

The Buddhist and the Khaek: A Study of the Thai State's Ontological Security and Self- Identity

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to examine and analyze the manifestations of the ontological security and self-identity anxiety of the Thai states through its rhetoric in relation to Thai and Malayu Muslims. The main question being posed in this thesis is how the Thai state justified the use of force during the Tak Bai Incident in 2004 and the Ratchaprasong bombing in 2015. This thesis examines the rhetoric of the Thai state through speeches and media before, during, and after in the selected cases. Such rhetoric involves the framing and constructions of “Thainess” or Thai identity in relation to the “other” or Thai and Malayu Muslims during the events. This framing is related to ethno, religious, and cultural nationalism and draws on those narratives. The theory that this research draws from is the Ontological Security theory by Jennifer Mitzen and Brent Steele which allows us to analyze the Thai state's actions and identity construction during the events. Ontological security is the security of the self, which all states strive for since it is linked to self-identity constructions. States will take actions that are at times detrimental to the physical self in order to protect ontological security because it is crucial to its survival. The methodological approach draws from Roxanne Lynn Doty's Discursive Practices Approach which allows us to examine how power and roles are constructed from rhetoric. The key results show that both the Tak Bai Incident and Ratchaprasong bombing disrupted the Thai state's ontological security and self-identity construction. In response, the Thai state engages in security-seeking behavior by reconstructing its self-identity in relation to the Thai and Malayu Muslims in order to regain its sense of ontological security. In doing so, the Thai state and media use rhetoric such as “Farang” and “Khaek” to define the Thai and Malayu Muslims as different and inferior subjects to the Buddhist majority. This enables the Thai state to justify its use of force in order to regain control over its compromised ontological security by way of military actions and violence. We see that the Thai state's perception of ontological security derived from its attachment to routines which had now been associated with the attachment to the conflict. This attachment had allowed the Thai state a sense of certainty since it knew how to act in the face of challenges. Attachment to routines thus allows the Thai state to dispel uncertainty which causes disruptions to its self-identity by creating anxiety. In analyzing the Thai state's rhetoric during these events, various identities of who is and is not Thai can be noted. These are then used to justify and legitimate the use of force by the Thai state as it seeks to protect and safeguard its ontological security.

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General Audience Abstract

This thesis aims to understand how the construction of self-identity of the Thai state manifested in rhetoric. In particular, the Thai state's relationship towards the "other" or in this case the Thai and Muslim Malayu population in the three southern provinces of Thailand. This research attempts to understand how the rhetoric involving "Thainess," "Farang," and "Khaek" play a role in the conception of Thai identity. In particular, the way these rhetoric manifest themselves in both the media and the official channels. This research utilizes the Ontological Security Theory and the Discursive Practices Approach to analyze the rhetoric found in the two cases of the Tak Bai incident in 2004 and the Ratchaprasong bombing in 2015. This analyzed rhetoric allows us to understand the way ontological security manifests itself in the Thai state when its self-identity is challenged by the "other." The research results show that both cases present a challenge to the Thai state's self-identity construction and ontological security routines. Once disrupted the Thai state uses force to subdue the source of the challenge, which was the presence of the Thai and Malayu Muslims. We see that the examined rhetoric of the Thai state created an environment and conditions, which enables the justification of force to protect its sense of self-identity and ontological security. Lastly, this research is important to the field, since it allows us to understand how states, such as the Thai state, behave and justify force against minority groups. It further enables us to see a state's behavior from a physical security standpoint and an ontological security one. It shows that language can be the window to the behavior of a state and regime that feels insecure by its encounter with the "other."

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Chapter 1: Introduction, Research Question, and Concept Identification

Introduction

On January 13, 2018, during his Thai children's day speech, military coup leader Prayut Chan-o-cha remarked that a good Thai is defined by his or her adherence to *Thai Niyom* principles.¹ This characteristic of *Thai Niyom* describes an individual who is loyal to the monarchy, follows Buddhist precepts, and supports the Thai state. Chan-o-cha's campaign of *Thai Niyom* can be seen as a continuation of past coup leaders' policies, especially seen in Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram's stance. In 1938, he similarly called for Thai citizens to adhere to *Rattha Niyom* precepts.² In both programs, adoption of "Thainess" as the main principles of associations with the state and encouragement for public displays of loyalty are at the core. This new manifestation by Chan-o-cha is similar to Phibunsongkhram's usage, where the rhetoric of ethno, religious and cultural nationalisms became the national security tools that justified the Thai state's purging of ethnic diversity, especially Chinese, Laos, Burmese and Malaysian immigrants, during the World War II era. This included the changing of the name of the nation from Siam to Thailand in order to exert the idea of the "Thai race" and to construct the belief in the existence of a singular and unified nation.³ Specifically, this resulted in the enforcement of the Thai language as the only language and frequent public displays of reverence to the monarchy and Buddhism by ethnic groups. Failure to integrate resulted in arrest and incarceration.

¹ Paritta Wangkiat, "Thainess: History Doesn't Repeat, but Rhymes," The Bangkok Post, Feb. 1, 2018, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/1405458/thainess-history-doesnt-repeat-but-rhymes>.

² Anchalee Kongrut, "Regime Push for 'Thainess' Turns Sinister," The Bangkok Post, Jan 26, 2018, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/1402130/regime-push-for-thainess-turns-sinister>.

³ Stithorn Thananithichot, "Understanding Thai Nationalism and Ethnic Identity," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 46, no. 3, (2011): 259.

History, in this sense, is repeating itself with Chan-o-cha's program now turned towards the purge of individuals and groups who refused to conform or accept military rule. Aside from political opponents, one group in particular that poses a challenge to "Thainess" is the Thai and Malayu Muslims from the three southern provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala. This minority group had been and continues to be framed in the modern nationalist rhetoric by both the Thai state and the media as "terrorists," "insurgents," and "separatists" who strive to undo the fabric of the Thai nation.⁴

The main opposing actors in this ongoing conflict had been the Thai state and separatist resistance fighters led by the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), which comprised a coalition of five to six smaller Islamic movements.⁵ Since 2004, official Thai government statistics estimated that roughly 7,000 people, mostly civilians and security forces, have been killed in this conflict. Independent figures in a report from the International Crisis Group, a non-government organization, also confirms this number, citing that the death toll was as high as 892 fatalities in 2007.⁶ The Thai government figures show 72 percent of casualties had been local civilians, monks, headsmen and teachers, while security forces and local officials attributed roughly 16 percent.⁷ The insurgents' death toll was estimated to be roughly at 12 percent of the total deaths. However, civilian deaths had decreased significantly from 2007 to 2017, averaging 300 casualties per year, which is believed to had been attributed to different attempts at peace talks, increased local informants for the military, and more precision government strikes against

⁴ Irving Chan Johnson, *The Buddha on Mecca's Verandah: Encounters, Mobilities, and Histories Along the Malaysian-Thai Border*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 164.

⁵ Zachary Abuza, *Conspiracy Of Silence: Insurgency in Southern Thailand*, 1st ed. (Washington DC: United States Institute Of Peace Press, 2009), 16-17.

⁶ Matthew Wheeler, "Behind the Insurgent Attack in Southern Thailand," The International Crisis Group, Feb. 17, 2021, www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/thailand/behind-insurgent-attack-southern-thailand.

⁷ Abuza, *Conspiracy Of Silence*, 72.

insurgent positions which had limited the BRN's fighting capabilities.⁸ However, the prolonged effects of the conflict had encapsulated and sustained animosity between the majority Thai Buddhist and Thai and Malayu Muslims communities. This was further enflamed by government-sanctioned circulations of graphic photographs of daily attacks on security forces, suicide bombings, and beheadings of school teachers, monks and imams which were nationally and widely accessible in both social media and mainstream news outlets.⁹ Even though these graphic images of beheaded civilians and security forces were not the only cause of death in the conflict, the majority of the Thai media focuses on these images in order to generate headline grabbing reports that are reused in social media.

When the Thai nation-state, formerly known as Siam, was solidified in the 14th century, parts of the southern territories were placed at its margins with few efforts made to include it into the mainstream state. These territories, now known as Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala, were formerly under the control of the Islamic Sultanate of Pattani.¹⁰ Despite the success of the Siamese military against them, many historical accounts argued that the Siamese kings were unsuccessful in their attempts to integrate the conquered Malayu Muslims into Buddhist society due to perceptions of religious and cultural differences. Later expansion of the British Empire onto the Malay peninsula in 1902 increased tension further as the Kingdom of Siam was forced to relinquish segments of their Malay territories, including separating parts of the Pattani Kingdom.¹¹ Although Thailand regained some of these territories back from the British by aligning with Imperial Japan during World War II, parts of the South were never fully integrated

⁸ AFP. "Death Toll in Thailand's Southern Conflict Hits Record Low." The Straits Times, Dec. 27, 2017, www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/death-toll-in-thailands-southern-conflict-hits-record-low.

⁹ Abuza, *Conspiracy Of Silence*, 2.

¹⁰ Joseph Chin Yong Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 101.

¹¹ Abuza, *Conspiracy Of Silence*, 13.

into the Thai state. It resulted in increased perception of “otherness” amongst the modern Thai state towards the incorporated Malayu Muslim population of the three southern provinces region.¹²

This continued into the modern context where small Thai and Malayu Muslims groups with alleged ties to Al-Qaeda continued their struggles to separate from the Thai state. The most prominent of the insurgents in the region are the Barisan Revolusi Nasional or BRN and the Patani United Liberation Organization, or PULO.¹³ The BRN and PULO had claimed the most responsibility for various attacks on government officials, local villagers-especially Buddhists, teachers and security forces. Although most Thai security experts argued that the BRN and PULO as representative of the main factions in the struggle, the lack of coordination and cohesion in their attacks had puzzled the Thai state.¹⁴ Some scholars had suggested that these attacks were rather attributed to criminal activities along the Thai-Malaysia border rather than organized insurgent groups. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that the Thai state’s general lack of understanding of the situation had aggravated the situation further.¹⁵

Facing this, successive Thai governments had championed nationalistic rhetoric to the Thai public in order to mobilize support for military actions against what it perceived as religious zealots armed with separatist desires.¹⁶ Although clear intentions and grievances from Thai and Malayu Muslims insurgents were never fully verified or confirmed, many academics interpreted that the constructed self-imagined cultural identity, religious differences, and physical humiliation had been the main driving forces. If these causes were the spark, Thai government

¹² Abuza, *Conspiracy Of Silence*, 15.

¹³ Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 103.

¹⁴ Abuza, *Conspiracy Of Silence*, 103.

¹⁵ Abuza, *Conspiracy Of Silence*, 101.

¹⁶ Abuza, *Conspiracy Of Silence*, 39.

officials' usage of ethno, religious, and cultural nationalist rhetoric, which framed Thai and Malayu Muslims as “insurgents” and “separatist” to the Buddhist majority, certainly inflamed it.¹⁷ Differences in conceptualization of nationalist identity, religious affiliation and local cultural practices between the Malayu Muslims and the Thai Buddhist population are at the center of the discussion. This thesis argues that the political usage and spread of nationalistic ideologies manifested in rhetoric by the Thai state help redefine Thai identity as an attempt to prevent a perceived threat of the “other” to its self-identity and ontological security.

The purpose of my research is to explore the question surrounding the topic of Thai state and media rhetoric towards the “other” and construction of self-identity in an effort to reinforce Thai national identity or “Thainess”. These rhetoric and construction of self-identity enables the justification of the use of force against minority groups, such as the Thai and Malayu Muslims, who are seen as these “others” by the Buddhist majority country. I will focus on two critical cases in order to examine this rhetoric, how it was used by the Thai state, and the media and how it helped legitimize the use of force by the state. The first case is the Tak Bai Incident on October 25, 2004 under democratically elected Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. The case took place during Prime Minister Thaksin's second term in office in the Tak Bai district of Narathiwat Province. The event started with the protest by local Muslims over the wrongful arrest of six suspected insurgents. The protest turned into a riot, which ended in a Thai security forces violent crackdown.¹⁸ The incident saw over 1,0000 people detained and 85 Thai and Malayu Muslim dying from asphyxiation in the back of military trucks. This prompted retaliatory killings

¹⁷ Johnson, *The Buddha on Mecca's Verandah*, 168.

