulanont, who later became prime minister after the 19 September 2006 coup d’état.

Some government officials perceive Malaysia as a threat to Thai national security. But people in the southern border provinces are connected to Malaysia because of geographical proximity. In chapter six, Rattiya discusses the case of Ramong in Betong, Yala, a village with a population of one thousand and only 10 per cent Buddhist. Muslims and Buddhists in the village have been living peacefully side by side but they have a closer relationship with Malaysia than Thailand. For Ramong villagers, it is easier to go to Malaysia than to the town of Yala.

Besides territorial connection, geo-cultures also weave Malays into a community spanning Sumatra, the Malay Peninsula, and southern Thailand. But it is fascinating to find that “Malayness” does not have to be defined from outside the province of Pattani. There was a time when it was Patani that defined “Malayness” as evident in the case of a Malaysian who came to southern Thailand in order to
fulfill his father’s admonition that “If you want to ‘know’ the Malays, go to live in Patani and learn about their society’s traditions.”

These strange realities and analyses beg a more profound question of how this wonderland should be re-imagined?

**Conclusion: imagined land?**

The contributions in this volume suggest that the area plagued with violence at present is a “special space.” As a result, there have always existed specific security policies designed for this particular area under the name “National security policy (for) southern border provinces.” Thai society has produced a vast amount of “knowledge” on this specific area. Because it suffers from “security problems,” civilian and military officials must go through special recruitment processes and be oriented by a set of “manuals” specifically prepared to help them perform their duties in just such a context. The gaze of the American empire is fixed on southern Thailand because the area has become a part of the Southeast Asian anti-terrorism war front, and the gaze of the Muslim world is drawn because a Muslim minority is seen as suffering at the hands of an unjust non-Muslim government. Victims of violence, both Buddhists and Muslims, ordinary people and civil servants, lose their lives, families, and livelihood, while others just decide to leave.

When the contributors of this volume presented their findings at an academic seminar organized by the Senior Research Scholar Project, Thailand Research Fund, at the Sirindhorn Anthropology Center on 18–19 August 2006, there were high expectations that the research would have direct practical application, particularly Decha’s work on official manuals. But Decha’s presentation generated much frustration among the audience. Many were working in the field and hoped for practical answers they could try to implement. But his framing of the study, using sophisticated theoretical apparatus peppered with postcolonial language, is extremely important for opened up new ways to view the problem with borrowing from “Borderland Studies.” From this theoretical
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perspective, the “space” itself influences the relationship between cultures and the state, and this relationship in turn shapes and contributes to the escalation of violence.

I would argue that no matter how a space or territory is imagined, or by whomsoever, problems of violence could arise. In the final analysis, though land, space, and territory are geographical concepts, they are also part of a juridico-political geography, permeated with power. For those who are in control of the land, it seems normal and logical to exercise the power that has been in their possession for so long that the traces of pre-existing freedoms are hard to find.

The main problem is how to prevent this land that is imagined as “special” in different senses of the term by so many involved, from descending into greater violence that will bring about further destruction to lives and the cultural ties that have bound different peoples together.

Violence, especially war, not only causes casualties but also destroys existing collective integrity. War, and other forms of extreme political violence, are carried out “to destroy the very way the enemy perceives itself, the way it forms its identity.” Among ethnic groups with clear spatial distinctions from “the Others”, ethnic identities become connected with the lands where they were born. The land is no longer a mere physical entity but a site of symbolic power. When the ties binding people to their lands are undercut by violence, the lives that derive meanings from such ties simply end. A Palestinian woman told a remarkable story from the West Bank. She saw her elder brother collapse and die before her very eyes when he was told that his land had been occupied by the Israelis to build a new settlement. For such people, “land is all they have,” it is the very thing that connects them together. When this connection is nurtured by historical consciousness and constantly drummed up by the pain of unending violence, it means more than mere ethnic identity in a material sense because it endows the natural geography with a sense of the sacred, giving birth to sacred geography. Perhaps this is why in so many cases, struggles for freedom from foreign occupation stress the connection of people to land, and then chain this
connection to their struggle. This is what has happened in the case of Palestinians all over Israel and the occupied territories. In this sense, it could be argued that the “land” occupied by Israel helps produce the Palestinian identity since it has become a “space” for the Palestinians to preserve and lead their lives. The land has become an emblem of Palestinian existence, and the theft of this land is “the sign of the Israeli will to efface the Palestinians.”