¹⁸ Abuza, *Conspiracy Of Silence*, 65.

orchestrated by Muslim insurgent groups against the local Buddhist population and security forces.¹⁹

The second event is the Ratchaprasong bombing on August 17, 2015, during military coup leader Prayut Chan-o-cha's tenure. Multiple explosives were detonated at the Ratchaprasong intersection next to the revered Buddhist-Hindu Erawan Shrine, which is located in the economic and tourist heart of Bangkok.²⁰ The area is especially popular with foreign tourists, as it consists of large shopping centers, hotels, shrines and main public transportation stations which serve as hubs for different systems. The explosives mainly damaged the Erawan Shrine and resulted in 20 fatalities and 163 injuries, most being Western and Chinese tourists.²¹ It was the first major terrorist attack in Bangkok, which created a mass panic within the Thai media circle. As panic sets in, many Thai news agencies released unverified and speculative information that accused Thai and Malayu Muslims "separatist insurgents" for the attack. These statements were eventually amended to place blame instead on a Chinese Muslim minority group called the Uyghurs.²² However, rhetoric from Thai media and the Thai state continued to cast suspicions on local Thai and Malayu Muslims for the attack by support in manpower and logistics. The lack of transparency about government policies cemented doubts and provoked further distrust of Thai and Malayu Muslims in the Thai Buddhist consciousness. In both cases, an upsurge in the rhetoric of violence from the Thai government, media and public became the platform for justification of renewed military actions in the three southern provinces.

¹⁹ Abuza, *Conspiracy Of Silence*, 66.

²⁰ "Bangkok Bomb: What Do We Know?" BBC News, Aug. 20, 2015, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-33969671.

²¹ BBC News, "Bangkok Bomb: What Do We Know?"

²² Post Reporters. "City Police Probe Uighur Revenge Motive for Blast." The Bangkok Post, Aug 19, 2015, www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/660640/city-police-probe-uighur-revenge-motive-for-blast.

Research Question and Concepts Identification:

In this research, I argue that escalation of violence or intergroup violence in Thailand is caused by the Buddhist majority through the Thai state's and media's rhetoric reactions to the perceived challenge and disruptions to its constructed self-identity and ontological security in relations with the "others," which in this case are the Thai and Malayu Muslims. This identity anxiety is seen in the Thai state and media rhetoric used during the Tak Bai Incident and the Ratchaprasong bombing. Ontological security is broadly defined as "When a state pursues social actions to serve self-identity needs, even when these actions compromise their physical existence."²³ This means that when a state feels that its identity, control and internal security is jeopardized by an object that does not fit into their imagined identity, it will assume security seeking behavior and take certain actions to try to correct the object, even if the actions are irrational and violent.²⁴ The state will eventually construct a routine which it sees as a way to regain self-identity and security. Routines in this case can be either violent and self-destructive or non-violent and peace-seeking, which the states become attached to and is unable to change course.²⁵

Ontological security essentially reveals that crises which challenge a state's identity, such as domestic instability or introductions of a foreign element, will make it behave and take actions to maintain or return to the status quo. Both democratically-elected civilian and military governments of Thailand exhibit such a trait when challenged. They retaliate by using rhetoric which reconstruct and frame Thai national identity into a simplified concept of "Thainess".

"Thainess" in this sense was used to demarcates and excludes ethnic, religious, and political

²³ Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2014), 2.

²⁴ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 3.

²⁵ Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma," *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 12, no. 3, (2006): 360-361.

communities who are deemed as the “others”.²⁶ These rhetoric are further supported by discussions within the media, further escalating the sense of ontological insecurity. In the past, this effort subsequently mobilized the Buddhist Thai population’s support for the justification of force and violence against the “other,” which in this case was minority Thai and Malayu Muslims. Furthermore, once repression occurs, an environment of imagined insecurity becomes ingrained, which enables ongoing repression by the state while furthering separatist sentiments amongst the threatened population. The analysis of this research will draw from Ontological Security Theory along with the methodological approach of Discursive Practice Approach which will be discussed in further detail in the next section.

To define key terminology in this research, I reference Pavin Chachavalpongpun’s work *A Plastic Nation: The Curse of Thainess In Thai Burmese Relation* to define “Thainess,” “Although Thainess had never been clearly defined, as history suggests, it holds power and hegemonic status within and without the realm of the Thai state. It is forwarded as the defense of national survival.”²⁷ “Thainess,” in essence, is fluid and often is imagined and reimagined to fit the political interest of the elites. In creating an imagined identity of “Thainess,” the Thai state insulates itself and the public from the anxiety and uncertainty of a lack of security. It also allows the Thai state to provide itself and those it governs with a sense of purpose, unity, and commonality. Specifically, this imagined identity is built upon the concepts of the monarchy, religious affiliations, political outlooks, and cultural practices which manifest itself in rhetoric and language. As Chachavalpongpun argued in his work, ethno-nationalism evolved according to the political need of the Thai government. We can see that it was used in historical contexts

²⁶ Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 33.

²⁷ Pavin Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation: The Curse of Thainess in Thai-Burmese Relations*, (Landham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2005), 3.

whether to mobilize nationalistic sentiment to expel Thai Chinese during World War II or to paint the Burmese as a threat.²⁸ However, it may be possible to assume that ethno-nationalism in the Thai context is based on the sentiment of belonging according to ancestry and physical characteristics.

Alternatively, religious nationalism is more commonly identified in the modern Thai context. It manifests itself from the mainstream beliefs of the majority of the Thai population, who adhere to a mix of Hinduism and Theravada Buddhism. This affiliation constituted 93 percent of the Thai population, while in contrast, Islam accounted for only 5.5 percent.²⁹ This mixed Hindu-Buddhist religion had been championed by successive Thai governments as a key quality that defines a “good” versus “bad” Thai citizen. Thus, religious nationalism in the Thai context can be defined as politicization of religion to create friend-enemy interaction between Buddhists and in most cases, Muslims or Christians.³⁰ Lastly, cultural nationalism is defined in the Thai context as the shared cultural practices and adherence to tradition of the Thai state. Thai governments had used cultural nationalism as a way to influence public sentiments by focusing on “unity” under the government-defined Thai identity, such as social practices and traditions. This adherence specifically entails the public display of respect toward the royal institution in daily life and proper cultural practice of the greeting protocol towards one another known as “wai.”³¹

Cultural nationalism is seen as a bridge between the ideologies behind ethno and religious nationalism, as it provides a context in which both ethnicity and religious belief

²⁸ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 45-46.

²⁹ “Religions in Thailand: PEW-GRF.” *Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project*, Accessed Feb. 15, 2021, www.globalreligiousfutures.org/countries/thailand#/?affiliations_religion_id=0&affiliations_year=2010@ion_name=All%20Countries&restrictions_year=2016.

³⁰ Johnson, *The Buddha on Mecca’s Verandah*, 148.

³¹ Johnson, *The Buddha on Mecca’s Verandah*, 149.

becomes part of the cultural traditions.³² This practice of expression of adherence and tradition which are defined as Thai are central to the issues of Thai cultural nationalism. Thus, I argue that the Thai state and media combined elements of all three types of nationalism, manifesting within public rhetoric, to cultivate a sense of commonality by comparing it against the perceived foreign elements seen here as “otherness,” to reconstruct self-identity and ensure ontological security. In turn, the Thai nationalism movement and rhetoric enabled the Thai state and media to solicit support and created conditions where force could be easily justified against ethnic minorities or political opposition. These three types of nationalism allow the Thai states to construct the self-identity of “Thainess” which are representative of these terminologies.

The ideology of “Thainess” in this context is also embedded within the core beliefs of the community for crucial daily life institutions. These can be summarized into the core pillars of *Chat, Sasanam and Phramahakasat* which translates to Country, Religion, and King.³³ All Thais are expected to heed and adhere to such a creed since it has often been used by the media and the Thai state to encourage loyalty to the common cause. Those who do not adhere are labelled as disloyal or foreign since they are seen as incompatible with the values that encompasses Thai identity.³⁴ Examples in mainstream and social media usage of these terms had been seen as a tool to question Thai and Malayu Muslim’s compatibility and loyalty to the Thai Buddhist communities. “Khaek” had been exploited in this context for centuries against individuals who are seen as opposites to “Thainess” who have assumed intentions of spreading corruptive foreign ideologies.³⁵ It also serves as a method to construct the Thai and Malayu Muslims communities

³² Johnson, *The Buddha on Mecca’s Verandah*, 149.

³³ Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 108.

³⁴ Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 112.

³⁵ ดร.ศุภณัฐ อภิญาวม(Dr. Supanat Apinan), “ถึงพวกต่างชาติ! ‘คร.นิว’ ใช้เวลานานกว่าแต่โทษคนอื่นในโซเชียลด้วยความเกลียดชัง ไม่ทำให้อะไรดีขึ้นมา” (To all the Chang Chart! Dr. New “if you spend your days blaming others with hate the situation will never get better), *ไทยโพสต์ (Thai Post)*, July 26, 2019, <https://www.thaipost.net/main/detail/51110>.

as barbaric, violent and uncivilized, which are not compatible with the ideologies of Thai Buddhist society.

Key terms that are important to this thesis research are “Farang,” “Khaek,” and “Thai and Muslims Malayu”. These terms represent unique rhetoric which are used frequently by both the Thai public, media and state to create a demarcated line between Thai and “others”. The terminology of “Farang” is common and is key to Thai identity research. “Farang” can be translated simply as “foreign” in the Thai language.³⁶ However, its historical usage by Thai Buddhist communities was to identify and separate local Thais from Westerners who are generally classified as Anglo-Saxon and Christian. This is a way to separate and prevent Thai communities, formerly known as Siamese, from associating with European powers. In the modern context, “Farang” remains associated with a person who is seen as White or of European descent, which serves as a way for Thais to label individuals who they see as not a part of the community or those who do not share the same traditions and culture in the Thai social construct.³⁷

“Khaek” is a term that is used to identify individuals who are of Middle Eastern, South Asian, or perceived Muslim descent, generally having darker complexions and skin color.³⁸ We can see that the “Khaek” is also often used when discussing Thai and Malayu Muslims in the three southern provinces. Thai Buddhists often use this as a derogatory term to infer differences between the Muslim and Buddhist communities.³⁹ An important aspect of these terminologies to note is that there are embedded hierarchies to the labels that are placed on people who are

³⁶ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 19.

³⁷ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 19.

³⁸ Peter G. Gowing, “Moros and Khaek: the Position of Muslim Minorities in the Philippines and Thailand.” *Southeast Asian Affairs 1975: ISEAS: Yusof Ishak Institute* (1975): 31.

³⁹ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 160.

considered as “others” in Thai society. Generally, lighter skin individuals such as “Farang” will be considered higher or more desirable than darker skinned individuals such as “Khaek.”⁴⁰ This hierarchy has to do with perceived cultural practices and the desirability for fairer skin tone, as it is associated within the Thai consciousness certain qualities of wealth, purity, trustworthiness and civilized while darker skinned tones are associated with poverty, filth, dishonesty and treacherousness.⁴¹

Throughout this research, the term “Thai and Malayu Muslims” will be referred to often when discussing the ethnic minority group living in the three southern provinces of Thailand. Thai and Malayu Muslims are categorized together in most Thai state and media rhetoric when discussing the people living in the Muslim south.⁴² However, they are in actuality different from one another. The Thai Muslims are defined as ethnically and linguistically Thai but who are either hereditary Muslims or Muslims by intermarriage or had convert to Islam.⁴³ They mainly immigrated into the region and make up the minority population in the three southern provinces. Thai Muslims see themselves as citizens of Thailand more than Malaysia especially through their language and cultural practices.⁴⁴ Although similar in their practice of Islam, the Malayu Muslims or Malay Muslims are seen as Muslims who were originally part of the Malay ethnic groups who resided in the three southern provinces before the Siamese conquest in the 19th century. Their native language is Kelantan-Pattani Malay which differs from their Thai Muslims counterpart while also seeing themselves as the subject of Malaysia more than Thailand.⁴⁵ However, throughout years of intermarriage and integrations, the Thai Muslims and Malayu

⁴⁰ Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 111.

⁴¹ Gowing, “Moros and Khaek,” 32.

⁴² Duncan McCargo, et al, *Mapping National Anxieties: Thailand's Southern Conflict*. (Denmark: NIAS Press, 2012), 84.

⁴³ Johnson, *The Buddha on Mecca's Verandah*, 87.

⁴⁴ Johnson, *The Buddha on Mecca's Verandah*, 143.

⁴⁵ Johnson, *The Buddha on Mecca's Verandah*, 60.

Muslims had become integrated in one another's communities. This had allowed the Thai state and media to group the two groups together when constructing and framing their identities to the public, which is now known as "Thai and Malayu Muslims".

In examining the concepts associated with the rhetoric of "Thainess," "Farang," "Khaek," and "Thai and Malayu Muslims," one can conclude that someone who is accepted and considered a Thai is not an individual who is a "Farang," "Khaek" or other person who does not adhere to the principles of *Chat*, *Sasanam* and *Phramahakasat*. We can see that in Thai society, an individual who is labelled or associated with such terms is often believed to be different and, at times, a threat to social hegemony. In recent times however, the meaning of "Farang" had evolved and come to be associated with more positive traits since modern Thai society had become more accustomed to Western culture and values. "Farang" and Western ideologies had now become associated with civility, wealth, strength, and democratic.⁴⁶ However, the perspectives of Thais still remains unchanged as it still associates the "Khaek" with meanings such as uncivility, poverty, weak, and religious fanatics.⁴⁷ This evolution of perspectives further cements the mentioned hierarchy between the two identity constructions Thais associate with what they perceive as foreign or different. These perceptions, especially toward the "Khaek," had led to a culmination of anxiety, fear, and mistrust among Thai communities.⁴⁸ The consequence is that these meanings enabled a space for nationalistic movements and violent rhetoric to become normalized, especially by the Thai state and media to facilitate their political and security goals.

⁴⁶ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 137.

⁴⁷ Gowing, "Moros and Khaek," 33.

⁴⁸ Gowing, "Moros and Khaek," 31.

Chapter 2: Methodology, Research Design, Case Selection, and Data Collection

Methodology and Research Design:

The proposed method for this research is to analyze the rhetoric and language used by the Thai state and the media during specific events (cases). This research examines primary sources focusing on rhetoric of violence from both government declarations and news outlets used during the Tak Bai Massacre in 2004 and the Ratchaprasong bombing in 2015 to examine the patterns and compare the reactions of the Thai state and media to the events which involved domestic Muslim communities. I turned to the in-depth discussions of the Ontological Security Theory in Jennifer Mitzen's *Ontological Security In World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma* and Brent Steele's *Ontological Security In International Relations: Self Identity and the IR State* drawing from them to form my theoretical framework, and the Discursive Practice Approach in Roxanne Lynn Doty's work, *Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post Positivist Analysis of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines*, as my methodological framework.

The Ontological Security Theory had become a well-accepted approach in analyzing security seeking behavior of states. Further examination, the theory argues that states seek not only physical security but also ontological security, which is the imagined security of the state's self-identity. States are interested in both physical survival and in the stability of the self. This stability provides the confidence and assurance that the self-will continued when faced with a threat to its identity.⁴⁹ Ontological Security Theory allows researchers to take account of the disruptions and psychological processes that lead states to favor certain policies over others. This

⁴⁹ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 3.

framework also allows scholars to explain why some states are compelled to act in situations that are detrimental to its policy as well as behavior that seems irrational but is beneficial to its sense of self-identity.⁵⁰ However, limitations of the Ontological Security Theory is argued by Chris Rossdale's *Enclosing Critique: The Limits of Ontological Security* in reference to Donna Harraway's feminist and queer theory.⁵¹ Rossdale argued that Ontological Security Theory is partial and does not include the voice of marginalized groups. Since not all people have the same sentiments in regard to identity construction, the theory is not representative of security seeking behavior of all individuals within that state.⁵² Despite its criticism, I focused my research on the state level rather than the behavior of the individuals, as the Ontological Security Theory provides an extensive explanation and analysis of security-seeking behavior of the state.

Brent Steele discusses that states generally are motivated by the sense of "moral actions" that reconstruct its identity in the process of self-evaluations or shame, which translates to the anxiety of past actions.⁵³ These two forces push states to seek security when their constructed identity is challenged by another force. In his work, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State*, Steele makes his arguments through the analysis of three cases, British Neutrality during the American Civil War, Belgian self-identity during World War I, and NATO's intervention in Kosovo. In these cases, ontological security anxiety manifested in different modes and could be explained by examining their sense of shame, self-identity, self-interrogative reflexivity, memory, honor, and morality which made up ontological insecurity and promoted security seeking behaviors.⁵⁴ Steele argues that these elements force

⁵⁰ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 5.

⁵¹ Chris Rossdale, "Enclosing Critique: The Limits of Ontological Security," *International Political Sociology*, vol. 9, no. 4 (2015): 10-11.

⁵² Rossdale, "Enclosing Critique: The Limits of Ontological Security," 10-11.

⁵³ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 13.

⁵⁴ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 148.

states to engage in specific conflicts since the engagement in conflict satisfies the states' self-identity needs and community perceptions. These states subsequently take calculated actions to intervene, maintain neutrality, or fight against the odds because they view it as a way of confronting the threat to its self-identity.⁵⁵ A state, in this contrast, will take actions based on the self-reflection process and calculation of risk to its self-identity.

In comparison to Mitzen's Ontological Security Theory, Steele argues that Mitzen's omission of narratives is flawed since narratives are important to self-identity.⁵⁶ In addition, he saw Mitzen's focus on ontological security as being dependent on the other for sensemaking. In this sense states will take actions that become routine and, at times, self-defeating based on how it perceives self-identity base on its relationship to the other.⁵⁷ What differs between them is that Steele sees this rather as only a segment of the security seeking behavior of the state, in which routines are rather based on established policies to create predictability and calculated risk.⁵⁸ Steele also sees the process of sensemaking relying not solely on the relationship with the other but rather on new information intake of the state, who makes decisions based on the risk to the self. He argues that, "I would agree with Mitzen that an agent must make sense of the social world to ensure ontological security. But this does not mean that this agent is 'dependent' upon the social world, in that (1) the screening of 'relevant' elements of that social world is in part constituted by an agent's sense of Self and (2) what those elements are, what produces them, what 'causes' them- in short, how an agent 'make sense' of those elements-is in part also dependent upon an agent's updating of information."⁵⁹ Steele saw that security-seeking behavior

⁵⁵ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 27.

⁵⁶ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 58.

⁵⁷ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 58.

⁵⁸ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 32.

⁵⁹ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 59.

of a state and self-reflections of its ontological security and self-identity are not only tied to the other but dependent on the type of new information it receives. This sensemaking process is then factored into the risk evaluation of the state when taking specific actions.

Mitzen, in the similar traditions as Steele, saw that ontological security implies that physical security or insecurity are not the main causes of anxiety for the state and individual actors but the security of the self, the subjective sense of who the individual is, which leads to motivations of certain actions and choices.⁶⁰ Mitzen argues from this tradition that states have the tendency to naturally seek out security and stability through the practice of routines which promotes necessary insulation of itself. Both individuals within the state and the state itself naturally fear deep uncertainty and view it as an identity threat.⁶¹ Once an event or occurrence causes the state to experience anxiety and imagine that its own stability and identity is compromised, it will take corrective action in order to gain back the perceived loss. Most actions in this case will manifest themselves in the form of violence, force and repression since the state feels that the process of losing ontological security also indirectly jeopardizes its population and their support for the state. In order to prevent such a challenge, the state will take actions that at times could be detrimental to its physical security in order to secure its self-identity.⁶²

Mitzen's theory also views the process of a state's identity construction being reliant on its relationship with the other. The other, in this case, are actors that the state interacts with, be it another state or non-government groups. Mitzen argues, "In my view, the aspect of state identity that drives realist security dilemma logic must be a role identity because it refers to the state's internalized attitude toward others in anarchy, and anarchy is a social environment. Role

⁶⁰ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 344.

⁶¹ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 345.

⁶² Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 352.

identities are formed and sustained relationally; they depend on others to be realized.”⁶³ By examining the differences between itself and the other, the state is able to recognize its role in the ecosystem and reconstruct its self-identity that is opposite to the others in order to retain its distinctiveness. This distinctiveness is important to the state and its population since it provides a unique identity that separates itself from the others who are perceived as threatening to its ontological security and identity.⁶⁴

Mitzen argues that this behavior of the state is done in the purpose of understanding self-identity construction, which is based on establishing routines. She states, “Ontological Security tells us that rational agency relies on a platform of routines, which suppresses uncertainty and makes the world knowable. Because routines that perpetuate physical insecurity can provide ontological security, states can become attached to physically dangerous relationships and be unable, or unwilling, to learn their way out.”⁶⁵ Routines that the state becomes attached to allows it to have a sense of security and familiarity. As some states become attached to routines that involve the use of force, they reconstructed those routines to represent the act of securing of the self.⁶⁶ This means that if a state loses its ontological security and had elected to employ force in order to regain it, that state will potentially become conditioned to this new reality, which forces it to view conflict as a form of stability and security.⁶⁷

In the case of Thailand, ever since the transition from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy in 1932, the Thai state had existed within the environment of violence through countless coups d'état, constitutional rewrites, domestic insurrections, and failed democratic

⁶³ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 357.

⁶⁴ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 352.

⁶⁵ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 354.

⁶⁶ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 354.

⁶⁷ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 354.

governments.⁶⁸ This continuous loss of ontological security created anxiety over its self-identity, which resulted in the Thai state turning toward conflict in order to recover its sense of security. This construction is seen in the rhetoric and language used by the Thai state and media for the purpose of preventing imagined threats, such as Thai and Malayu Muslims, to disruptions of cultural stability and identity of the nation. Thus, ontological security is a useful theoretical approach to examine and understand identity construction, nationalism, and justification of force in Thailand.

Although I refer to both Steele and Mitzen's Ontological Security Theories throughout my analysis, I rely more heavily on Mitzen especially regarding how ontological security is constructed and influenced by the relation of the state with the other. Disruptions to routines are critical in her theory to explain how states react and define their identity through self-reflection process, which at times can be self-negative and detrimental to physical security. Steele's criticism of Mitzen's omission of narratives and her overreliance on the social world for a state's sensemaking does not sufficiently impact the examination of the rhetoric expressed by the Thai state and media. Despite Steele's focus on the importance of narratives allowing us to understand certain aspects of a state's responses to ontological security challenges, it is unable to determine why a state would take certain actions when they are perceived to be detrimental to its physical security. Mitzen's argument allows for more interpretations of self-identity anxiety generated from the Thai state and media during the cases, which gives us a better understanding of the way their rhetoric represents the presence of ontological insecurity.

In providing examples of how other scholars conduct research in international security, Rogers Brubaker's and David D. Laitin's works *Ethnic and Nationalist Violence* provides an

⁶⁸ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 43.

additional theoretical approach to studying violence between interstate actors, which is useful to examine in conjunction with the Ontological Security Theory. Their main discussion centers around the idea that ethnic violence is not a frequent occurrence since violence between actors tends to originate from other causes such as economic disputes, political power struggles or ideological differences. Violence becomes constructed as ethnic violence when factions or actors reimagined the conflict as such through methods of reframing identity or exploitation of nationalistic fervor.⁶⁹

Brubaker and Laitin highlighted three theories to studying ethnic and nationalist violence, which are International Relations Approach, Game Theoretic Approach, and Culturalist Approach. The International Relations Approach, or IRA, entails that “the existence of a ‘security dilemma’ under conditions of anarchy, in which even non-aggressive moves to enhance one’s security, perceived threatening by others, trigger counter moves that ultimately reduce one’s own security.”⁷⁰ The IRA approach theorizes that under stressful conditions, nationalist movements will view the other or different groups as hostile, which creates incentives for violence. The Game Theoretic Approaches' offers a different theory to analyze ethnic and nationalist violence. “Game theorists seek to provide a specific account of violence rather than accept it as an unexplained and unintended byproduct of tense ethnic conflicts.”⁷¹ Game theorists focused on identification of certain mechanisms that cause violence rather than perceptions of threat. They argue that violence in this case are generated neither from fear nor from failed coordination within the group but instead from deliberate policies that triggered the violence.⁷² In

⁶⁹ Rogers Brubaker and David D. Laitin, “Ethnic and Nationalist Violence,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 24, no. 1, (1998), 426.

⁷⁰ Brubaker, and Laitin, “Ethnic and Nationalist Violence,” 437.

⁷¹ Brubaker, and Laitin, “Ethnic and Nationalist Violence,” 438.