To prevent the “land” from becoming a legitimizing space for violence among different peoples with histories of pain is not easy. It is even more difficult when this task has to be undertaken in the context of violence used by all sides. The research findings in this volume, however, indicate traces of ways for this imagined land to exist within an imagined community that is the modern Thai nation state. These traces include past security policies based on the reality of cultural diversity with respect for “otherness”; the awareness of some commanding officers working in the field who have tried to issue rules and regulations conducive to rights, liberty and human dignity; and a residuum of cultural ties binding Buddhists and Muslims.

But to empower this knowledge to the degree that it could halt future violence depends on the capacity of the Thai people to re-imagine their community with sufficient space to allow the different peoples who were here before the modern nation-state, and who were perhaps born from a different imagination, to be able to live side by side with dignity.

* This chapter is the introduction to Imagined Land? The State and Southern Violence in Thailand, edited by Chaiwat Satha-Anand (Tokyo: Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA), Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2009). The book is a result of 9 research projects under the Senior Research Scholar’s “Nonviolence and Violence in Thai Society” project supported by Thailand Research Fund.

Notes

1 Bangkok Post, 30 July 2007.
3 Supara, ‘Living in the crossfire.’
4 Supara Janchitfah, Violence in the mist: reporting on the presence of pain in southern Thailand (Bangkok: Kobfai, 2004), p. 15.
7 Worawit Bahru, ‘Kan ko kanrai kap kan sang santiphap khong prachachon’ (Terrorism and people’s peace-building) in Kaew, Khwam ru lae khwam mai ru, p. 139.
8 Saowaluck Kittiprapasr et al., Naeothang dan nayobai nai kan kaekhai panha nai 3 changwat chaidaen phak tai (Policy directions for solving southern border provinces problems) (Bangkok: Public Policy Development Institute, 2006), pp. 58–9.
9 Uthai Dulhyakasem et al., Nayobai khong rat lae kan nam nayobai khong rat su kan pathipat kap kan kaekhai panha khwam khataeng nai changwat chaidaen phak tai yang yangyuen (State policy and policy implementation and sustainable conflict resolution in southern border provinces: a research report) (Bangkok: National Research Council, 2007).
11 Some scholars believe that this particular security policy contains “the best understanding of the different peoples and the land in the southern border provinces.” See Uthai, Nayobai khong rat, p. 71.
12 To the best of my knowledge, the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee has completed its report on Raingan kan wichai rueang panha khwam runraeng nai changwat chaidaen phak tai lae phon katop to khwam samphan rawang prathet khong thai (Violence in the southern border provinces and its impact on Thailand’s foreign relations) (Bangkok: Research and Development Committee, the Thai Senate, 2006). But because this report appeared in 2006, it lies outside the scope of the research discussed in chapter two of this volume.
13 Interview with Police Major General Worapong Siewpreecha, deputy commander, Police Bureau Operation Front and Deputy Metropolitan Police Commander, 21
April 2006, by Rungrawee in chapter three of this volume.

14 For example, the villagers believe that it was the Thai authorities who shot at their cars killing two people at Pondok Taseh in Yala on 9 March 2007; or the case of a ranger killing four Malay Muslims in Patae, Yaha District, Yala in the evening of 22 May 2007. These incidents are some of the cases which the student protesters (the network of people’s protection students) at the Central Mosque in Pattani from 31 May to 4 June 2007, put forward and called for further investigation by the government.


16 Rungrawee’s interview with Colonel Akra Thipyaroj, the Army spokesperson on 26 December 2005 in chapter three of this volume. Sri Thanonchai is a mischievous trickster in local Thai folktales, while Panthai Norasingh is a historical figure from the Ayutthaya period who sacrificed his life out of loyalty to the king.


18 Chayanit Poonyarat, ‘Changwat chaidaen phak tai kap khwam pen pai dai khong kan samanchan’ (The southern border provinces and reconciliation possibilities), unpublished manuscript, Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University, 3 August 2007, pp. 10–1.


22 Lieutenant General Nanthadej Meksawasdi, *Pathipat kan lap dap fai tai* (Dousing southern fire: covert operations) (Bangkok: Ruamduay Chuai Kan Publishers, 2006), pp. 152–4. The author of this book is a long time intelligence officer and was very close to prime minister Surayud Chulanont. It is interesting to note that there are some foreign scholars who firmly believe that there have been concerted efforts on the Thai side to claim that southern violence is a domestic problem and thus conceal the role of foreign involvement. I understand that Zachary Abuza, who writes on terrorism and the Muslim world, has written on this “conspiracy of silence” among Thai officials and academics on international terrorist organization involvement in southern Thailand.


24 Imtiyaz Yusuf, *Faces of Islam in southern Thailand* (Washington D.C.: East-West Cen-