⁷² Brubaker, and Laitin, “Ethnic and Nationalist Violence,” 439.

contrast to the International Relations Approach and Game Theoretic Approach is the Culturalist Approaches which is closer to the Ontological Security Theory that I have chosen. “Culturalists approaches seek to specify the manner in which fears, and threats are constructed through narratives, myths, rituals, commemorations, and other cultural representations.”⁷³ The culturalist approach mainly focuses on the construction of fears and narratives which enables violence between groups. This construction is based on the understanding that security dilemmas are subjective and located in the meaning and discourse rather than the external physical space.⁷⁴

Brubaker’s and Laitin’s work shows that there are many theories that could help explain ethnic and nationalist violence. However, the International Relations Approach does not examine the self-identity and anxiety that arise from the disturbance to a state's ontological security but rather focuses on violence deriving from physical anarchy within a state.⁷⁵ This difference between the construction of the entities of state and ethnic groups presents an issue when attempting to use international relations approaches since it would limit the research’s ability to treat these non-state entities as unitary actors.⁷⁶ This approach does not take into account the significance of the intentions of actors which are produced within rhetoric. At the same time Game Theoretic Approach assumes that ethnic violence derives from policies or certain mechanisms rather than imagined fear, which provides answers more for the physical threat than the imagined threat.⁷⁷ Its weakness is associated with assumptions based on group uniformity and mutual actions toward escalations or de-escalations of violence prompted by policy mechanisms. This relies on physical perception of threat and mutual actions between states rather

⁷³ Brubaker, and Laitin, “Ethnic and Nationalist Violence,” 442.

⁷⁴ Brubaker, and Laitin, “Ethnic and Nationalist Violence,” 442.

⁷⁵ Brubaker, and Laitin, “Ethnic and Nationalist Violence,” 437.

⁷⁶ Brubaker, and Laitin, “Ethnic and Nationalist Violence,” 438.

⁷⁷ Brubaker, and Laitin, “Ethnic and Nationalist Violence,” 438.

than imagined threats. In doing so, I believe that these approaches miss the psychological, political and economic intentions of actors, despite it providing collective analysis. These theories are not suitable for examining the self-identity of the state in relations to the other since they mainly focus on physical security rather than imagined security.

Additionally, despite being closely related to the Ontological Security Theory, the Culturalist Approach also is not suitable for examining states' security-seeking behavior for self-identity construction. The issues with culturalist approach is that they focus on cultural constructions of fear but does not go as far as providing an explanation of how a states' behavior and reactions are impacted by such fears.⁷⁸ In discussing ethnic violence, the culturalist approach merely addresses discursive, symbolic, and ritualistic aspects, which are inadequate when attempting to understand the way rhetoric and identity anxieties are internalized within a state entity.⁷⁹ The approach tends to overgeneralize and thus is unable to account for all the diversity or responses for all of the actors within the cultural context that it attempts to analyze.

As this research focuses on how ontological security and self-identity anxiety manifest in the Thai state's and media's rhetoric, the theories put forth by Brubaker and Laitin do not fit into this intended approach. Unlike Mitzen's ontological security theory and Doty's discursive practice approach, their analysis of International Relations Approach, Game Theoretic Approaches, and Culturalist Approach to ethnic violence does not fully take into account the importance of rhetoric and meaning constructions in relations to violence over issues of self-identity anxiety. Future research could examine how different Thai ethnic groups' perceptions of one another and ways in which violence influences these interactions. However, this would raise new questions in regard to whether or not the conflict in Thailand is an ethnic conflict or an

⁷⁸ Brubaker, and Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," 442.

⁷⁹ Brubaker, and Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," 443.

example of state violence. In this case, more in-depth research would need to be conducted to see how such conflicts are executed by both the state and the insurgents.

The methodological framework adopted is the Discursive Practice Approach by Roxanne Lynn Doty. This approach emphasizes analysis of languages used by social actors, such as states, in order to legitimate particular identities and actions. Doty presented this approach from her analysis of the U.S. anti-insurgency policy within the Philippines. Her work highlights the type of rhetoric and language used by the US military command to discern and describe how counter-insurgency policies should be carried out by the Philippine government.⁸⁰ The discursive practice approach emphasizes the *linguistic construction of reality*. The productive nature of language does not depend on nor necessarily coincide with the motivations, perceptions, intentions, or understandings of social actors. Language is seen as a set of signs which are part of a system for generating subjects, objects, and worlds.⁸¹ In this sense, the type of language that is used by both state and non-state actors conveys their intentions and outlooks on their own identity and actions toward one another. This approach allows us to analyze the conception of power and political will, which are embedded within linguistic practices that are constructed and articulated.⁸²

This methodological approach can also be used to identify and understand how the Thai state generates and legitimizes its identity and actions through the rhetoric of anxiety and nationalism. These rhetoric could be found in both media sources and government declarations. Doty refers to policy makers in particular in her work, “Policy makers also function within a discursive space that imposes meanings on their world and thus *creates* reality.”⁸³ Since policy

⁸⁰ Roxanne Lynn Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines,” *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 3, (1993): 310.

⁸¹ Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction,” 302.

⁸² Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction,” 302.

⁸³ Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction,” 303.

makers are able to generate this reality through rhetoric, this self-identity and imagined security are constructed through the linguistic creation of meanings alongside its target subject. Doty gives a further example of the discursive practice approach that shows the United States' usage of rhetoric to refer to interaction relationships between the actors as parent/children in order to assign meaning to its own identity in relation to the Philippines. "The U.S. had to be patient and sympathetic, yet firm, in using its constructive and guiding influence on its former ward. The ostensibly nurturing relationship invoked by the parent/child opposition obscured and justified practices of domination."⁸⁴ We can see that the United States gave itself meaning as the "parent" while assigning the Philippines as the "child" through their interactions. In doing so, the Philippines is reduced to an inferior party who is viewed as incapable of making its own decisions and in constant need for a "guiding hand" from the United States as the assumed dominant party.⁸⁵ By producing such meanings, the United States constitutes its identity as the decision maker in this relationship. This subsequently justified the United States interventionism in the insurgency policy-making process of the Philippines government.⁸⁶ A similar approach and methodology will be applied to analyze the selected cases of the Tak Bai Incident and the Ratchaprasong bombing to examine the Thai state and media rhetoric and its meaning which constitutes particular self-identities and security which enables the justification of violence towards minority groups.

Limitations of this research project to the ones already mentioned include its reliance on a limited number of primary and secondary sources. Future research can include first-hand accounts and interviews of actors, such as the Thai and Malayu Muslim community members,

⁸⁴ Doty, "Foreign Policy as Social Construction," 313.

⁸⁵ Doty, "Foreign Policy as Social Construction," 315.

⁸⁶ Doty, "Foreign Policy as Social Construction," 315.

insurgents, government officials, and general public, in order to gauge ways in which they use and experience repression instigated by state and media rhetoric. We must also note that by using media and government sources, we will find that each agency will have its own biases and agendas, which may not reflect the true intentions of the actors involved. As mentioned, face to face interviews will more than likely yield better results as since I could better engage with the actors and obtain raw data. However, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 made this process impossible since this method would require spending significant time in Thailand and embedded within the community, where interactions are key.

Lastly, the issue of reliable data sources has presented a challenge since the explosive student-led movements of 2020 had threatened the Thai state. In response, I found that Thai government agencies which I had contacted and engaged with throughout the process began to restrict information disclosure, especially to student research projects from the United States. Individuals who I had contacted also either shut down our discussion channel completely or limited the amount of access that I was entitled to for these two cases. This subsequently limited the amount of data I was able to gather towards the end of the process. All individuals who I had contacted to obtain access to data requested anonymity, since the examined topic of this project is a sensitive one for the country. To honor their request and protect their identity, I will refer to only the organization's name for the data source when creating citations or in reference. It is also important to note that the various media outlets and government declarations have an agenda in utilizing specific rhetoric.

Case Selections:

These two events provide an intriguing case comparison study, as they will enable me to compare how Thai state and media's rhetoric are constructed and framed to justify violence against Thai and Malayu Muslims under different administrations and circumstances. I analyze

the language that was used to define “Thainess” in these contexts while also conducting research into the issues behind the anxiety and fear of identity insecurity of the Thai state. The structure of this research examined in depth the selected cases of the Tak Bai Massacre and the Ratchaprasong bombing through primary sources collected from the media and Thai government repositories. The criteria for this research entailed the examinations of rhetoric before and after the events. I had gathered data that involved discussions of the issues involving Thai and Malayu Muslims one week before the case. I also obtained data that involved discussions of the examined case which references to Thai and Malayu Muslims in the two weeks following the case.

The selected cases held important significance to the study of state rhetoric and ontological security. Starting with the Tak Bai Incident, there had been many academic works in the past which addressed the start and escalations of continued hawkish policies and mismanagement by Prime Minister Thaksin's government.⁸⁷ These policies center on the use of military force to suppress peaceful protests by the Thai and Malayu Muslims in the three southern provinces. One can see this in the use of extensive martial law, the arming of Buddhist villagers and the support for militia death squads.⁸⁸ These actions subsequently created an environment of escalating insurgent violence and further segregation of communities. The Tak Bai Incident case is also relevant to Thai society since it showed that the majority of Thai Buddhists do not fully grasp the issues of identity which are closely linked to religious beliefs. The treatment of Thai and Malayu Muslims in the case of the Tak Bai Incident shows the negative stereotype in which the Thai state and media view the ethnic minorities viewing them as

⁸⁷ Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 104.

⁸⁸ Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 91.

the “other” due to differences in religion and culture.⁸⁹ The media attention and government statements gave rise to the fear of this imagined threat, enabling nationalist sentiments within Thai Buddhist communities against Thai and Malay Muslims. This notion provides important evidence to support the argument that Thai government has fallen into the routine of forceful and violent reactions as its ontological security is challenged by the “other”.

The Ratchaprasong bombing case presents another critical example of how ontological security manifests itself within the Thai state. This case presented a unique opportunity for this research project since it had not been widely analyzed by academics in either Thailand or the West. By conducting this research, I hoped to provide new insight into how this event contributed to the Thai identity anxiety and state insecurity through examinations of the existing rhetoric from the media and the Thai state. It also became critical to the study of “Thainess” since the location of the bombing is symbolic to Thai national identity and pride. The shrine was originally constructed in 1956 in the Hindu tradition with the purpose to ward off evil. The shrine housed Phra Phrom, who is the four faced Thai representation of the Hindu god Brahma.⁹⁰ Since Thailand adheres to a mixture of Theravada Buddhism and Hinduism, the Erawan shrine was widely accepted by the Thai Buddhist majority to be an important representation of the identity of Thailand. The attack was perceived to be symbolic in its attempt to destroy Thai identity which is linked to Buddhist values.⁹¹ Adding to this narrative, the attack had occurred within the economic and commercial heart of Bangkok, where political conflicts had been frequent from 2006 to 2013 where anti-government and pro-government rallies in the area had

⁸⁹ Gowing, “Moros and Khaek,” 33.

⁹⁰ “Bangkok Bomb: Why Do People Visit the Erawan Shrine,” *BBC News*, Aug. 18, 2015, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-33964384#:~:text=The%20best%20known%20of%20a, had%20just%20been%20built%20nearby.&text=The%20shrine%20houses%20a%20golden,Hindu%20god%20of%20creation%2C%20Brahma.

⁹¹ Nation Reporter, “Give the Bombers the Last Thing They Expect,” *The Nation*, Aug. 18, 2015, www.nationthailand.com/opinion/30266908.

ended in riots and death.⁹² The area had become symbolic within Thai consciousness in relations to violence and the deterioration of Thai unity. The relevance of the Ratchaprasong bombing case subsequently reveals the differences in responses and rhetoric of the Thai state and media in addressing issues that involve the relations between Thai Buddhists and Muslims. This case provided a crucial examination of Thai state's ontological insecurity and the way it reconstructs identity in relations to the "other." The following table 1. shows a breakdown of the cases.

Table 1: Case Breakdown

	Actors	Incident	State responds
Tak Bai Incident, Narathiwat Province October 25 2004	Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) Patani United Liberation Organization (PULO)	Thai security forces arrested six suspected Thai and Malayu Muslims Insurgents 1,500 Thai and Malayu Muslims villagers gathered at police station in Tak Bai village to protest	Deployment of military personnel Fired live ammunitions and tear gas to break up protest Arrest of over 1,000 protestors 85 Thai and Malayu died on way to detention center due to asphyxiation
Ratchaprasong Bombing, Bangkok Metropolis August 17 2015	Prime Minister General Prayuth Chan o-cha Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) Patani United Liberation Organization (PULO) Muslims Uighurs	Explosion at Ratchaparasong intersection next to Erawan Shrine 20 dead mostly foreign tourist 163 people injured Next day Second bomb exploded in the Chao Praya River near Sathorn Pier	Police investigated and offered reward for information leading to arrest Media connections with Thai and Malayu Muslims insurgency in the three southern provinces. Thai state warned against speculations by media and public Thai Police Named Chinese Muslim Uighurs as suspect based off CCTV. Deployment of additional Thai military and security forces in Bangkok and subsequently three southern provinces Arrest of three suspects, two Muslim Uighurs and one Thai Muslim. Question surrounds true identity of suspect.

⁹² Post Reporter, "The Shrine's History: More than Four Faces," *The Bangkok Post*, Aug. 19, 2015, www.bangkokpost.com/life/social-and-lifestyle/660784/the-shrine-history-more-than-four-faces.

Some differences between the two cases are that the Tak Bai incident started as a protest by Thai-Muslims villagers against the Thai security forces, which escalated into violent confrontations. The protestors were apprehended by the Thai security forces and brought to detention centers, which resulted in the death of 85 Thai and Malayu Muslims. The Ratchaprasong bombing, however, was an act of violence committed by an unknown actor. Despite the Thai state's claim of Uighurs Muslims with suspected ties to Thai and Malayu Muslims insurgents being the culprit were never confirmed to the public. Another key differences between the cases is that the Thai state is ruled by a different types of government during this two period. We see that during the Tak Bai incident, the Thai state was under the control of a democratically elected Prime Minister under the leadership of Thaksin Shinawatra. The Ratchaprasong bombing, however, occurred during the period of military government led by coup leader Prime Minister Prayut Chan o-cha. Despite these differences, the result of this research is not impacted by it, since I focused on the key issues involving the Thai identity and the way in which the Thai state formulates identity. We see that these two cases created an environment and conditions where the Thai state is able to justify violence against the "other," with Muslims in Thailand categorized as the "other." This point is especially important since these two events caused the public to not only questions "Thainess" and Thai identity, but also the role that the Thai state plays in shaping Thai identity. Thus, the similarities, which is key to this research, in both cases are the fact that they challenged the idea of "Thainess" and how it had been constructed to justify violence by the Thai state.

Data Collections:

In terms of obtaining data, there was a lack of media sources and coverage on the Tak Bai Incident. This was due to the national restrictions on media reporting during the 2006 military coup which ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. These restrictions extended to the

archiving of news that would be deemed as detrimental to the military government at the time. I was able to obtain most of the media sources from international news outlets rather than Thai news agencies. I drew from *The Washington Post*, *The BBC*, and *Aljazeera* for international media sources while examining *The Manager* for the Thai source.

Under this circumstance, I focused on the transcript of the government weekly radio show ran by Prime Minister Thaksin called “นายกฯ ทักมิติน คู่ยกัฒบรระชาชน” translated into English as “Prime Minister Thaksin Speaks with Citizens”. The show aired once a week and comprised various interviews and discussions led by the Prime Minister about current affairs which had been organized according to its aired date. This transcript was obtained through virtual meetings and discussions with officials at the Legislative Institutional Repository of Thailand. However the contacted officials requested anonymity due to the sensitivity of the subject. Therefore, I refer to these officials by their organization, referring to them as the Legislative Institutional Repository of Thailand sources. This transcript provided an important basis in examining the rhetoric of the Thai state towards the Thai and Malayu Muslims during the Tak Bai Incident.

For the Ratchaprasong bombing, there were more widely accessible media sources and government discussions during and after the incident. Local primary sources from media outlets examined in this research came from the English-language newspapers, *The Bangkok Post*, *The Diplomat*, *Aljazeera* and *Khaosod English*. The Thai language newspaper agencies that I drew from are *Naew Na News*, *Daily News*, *Matichon*, and *Thai Rath*, which had extensive coverage of the case. These sources were obtained from public records and requests to the news agencies. I also examined the speeches made by Prime Minister Prayut and his cabinets in regard to the Ratchaprasong bombing. These sources will come from the government public program sponsored by the Thai government called “แถลงการณ์คืนความสุขให้คนในชาติ,” translated as “Return

happiness to the people of the country”. This was uploaded and acquired from the official Thai government YouTube channel, which is accessible to the public. These primary sources provided an in-depth look at the rhetoric which occurred during the event of the Ratchaprasong bombing.

For this research, I examined approximately forty different primary data sources that deals with the discussions surrounding both the Tak Bai incident and the Ratchaprasong bombing. This included print news articles, online news articles, radio show transcripts, and government television briefings. The majority of the primary sources came from local Thai government data base and Thai language news agencies, which are a mixture of online and print format. The international sources came mainly from online data base of the specific news agencies. The examined primary data for the Tak Bai incident ranged from October 25, 2004, to November 8, 2004, while the examined primary data for the Ratchaprasong bombing ranged from August 19, 2015, to August 31, 2015.

This research adds meaningful content to the existing academic discourse over the issues of identity anxiety, and state violence in Thailand. This research also examines how the Thai state constructs its identity to justify the treatments of ethnic minority groups such as the Thai and Malayu Muslims. Both selected cases provide unique perspectives on the way Thai media and states under different forms of government react towards self-identity anxiety, which has been expressed through rhetoric. In order to analyze and give meaningful context to this phenomenon, I drew from the theoretical concept of Ontological Security Theory and the methodological approach of the Discursive Practices Approach as my main framework for analysis. Both provided the basis in which I examined the issues of language and identity, along with nationalism and violence against Muslims in Thailand. The selected frameworks helped

provide strong theoretical and methodological approaches to the topic of state's identity anxiety and rhetoric of violence, as they provide an important platform to analyze the collected data.

Chapter 3: Review of Literatures

The works that I had examined show the different academic approaches to researching Thailand's identity and rhetoric of nationalism towards the "other". These works are an important references for my project, as they contribute to explanations of different types of rhetoric that are used to justify state and media repression and violence against Thai and Malayu Muslims who have been branded as "insurgents" and "separatists" within the Thai Buddhist consciousness. These works will also cover the historical and modern contexts of "Thainess," where the reimagining of identity is important for the examination of state identity insecurity. As stated, the selected cases for this project are the Tak Bai Incident in 2004 and the Ratchaprasong bombing in 2015. Currently, the majority of the academic research in this field concentrates around the issues of "insurgency" and "separatist" movements in the three southern provinces of Thailand along with the formulation and conception of Thai identity. However, there is a lack of academic research and resources focusing on the Ratchaprasong bombing of 2015, which makes it interesting for this project to research and provide new content in this field by utilizing academic theories such as the Ontological Security Theory and the Discursive Practice Approach to help analyze the case.

Of relevance are *Understanding Thai Nationalism and Ethnic Identity* by Stithorn Thananithichot. It explores the formation of the Thai identity from its Siamese origins, while *A Plastic Nation: The Curse of Thainess in Thai Burmese Relation* by Pavin Chachavalpongpun examines how Thai identities are politically formulated based on its relations to the Burmese "other". *The Buddha on Mecca's Verandah* by Irving Chan Johnson examines the media impact on mixed Thai Buddhist and Muslim communities and the way it had shaped their identities, and *Muslim "Others" In Buddhist Thailand* by Charles Keyes examines how Thai and Malayu

Muslims are perceived by the Buddhist majority, who are influenced by the state and the media. Similarly, *Moros and Khaek: the Position of Muslim Minorities in the Philippines and Thailand* by Peter Gowing explores the way the Thai Buddhist communities express and give meaning to the rhetoric of the “Khaek,” and *The Conspiracy of Silence: The Insurgency in Southern Thailand* by Zachary Abuza focuses specifically on the insurgency and state response to the violence in the three southern provinces. On the topic of the insurgency, *Muslim Insurgency, Political Violence, and Democracy in Thailand* by Aurel Croissant examines the way that the insurgency impacted the perceptions of Thai Buddhists and justification for ongoing repression, and *Mapping National Anxieties: Thailand’s Southern Conflict* by Duncan McCargo explores how failed policies and violent rhetoric from the Thai Buddhist state and media shape the way Thai and Malayu Muslims are seen as “others” while being conceptualized as a threat. Although these works are pivotal to the discourse of Thai national identity and the issues surrounding the three southern provinces, they do not specifically discuss national identity in relation to the ontological security that this thesis examines.

I begin with the journal article *Understanding Thai Nationalism and Ethnic Identity* by Stithorn Thananithichot. It lays out the background of how Thai national identity was created and strengthened from a historical context. He argues that during the consolidation of the Thai state, the concept of unity and identity was inspired by the monarchy in response to Western colonial expansions, in particular from the French and the British. The key purpose of identity creation was to generate a singular force which will unify various ethnic minorities living under the Siamese state at the time.⁹³ The Siamese king created a single set of principles under the institution of the monarchy in which an identity of “Siamese” was born. This eventually evolved

⁹³ Thananithichot, “Understanding Thai Nationalism and Ethnic Identity,” 255.

into “Thainess” before World War II under the military government. This manifestation of identity was defined as allegiance to the royal institution, adherence to Theravada Buddhist beliefs, willingness to enter into military service, and ability to communicate in the Thai language.⁹⁴ The ideology of citizenship became an important concept within the new Thai state. This case is seen as an early manifestation of the Thai state’s utilization of nationalistic rhetoric to control and insulate its sovereignty from foreign forces.

This conception of “Thainess” was also utilized by the feudal state elites and military factions for consolidation of power. To make it effective for their cause, they had to identify a recognizable foreign element which they found in Western colonial powers who were painted as the “other” in order to create boundaries and separation between their community and the colonial forces. The term “Farang,” or foreigner, which was discussed in an earlier section, was not only used to identify Westerners but also served the purpose of constructing the Thai identity in relations to it.⁹⁵ The historical rhetoric of “Farang” also had a deeper context in that it represents values that are different and undesirable within Thai society. Aside from the ethnic identification of skin color and physical features, “Farang” were identified as a group of non-Buddhists who have different sets of morals and respect of local Thai cultural traditions.⁹⁶ This process of construction is seen as a way for the Siamese elites to maintain unity and stability within the state during the colonial incursion while imagining the foreign power as a potentially dangerous actor through nationalist rhetoric to influence the public. Thananithichot’s work helped establish the basis for understanding how identity was historically understood in Thailand

⁹⁴ Thananithichot, “Understanding Thai Nationalism and Ethnic Identity,” 256.

⁹⁵ Thananithichot, “Understanding Thai Nationalism and Ethnic Identity,” 257.

⁹⁶ Thananithichot, “Understanding Thai Nationalism and Ethnic Identity,” 254-255.

and ways in which ethno, religious, and cultural nationalist rhetoric evolved. It also shows that identity can be created and pressured through force interactions with foreign outside elements.

Along the lines of Thananithichot's work, Pavin Chachavalpongpun's *A Plastic Nation: The Curse of Thainess in Thai Burmese Relation*, examines the definition of "Thainess," or the conception of Thai identity from the rhetoric of ethno, religious, and cultural nationalism. He chose to base his research upon the case study of the relationship between Thailand and Myanmar (Burma). Chachavalpongpun's main argument is that "Thainess" is fluid and often imagined by political elites and the military in order to achieve control over the nation. This ideology can be manipulated and changed according to the political environment as well as the present requirements of the ruling class.⁹⁷ These political goals involved in identity re-imagining include retention of power, economic interest, privileges, repression and justification of force against political dissidents. They are also related to the mobilization of public support through the creation of an imagined threat perceived as the "other."⁹⁸ This "other" is then propagandized to the general public as an entity that not only presents danger to Thailand's sovereignty and stability but also serves as an example of qualities that are incompatible with the Thai identity.⁹⁹

Chachavalpongpun focuses on the comparisons of three Thai government regimes, Chatichai, Chavalit, and Chuan, in regard to their policies toward Burma. Their support and rhetoric of "Thainess" embedded these principles into their individual government's policies that became the crux of how Thai identity is defined and reshaped as a concept to serve political interest.¹⁰⁰ Another point that the author made clear in his research has to deal with economic ambitions of the Thai state. He discusses the approach in which the Thai state takes certain

⁹⁷ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 34.

⁹⁸ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 19.

⁹⁹ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 19.

¹⁰⁰ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 29.

actions to achieve this ambition by redefining Thai identity. He gave the example of how both Chatichai and Chavalit's governments saw Burma as an opportunity to create greater investment for themselves through their connections with the Burmese military. Thus, it was in their interest to redefine Thai identity as "friends" in relation to Burma rather than as "enemies". This argument is supported by the examples of greater liberalization of borders areas, trade promotions for Thai private sectors to invest, and returning of Burmese ethnic refugees and fighters to the Burmese government at its behest.¹⁰¹ This change of perception and relations between the Thais and Burmese public allowed the Thai government to carry out its revenue-generation initiatives without much resistance. The result was the enrichment of members of the regime, which saw many military and government officials during the Chatichai and Chavalit eras become hidden private sector investors.¹⁰²

Chachavalpongpun's work also looks at the Thai ontological security and identity anxiety that occurred within the Thai state at the time, which led to the justification of force against ethnic minorities. He discusses this concept in the case of Thai elites' use of rhetoric to re-define "Thainess" with the intention to transform the perception of the Shan, or "Tai Yai," ethnic minority in 1988. "Thai elites transformed the Shans, known as *Tai Yai* (big Tai), and other border minorities into part of a greater Thai family to glorify the notion of Thainess. The extension of the Thai ethno-family offered the title of historical friends to those ethnic minorities."¹⁰³ Unlike other outsiders such as the "Farang" and the "Khaek" who were constructed and associated with "otherness," Thai leaders attitude towards the integration of the Shan into the ethos of "Thainess" was motivated by the historical trauma of the Burmese

¹⁰¹ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 66.

¹⁰² Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 66.

¹⁰³ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 59.

incursion along its border. The “sameness” constructed here, however, does not include citizenship but was done to satisfy Thai security policies along the border, as it was attempting to create a buffer zone between the two states.¹⁰⁴ The Thai state’s insecurity over the border dispute with Burma thus manifested itself in the form of forced assimilation of the ethnic minority into mainstream Thai society. This was done specifically by drawing comparisons in terms of language, religion, and ethnicity to reinforce the “sameness” between the ethnic groups and the Thai state.¹⁰⁵ Chachavalpongpun’s “Thainess” and Thai identity is thus defined by the Thai’s perceptions of and interactions with the Burmese, or the “other”. This political re-definition of Thai identity, in turn, legitimizes the use of force against the Burmese threat under the guise of national security.¹⁰⁶ This research is useful since the Thai state redefinition of identity in relations to the Burmese case can be compared with its current treatment of Thai and Malayu Muslims in the three southern provinces due to the state’s ontological security issues and anxiety.

Irving Chan Johnson’s work, *The Buddha on Mecca’s Verandah*, also examines the conflict in the three southern provinces through a micro level observation of the dichotomy between Buddhist and Muslim communities. Johnson’s research is based on how individuals in these diverse communities co-exist and navigate ethnic, religious, cultural and political identities. He specifically selected the case of Ban Bor On village, which is predominantly Thai Buddhist but surrounded by Thai and Malayu Muslim majority communities.¹⁰⁷ His research found that isolated Buddhist dominated communities such as Ban Bor On-struggle with identity similar to

¹⁰⁴ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 68.

¹⁰⁵ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 60.

¹⁰⁶ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 60.

¹⁰⁷ Johnson, *The Buddha on Mecca’s Verandah*, 12-13.

Thai and Malayu Muslims communities, as they attempt to construct meaning of their “Thainess” in lieu of the Thai state’s rhetoric of nationalism.

Rhetoric by the Thai state and the media contributes to shaping this narrative and forces such communities to question their own allegiances not only to the local identity, which is closely related to Thai and Malayu Muslims, but also to the larger Buddhist Thai state.¹⁰⁸ This results in these communities attempting to generate their own identity in relations to how the Thai and Malayu Muslim communities are conceptualized in the media. An example of the Thai nationalist rhetoric perpetrated these communities included, “Malay had been generalized through the conduit of television reporting into an undifferentiated ‘Muslim’ other an enemy of global proportions. Television, more than newspaper, the radio, and Internet site is the primary mode of national and global news transmission in Kelantan’s Thai village.”¹⁰⁹ Johnson’s research shows that this prevalence of rhetoric labelling Thai and Malayu Muslims an enemy is widespread and perpetrated by the national media at the micro village level. In doing so, the Thai state is able to use media influences to reinforce this notion and indirectly forces villagers to re-define their own identities in relation to the imagined enemy as a way to elicit affirmation of allegiance to the ideologies of “Thainess”.

Johnson also discusses that communities such as the Ban Bor On village are vulnerable to state propaganda, especially when insurgent activities become more violent. “Ban Bor On villagers referred to possible terrorist bomb attacks on Thai railways stations and images of Southern Thailand’s extreme violence by suspected Muslim insurgents that saturate Internet video sites. ‘They slaughter people like pigs’ a distraught-looking Khun Rien exclaimed to

¹⁰⁸ Johnson, *The Buddha on Mecca’s Verandah*, 21.

¹⁰⁹ Johnson, *The Buddha on Mecca’s Verandah*, 164.

me.”¹¹⁰ The use of rhetoric to construct meanings out of the violence is prevalent throughout Johnson’s work. It expresses the fears and anxiety of the villagers as a microcosm manifestation of a larger phenomenon that the Thai state and media propagated to create an image of the enemy for the Thai Buddhist majority.¹¹¹ This type of framing subsequently serves to create a rift between the local Buddhist population and their Muslims neighbors by the Thai state and media.

We see this in Johnson’s interview with Na Rod, a villager in Ban Bor On village when discussing insurgent attacks, “Can’t be a Christian or a Jew. A Buddhist is even less likely to commit such an act. There can be no doubt about it. It must be a “Khaek.”¹¹² Instead of supporting their neighbors, the local Thai population became suspicious of the Muslims in their village of being involved in insurgent activities. Division created by the rhetoric and images in the Thai media and propagated by the Thai state embedded the stereotypes of the “Khaek” as insurgents within the imaginations of the locals.¹¹³ It also constructed the entire Muslim population as a threat to the community. Johnson’s work is interesting in that it provides a case of how identity-based religious, cultural and political differences become a way in which individuals create meanings from their surroundings and circumstances. This influences the individual’s perspective on their identity. In the case of Ban Bor On, this shifting of identity and meaning of “Thainess” exists within the nationalist agenda and policy of the Thai state and media.

The next work examines the religious tensions that arose from the conflict and how it became central to political discussion of “Thainess” and nationalism. *Muslim “Others” In Buddhist Thailand* by Charles Keyes argues that specific restrictions imposed by the Thai state on Thai and

¹¹⁰ Johnson, *The Buddha on Mecca’s Verandah*, 165.

¹¹¹ Johnson, *The Buddha on Mecca’s Verandah*, 169.

¹¹² Johnson, *The Buddha on Mecca’s Verandah*, 168-169.

¹¹³ Johnson, *The Buddha on Mecca’s Verandah*, 168-169.

Malayu Muslims are a byproduct of mistrust and discourse over religious faith and the ontological imaging of the difference in ethno and cultural practices between Thai Buddhist and Muslim communities.¹¹⁴ Keyes' argument centers around a deep-seated relationship between Thai Buddhists and Muslims where the latter were historically labelled as a threat to the Thai state's stability. This is shown from the rhetoric regarding differences in traditional customs and religious beliefs.¹¹⁵ In particular, he focuses on the way Thai Buddhists interact with Thai and Malayu Muslims which reveals racial and religious biases that fueled the Thai state's agenda of repression. Keyes gave the example of the perceived alienness in the examination of the daily practices of Thai and Malayu Muslims observants of fasting during Ramadan. The Thai Buddhist public came to view and defined such activity as purely "Khaek" rather than Thai.¹¹⁶ This redefinition of rhetoric by the Siamese and subsequent Thai elites allows for the state and community to alienate Thai and Malayu Muslims by defining them as outside of normal society. By being considered the "other," state repression against Thai and Malayu Muslims became normalized within the Buddhist majority communities.¹¹⁷ This shows that religion and cultural difference imagined and expressed in rhetorical forms can be easily manipulated to serve the purpose of the political will of the state and media.

Keyes explains further that the term "Khaek" is used in Thai language to convey an ethno nationalist attitude of the majority Thai Buddhist towards Thai and Malayu Muslims which was based on the perception of otherness created on the grounds of the religious differences.¹¹⁸ These views directed at individuals who are seen as different or alien transcends normal cultural

¹¹⁴ Charles Keyes, "Muslim 'Others' in Buddhist Thailand," *University of Washington: Thammasat Review*, n.d., (2009): 19.

¹¹⁵ Keyes, "Muslim 'Others' in Buddhist Thailand," 23.

¹¹⁶ Keyes, "Muslim 'Others' in Buddhist Thailand," 6.

¹¹⁷ Keyes, "Muslim 'Others' in Buddhist Thailand," 29.

¹¹⁸ Keyes, "Muslim 'Others' in Buddhist Thailand," 23.

practices in Thai society in the form of artistic expression of rhetorical sentiments. “As the painting at Wat Matchimawat in Songkhla shows, this alienness can be so radical as to situate *Khak Malayu* in the ranks of demons. While demonization of *Khak Malayu* was for a long time rather muted, it has become much more common as some of those identified as *Khak Malayu* have engaged in violent acts directed at individuals and institutions who are ‘truly Thai’ (*Thai tac*).”¹¹⁹ In this example, we can see that Keyes connects historical data with his examinations of paintings in order to compare it to modern-day rhetoric against *Khak Malayu*, or Thai and Malayu Muslims. This shows that rhetoric of violence can also be portrayed in a visual format in order for Thai Buddhists to define themselves against the “other”.

This self-identity constructions is projected through imagery that creates a boundary between the ideologies of the Thai and Malayu Muslims from the Thai Buddhists, which generated a sense of imagined threat to Thai society.¹²⁰ Keyes work is important in that it addresses how religious differences in Thai society allows for the reconstruction of identity. This reconstruction comes not only from language but also through cultural expressions such as paintings and depictions. Thai’s society perceptions of the “otherness” of the Thai and Malayu Muslims becomes associated with the terminology of the “Khaek,” which came to represent negative connotations which separate what is considered to be Thai from what is considered to be the “other”.

Peter Gowing’s *Moros and Khaek: the Position of Muslim Minorities in the Philippines and Thailand* examines the in-depth implications of how rhetoric creates meaning within society. He focuses specifically on the word “Moros” in the Philippines and “Khaek” in Thailand, which are used to describe Muslims and the way these ethnic minority communities construct their

¹¹⁹ Keyes, “Muslim ‘Others’ in Buddhist Thailand,” 27.

¹²⁰ Keyes, “Muslim ‘Others’ in Buddhist Thailand,” 27.

identity.¹²¹ Gowing examines the identity of Muslim people and their ability to exist within the majority Filipino Christians and Thai Buddhists . “Historically, Muslims have seen Islam as a closed system-embracing *all* aspects of the lives of Muslims, making no distinctions between ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ and one of their fundamental convictions has been that Muslims can never be fully Muslim without a state of their own.”¹²² Gowing’s examination of the method in which Muslims communities construct self-identity and interweave it with their faith in Islamic communities, religion and culture practices which differ from the country that they reside in.

This differences in identity constructions can cause conflict, especially when the state that the Muslim community resides within requires uniformity within its society, such as the Thai state does. “They, too, are caught in the dilemma of having to reconcile the demands of their rather traditionalist conception of faithfulness to Islam with the demands of citizenship in modern states which non-Muslims predominate.”¹²³ This conflict creates a sense of identity anxiety not only within the Muslim communities but also from the modern states. By having to choose its allegiances between state and religion, the psychological sense of community and faith becomes jeopardized, representing “psychological death” for the Muslim communities.¹²⁴ This idea of isolationism from mainstream society then gives rise to animosity and distrust from the majority groups within the country as accusations of disloyalty become the norm.

Gowing discusses this in the example Thai and Malayu Muslims in Thailand in relations to the Thai rhetoric of the “Khaek”. “In Thai language, it literally means ‘visitor’. But for at least a century, the term has also been used to referred to dark skinned foreign visitors or immigrants and, in that connotation, has been popularly applied to Indians and Malays residing in

¹²¹ Gowing, “Moros and Khaek,” 27.

¹²² Gowing, “Moros and Khaek,” 27.

¹²³ Gowing, “Moros and Khaek,” 28.

¹²⁴ Gowing, “Moros and Khaek,” 35.

Thailand.”¹²⁵ This early form of the word “Khaek” was predominantly used to identify individuals who are of darker complexions. However, we can also see that this type of early rhetoric was also used to separate between what is “Thainess” and what is the “others”. By being labelled a “Khaek,” one is identified as different from the fairer-skinned Thai Buddhist majority. He discusses this further, “These stereotypes are, in part, the inheritance from centuries of conflict between the Muslim and non-Muslim peoples; and, in part, the result of simple prejudice against people of a different religion and culture who, from a national point of view, appear to be stubborn and unprogressive.”¹²⁶ Gowing’s work shows the roots of identity anxiety within the Muslim communities in Thailand where rhetoric are assigned meanings that allow for the majority group to carry out repression. Although historical disputes form a part of the story of Thai Buddhist biases towards Thai and Malayu Muslims, the differences in cultural practices and ethnicity allows room for rhetoric of conflict.¹²⁷ By utilizing “Khaek” as a labelling tool for Muslims, the Thai Buddhist majority are able to reimagine their own identity within this space as it is able to identify what makes “Thai” different from the “others.”¹²⁸

The rhetoric of violence in this context alienates and reconstructs Muslims as lesser humans. This is shown in a US study into official Thai government attitudes toward Muslims in the southern provinces. “A large majority of his respondents regarded Muslims as less hardworking and less intelligent than Buddhists. Moreover, he found that those officials who had the most exposure to Thai Muslims tended to have the lowest opinion of them.”¹²⁹ The research shows that the identity label of “Khaek” is assigned by Thai government officials with the meaning and

¹²⁵ Gowing, “Moros and Khaek,” 32.

¹²⁶ Gowing, “Moros and Khaek,” 32.

¹²⁷ Gowing, “Moros and Khaek,” 32.

¹²⁸ Gowing, “Moros and Khaek,” 33.

¹²⁹ Gowing, “Moros and Khaek,” 33. This research was conducted by Professor M. Ladd Thomas University of Northern Illinois.

qualities from stereotypes of their Muslim counterparts. In this sense the word is used to separate between qualities that are associated with “Thainess” and “Khaek,” where the latter are assigned negative connotations such as laziness and unintelligence.

Gowing’s work also examines in detail how rhetoric and especially the word “Khaek” had come to define and divide Thai and Malayu Muslims from the majority Thai Buddhist community. By utilizing oppressive rhetoric in everyday life, Thais are able to justify their biases and, in some cases, violence towards groups that are viewed as inferior.¹³⁰ This work is important to the research into the issues of ontological anxiety and rhetoric of conflict in Thailand as it provides an example of how rhetoric can be imbued with meaning that nurtures the mentality of “Thainess” versus the “otherness”. From his work, we can see that “Khaek” and the meanings attached to it shapes perceptions of the Thai Buddhist government towards the Muslim-dominated three southern provinces of Thailand.

The Conspiracy of Silence: The Insurgency in Southern Thailand, by Zachary Abuza, explores the nature of the insurgency from the beginning of the conflict to its modern-day escalation. His argument centers around the questioning of motives of the insurgency, reasons for periodical upsurges in violence, actors behind the attack, desires and demands of insurgents, and Thai military policies as well as responses toward combating the threat.¹³¹ Abuza questions the methodological approach of the Thai government and their seemingly endless desire to drive rhetoric and policies that peddles nationalist ideologies. These actions resulted in increased isolation of Thai and Malayu Muslims from their Buddhist neighbors. This isolation then led to escalations of separatist and insurgent ideologies amongst the repressed communities.¹³² His

¹³⁰ Gowing, “Moros and Khaek,” 39.

¹³¹ Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 6-7.

¹³² Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 213.

work also examines the meaning behind the insurgents' use of gratuitous violence to create instability for the economic, social, political and international relations especially exacerbating contemptuous attitudes and mistrust between Thailand and Malaysia.¹³³ We can see that Abuza's work identifies the various actors in the conflict and discusses the discourse of the actions of these actors derived from ontological insecurity. Hawkish government policies, lack of coherent directions and misguided military responses that supported Thai nationalist agendas highlight the cause and effect of the narrative of the struggle between security forces and the separatist movements.

Abuza's research is important to this project as it focuses on the case of the Tak Bai Incident of 2004. He argues that this became a pivotal event as it shows Thai military intelligence anxiety which led to an overreaction that resulted in the deaths of 85 Thai Muslim men.¹³⁴ Inflaming the situation further, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra gave a public address after the Incident, where he used divisive language to allege that the deaths of the young men were due to their weakened state attributed to the tradition of fasting during Ramadan rather than the actions of the military.¹³⁵ In this example, we see that the Thai government shifted blame based on religious differences, while at the same time, embedded justification of the Thai state's retaliatory actions within the Prime Minister's rhetoric that supported the use of force. We see that ontological anxiety over identity had become a continuous routine which guided the Thai state and media to express rhetoric that enabled actions which escalated the violence.¹³⁶ Abuza's work is crucial to this research, as he provides in detail the key case study on the Tak Bai Incident in relation to the rhetoric that had been used by the Thai state and media. It also shows that spikes in violence

¹³³ Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 218-221.

¹³⁴ Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 65.

¹³⁵ Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 65.

¹³⁶ Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 177.

became more prominent as the Thai state's rhetoric became more violent in regard to Thai and Malayu Muslims.

Aurel Croissant's *Muslim Insurgency, Political Violence, and Democracy in Thailand* also discusses the issues of the Thai government's response and lack of coherent policy to de-escalate the violence. Croissant argues that the imagined Thai identity and "Thainess" had been exploited by the elites to justify military actions in the three southern provinces.¹³⁷ He gave an example of the different ways the Thai states and media looked to separate and alienate local populations by withholding economic access to the region and implementing policy measures that would subsequently divert development funds to other provinces.¹³⁸ This method is seen as "internal colonialism," where Thai and Malayu Muslims are categorized as outside of the "system" since they are perceived unwilling to conform to the ideology of "Thainess". This notion also questions Thai and Malayu Muslims' loyalty to the state, Theravada Buddhism and the royal institution.¹³⁹ By constructing meaning of the "otherness" to Thai and Malayu Muslims, the Thai state justified its social, economic and military actions against the region through the support of rhetoric within the media.

Croissant links his discussion to the theory of *Democracy-Violence nexus*, which he states that, "Thailand, whose current democratic polity is the result of a decades long political struggle characterized by frequent alternation between authoritarian and semi-democratic regimes and whose latest transition from military regime to democracy took place in 1992, is a prime example of how the action-repression spiral of political terrorism and violence may undermine

¹³⁷ Aurel Croissant, "Muslim Insurgency, Political Violence, and Democracy in Thailand," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 19, no. 1, (2007): 6.

¹³⁸ Croissant, "Muslim Insurgency, Political Violence, and Democracy in Thailand," 6.

¹³⁹ Croissant, "Muslim Insurgency, Political Violence, and Democracy in Thailand," 12.

democracy.”¹⁴⁰ Since the transition from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy in 1932, the Thai state endured various failed civilian governments that had resulted in a routine of continuous military coups. We can reason that the constant insecurity of the Thai state created uncertainty and anxiety which caused it to react with force to new distributive events, such as the Muslim insurgency as a means to secure itself and return to what it perceives as stability.

Croissant’s article supports the theory that the Thai state’s need for repressive policies and rhetoric was one of the core reasons for the escalation of separatist movements in the three southern provinces.¹⁴¹ It highlights the role of intragroup tensions rooted in identity imagining, where rhetoric becomes the focal point of the political interest of the elites. This is supported by his evidence of the ongoing drug trade and alleged involvement of the Thai military and politicians in the activities on the Thai-Malay border.¹⁴² We could see that this economic opportunity was pivotal for members of the Thai political elites which controlled these border provinces not only through force but also utilization of rhetoric to frame the issues as a fight against drugs rather than ethnic repression. Croissant specifically cited the cases of the Tak Bai Incident in 2004 under Prime Minister Thaksin cited as being framed within national discussions as a part of his *War on Drugs* policy rather than repression of minority groups.¹⁴³

Duncan McCargo’s *Mapping National Anxieties: Thailand’s Southern Conflict* is considered to be one of the leading studies on Thailand’s self-identity anxiety and ways it relates to the conflict in the three southern provinces. He discusses how the Thai identity and core principles of the Thai state, as it is now, have been constructed by the influences of Buddhism. This creates what he terms as “Buddhist Fears” when confronted with the imagined threat of Islam in the

¹⁴⁰ Croissant, “Muslim Insurgency, Political Violence, and Democracy in Thailand,” 12.

¹⁴¹ Croissant, “Muslim Insurgency, Political Violence, and Democracy in Thailand,” 11.

¹⁴² Croissant, “Muslim Insurgency, Political Violence, and Democracy in Thailand,” 5-6.

¹⁴³ Croissant, “Muslim Insurgency, Political Violence, and Democracy in Thailand,” 11.

south.¹⁴⁴ McCargo discusses this in his interview with a local Buddhist monk in the three southern provinces, “The monk had been told by military officers that the situation in the south was growing very serious: the separatists planned first to eliminate the monks and temples, then make the region a forbidden area for Buddhists, who would be driven out of their homes.”¹⁴⁵ We can see in this interview that rhetoric of imagined Muslim threat had perpetrated all segments of the Thai Buddhist communities in the region. The monk’s claim of military officers sharing intelligence also adds to this collective fear and insecurity of the Thai Buddhist populations over the loss of their homes to “invaders”.

This identity anxiety and insecurity was common throughout the conflict in the three southern provinces and had embedded itself within the Thai state and media’s rhetoric of “Thainess,” which McCargo sees as greater than citizenship.¹⁴⁶ Language, in this case, became politicized by the National Reconciliation Council in 2005, which can be seen in the reactions of Privy Council President Prem Tinsulanonda, who viewed the proposal to make Pattani Malay a working language side-by-side with the Thai language as absurd. “The idea of making Pattani Malay a working language was criticized by Privy Council President Prem Tinsulanonda, who insisted that Thai was the only national language.”¹⁴⁷ The reactions from Privy Council President Prem shows anxiety over what it means to be Thai. “Thainess,” in this example, was highlighted by the designation of a national language. If Pattani Malay language had also been included, would have no longer been representative of the Thai identity.¹⁴⁸ Once again, it is evident that rhetoric over what is defined as “Thainess” becomes a sensitive politicized object.

¹⁴⁴ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 16.

¹⁴⁵ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 24.

¹⁴⁶ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 119.

¹⁴⁷ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 80.

¹⁴⁸ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 80.

McCargo's work is also important in that it discusses how the rhetoric of the Thai state and media came to define the portrayal of the conflict between Buddhists and Muslims. He found that there was deep-rooted distrust from the local population towards not only the Thai Buddhist state but also the media. "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."¹⁴⁹ McCargo's findings show the influence of rhetoric on the conflict. As per the villagers' statement, the rhetoric being put out by the media was believed to be the reflection of the Thai state's policy and, to an extent, its security anxiety over the conflict in the three southern provinces. The main support for this argument is that Thai media tended to mask issues with strong language that evoked an emotional response from the general public in its coverages. "Other problematic issues included the widespread use of strong language by Thai print media, especially in headlines designed to dramatize and exaggerate issues; and the related deployment of offensive visual images, including gruesome pictures of crimes and accident victims calculated to generate newspaper sales."¹⁵⁰ Although in this example, the media used these journalistic tactics to generate more sales, it shows however, that the rhetoric were also used to elicit strong emotional responses from its readers. In the case of "Thainess," it is apparent that the rhetoric of violence could have been intended to generate nationalist sentiments and reinforce identity affirmations of the Thai state and public. It also reinforces the rhetoric of the imagined enemy of the Thai and Malayu Muslims while painting them as segments existing outside of Thai identity.¹⁵¹ This will be important within this research

¹⁴⁹ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 93.

¹⁵⁰ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 97.

¹⁵¹ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 116.

as the majority of the sources that were collected are based on the Thai state's and media's rhetoric, which is highlighted by the ontological security seeking behaviors.

McCargo sees this behavior in the Thai state's perception of loyalty to "Thainess" and subservience to Thai nationhood. "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 nation and its subjects/citizens."¹⁵² This refusal to cooperate and integrate "Thainess" into the Muslim communities disrupts the Thai constructed self-identity since it questions and challenges the legitimacy of the Thai state. By not accepting "Thainess" and its values, the Thai and Malay Muslims are perceived by the Thai state as "outsiders" rather than citizens of Thai society.¹⁵³

McCargo's work presented an interesting look at the issues of Thai ontological security and identity anxiety. One can conclude that his argument revolves around the issues of autonomous rule of the three southern provinces. McCargo's following statement summarizes his views on the identity of the Thai state. "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, impending royal succession, and the future of Thailand as a nation."¹⁵⁴ The Thai state sees autonomous rule issues as a break from what the Thai nationhood is supposed to represent. Uniformity and adherence under the three pillars of nation, religion, and monarch are key to "Thainess" and perceived stability. As

¹⁵² McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 127.

¹⁵³ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 128.

¹⁵⁴ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 136.

McCargo mentions, this is compounded by other issues that portray any disturbance, such as the conflict with Thai and Malayu Muslims as a challenge to the Thai state's ontological security.¹⁵⁵ These anxieties are thus key in understanding the subsequent rhetoric where both the state and the media are often caught in the position of ontological insecurity. While existing in this stage, it is more preferable to protect its self-identity and security by constructing foreign elements, such as Thai and Malayu Muslims, as the enemy in order to redefine what "Thainess" represents in relation to "otherness."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 137.

¹⁵⁶ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 165.

Chapter 4: Case Analysis

Case One: Tak Bai Incident 2004

The first case that will be analyzed is the Tak Bai Incident on October 25 2004. The Tak Bai Incident took place in the Muslim majority province of Narathiwat, located in the southern tip of Thailand. The incident started with local Muslim villagers staging a protest over the detentions of several suspected insurgents and separatist by Thai security forces.¹⁵⁷ The crowd eventually grew to roughly 1,500 people as they were joined by other neighboring Muslim villages. As the protestors became more agitated, leaders decided to cross the security forces' barricades. This prompted the police and military to fire tear gas canisters and live ammunition rounds into the crowd, which resulted in the apprehension of over one thousand people.¹⁵⁸ The Thai security forces proceeded to transport all detainees in military trucks to be questioned at local army bases. By the time the convoy had reached its destination, eighty-five detained Muslim villagers had died due to asphyxiation caused by the cramped environment and the lack of oxygen in the back of the truck.

Zachery Abuza's *Conspiracy of Silence: The Insurgency in Southern Thailand* blames these deaths on the uncaring attitudes of the Thai state and security forces over their handling of not only the Southern insurgency issues but their racism towards ethnic minority communities: "The callous nature of the deaths were compounded by the defiant reaction of Prime Minister Thaksin and his unqualified defense of the military, which asserted that the demonstration turned into a riot and that security forces responded with an acceptable measure of force. Furthermore, Thaksin's assertion that the deaths were the result of the detainee's weakness brought on by

¹⁵⁷Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 65.

¹⁵⁸Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 65.

Ramadan fast provoked enormous outrage.”¹⁵⁹ Abuza’s account details the presence of ontological insecurity and identity anxiety that the Thai state had felt towards the escalations of the situation in the South. The Thai state has always rested its idea of security and identity on the three pillars of Thailand laid down by past leaders. These pillars consisted of unquestionable devotion and loyalty to *Chat, Sasanam and Phramahakasat*, which translates to Country, Religion, and King.¹⁶⁰ A force that challenges the beliefs of the three pillars is often regarded as a threat to the stability of the nation.

Prime Minister Thaksin’s reactions to the Tak Bai Incident is an embodiment of the way the majority Thai Buddhist population had viewed Thai and Malayu Muslims.¹⁶¹ Often portrayed as an outsider group, the “Khaek,” or roughly translated as “guest,” Thai and Malayu Muslims are stereotyped by the majority Thai Buddhist public and state due to their differences in religious practices, distinct regional culture, and oftentimes skin color, qualities which are perceived to be closer to Malaysia than Thailand. However, the aftermath of the Tak Bai Incident saw the reinvention of historical narratives which strongly identified Thai and Malayu Muslims as the enemy involved in insurgency and separatist activities during Prime Minister Thaksin’s tenure.¹⁶² It also created a significant sense of anxiety and insecurity, which resulted in violent rhetoric and nationalist sentiments from Thai Buddhist. As such, the Thai state viewed the Thai and Malayu Muslims protest as a threat to its fundamental identity and security.¹⁶³ These beliefs manifested themselves in the rhetoric of both the local and foreign media coverage of the event. It is especially prominent in Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra’s transcripts of the

¹⁵⁹Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 65.

¹⁶⁰ Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 108.

¹⁶¹ Johnson, *The Buddha and Mecca’s Verandah*, 165.

¹⁶² Gowing, “Moros and Khaek,” 32.

¹⁶³ Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 109.

government's weekly radio show with the public. To begin, we will first analyze the rhetoric of Thai news agencies before moving on to foreign journalism, while ending the section with Prime Minister Thaksin's radio show transcripts.

Although government restrictions and silencing of Thai language news agency coverage of the Tak Bai Incident at the time proved to be quite problematic for the data collection process, we do get a glimpse of how Thai journalists viewed the event by the evidence provided from the *Manager News and Online*, a major Thai language newspaper. The article headlined “ตะลึง!สลาย"มีอบตาคบ" ยอดตายสูงถึง 84 ศพ” (*Stun!, Crackdown on 'Tak Bai Mob' 84 dead*) on October 26, 2004, illustrates how the media framed the violence. “The protestors are made up of three groups. The first group comprised of repeat offenders and riot leaders who wanted to cause chaos, the second group are supporters with evil intentions looking to enact violence on the innocent, and the last group are the so-called *Thai Moong*.”¹⁶⁴ *Thai Moong* is a derogatory term to refer to Thai people who like to gather around accident sites and inadvertently impede first responders from entering the scene¹⁶⁵. This article shows a rhetoric of violence that accuses and reconstructs the Tak Bai Incident protestors as not just simple innocent villagers but bandits and insurgents who were looking to use the opportunity to escalate violence and chaos.

We can see that, when describing the issues of the three southern provinces, Thai media further added to ontological security anxiety related to the Thai Buddhist majority identity. By referencing and reconstructing the image of Thai and Malayu Muslims protestors at the Tak Bai Incident as violent “offenders,” “riot leaders,” and “supporters with evil intentions looking to enact violence,” the media created and assigned meanings to the Thai and Malayu Muslims for

¹⁶⁴ ผู้สื่อข่าวผู้จัดการออนไลน์ (Manager Online Reporter), “ตะลึง!สลาย"มีอบตาคบ" ยอดตายสูงถึง 84 ศพ”(Stun!, Crackdown on 'Tak Bai Mob' 84 Dead.), ผู้จัดการออนไลน์ (*Manager Online*), Oct. 26, 2004, mgronline.com/politics/detail/9470000072669.

¹⁶⁵ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 174-175.

the Thai public to view them as a threat.¹⁶⁶ Thai Buddhist security forces were in turn positioned as the opposite and reconstructed as righteous, such that their actions were one of law enforcement instead of violent repression.¹⁶⁷ This objectification of Thai and Malayu Muslims during the Tak Bai Incident shows a rhetoric that aimed at creating an imagined enemy that endangered the collective ontological security of the Thai state.¹⁶⁸ In doing so, it assigned the meanings of danger and evil to the Muslim minority, which served as a way to justify Thai security forces' use of force and their related actions during the incident.

We could speculate that other news stories that were permitted to be published at the time had similar framings. McCargo explains in his work, "Criticism of an inept and biased 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."¹⁶⁹ Thai media had a complex relationship with the Thai state and society. Their methods of journalism often clashed with the subject of the reporting as well as with Thai officials. This resulted in strict control and censorship measures by successive Thai governments since the 2006 coup d'état on Thai news which it sees as destructive, especially discussion on the role of the military or the monarchy.¹⁷⁰ The few that are accessible to the public, such as this news source is considered quite sparse.

On the other hand, international press reporting is more accessible and uses different rhetoric from the one we have witnessed from the local news agency. Despite some condemnations and criticism, local Thai language news agencies were not as critical in their

¹⁶⁶ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 29.

¹⁶⁷ Doty, "Foreign Policy as Social Construction," 313.

¹⁶⁸ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 19.

¹⁶⁹ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 99.

¹⁷⁰ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 105.

discussion of the Tak Bai Incident as international agencies since freedom of press at the time was limited by government control.¹⁷¹ We see that foreign press were more willing to be critical towards the Thai state's role in the incident and especially the security forces' handling of Thai and Malayu Muslims. Stories from *Aljazeera*, *BBC*, and the *Washington Post* provide a solid base for this research to examine the rhetoric used during the incident and how it reveals ontological insecurity of the Thai state. The article headlined "78 Thai Die After Protest," reported on October 27, 2004, by Ellen Nakashima of the *Washington Post*, shows the rhetoric of Prime Minister Thaksin towards the Thai and Malayu Muslims at the onset of the incident. "This week's incident was the latest sign that Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's campaign to quell a 10 month rebellion in the south is failing. The growing crisis could threaten his reelection.... Thaksin suggested Tuesday that the detainees could have died because they were "weak" from fasting during Ramadan, the Associated Press reported....The government has attributed the violence to Muslim separatists, but no Muslim separatist group has asserted responsibility for any of the attacks."¹⁷² The *Washington Post* report reveals an ontological insecurity behind the Thai state and Prime Minister Thaksin's remarks. By stating that the Muslim protestors' deaths occurred because of their adherence to Islamic practices, the Prime Minister revealed the long held Thai Buddhist stereotype towards the presence of Islam embedded within the identity of Thai and Malayu Muslims.¹⁷³ This stereotype sees these ethnic minorities as the "other," whose practices do not adhere to the same value system as the majority in Thailand.

This framing of minority Thai and Malayu Muslims as potential threats to the constructed Thai identity effectively challenged the ontological security of the state and the public, which

¹⁷¹ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 98.

¹⁷² Ellen Nakashima, "78 Thai Muslims Die After Protest," *The Washington Post*, Oct. 27, 2004, A18, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A63714-2004Oct26.html?referrer=email.

¹⁷³ Gowing, "Moros and Khaek," 32.

caused certain actions by the Thai security forces to be seen as justified in order to combat such disruption.¹⁷⁴ The ontological security seeking behavior of the Thai state exhibited here proved to be detrimental and self-defeating, as it reveals that the Thai state had become attached to the use of force as a means to ensure its ontological security.¹⁷⁵ The Thai state's attribution of violence to Muslim insurgents and separatists without having provided concrete evidence was also viewed as a way for the state to assign meanings and define its relations to those it considers as "other." Doty calls it the subject positioning process. She states that, "When one uses language, one is implying something about the existence of subjects, objects, and their relations to one another."¹⁷⁶ Doty explains further that in exploiting language, the actors are able to assign meaning to those subject, which in turn, creates hierarchical systems between the actors. In this case, the deceased Muslims were assigned qualities associated with "weakness" which resulted in their deaths. By blaming the Thai and Malayu Muslims' religious practice for their death, the Thai state was able to shift responsibility for these deaths from its own use of force, which help justify the Thai state's actions.¹⁷⁷ Thai Muslims, Malayu Muslims, and Islam were reconstructed in relation to negative meanings and effectively positioned below the Thai state, who was associated with the more positive and opposing quality of "strength" in the relationship within the hierarchy. By assigning such qualities, Thai and Malayu Muslims were constructed through rhetoric as *objects* that were inferior in relations to their opposing actors.¹⁷⁸

We also see this type of rhetoric from the *BBC News* article on November 7, 2004, headlined "Thai Premier Visits Death Town." "Before he went to the region, Mr. Thaksin said he

¹⁷⁴ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 342.

¹⁷⁵ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 342.

¹⁷⁶ Doty, "Foreign Policy as Social Construction," 306.

¹⁷⁷ Doty, "Foreign Policy as Social Construction," 315.

¹⁷⁸ Doty, "Foreign Policy as Social Construction," 313.

would instruct the army and police there to act more decisively with militants in the south. He said that some groups in the area “want to create religious conflict.”¹⁷⁹ Prime Minister Thaksin's first visit to the Tak Bai district was marred by rhetoric of violence and anxiety of the Thai state. In the statement made during his visit, he referred to Thai and Malayu Muslim separatists as “militant” and alleged that there were some groups aided by the local Muslim community that wanted to create religious conflicts. By assigning these terminologies, the Thai state continued to reconstruct the Thai and Malayu Muslims population as having close associations with separatism and violence.¹⁸⁰

This created what Doty calls the *good vs. evil* opposition structure in her work. “This Manichean opposition which served to orient U.S. foreign policy discourse worked at two levels. At one level it served to construct the U.S. and the U.S.S.R as two distinct kinds of subjects; free world/Communist world, moral/totalitarian, good/evil....When it came to Filipinos subjects, evil mixed with irrationality.”¹⁸¹ In the case of the Tak Bai Incident, we can apply this same logic, which shows that the Thai state had constructed Thai and Malayu Muslims under the label of insurgent and separatist, linking them with the idea of “evil.” At the same time, the Thai Buddhist security forces and state were associated with positive connotations and terminologies associated with the conception of “good.” These opposites allowed the Thai state to construct its identity and provide justification for the violent handling of the protestors in Tak Bai.¹⁸²

The reports from *Aljazeera* provide further insights into the Thai state's rhetoric of violence and ontological insecurity deriving from the Tak Bai Incident. The article headlined “Thai Muslims Tells Harrowing Ordeal” on October 30, 2004, focuses on the aftermath of the

¹⁷⁹ “Thai Premier Visits Deaths Town,” *BBC News*, Nov. 7, 2004, news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3990469.stm.

¹⁸⁰ Johnson, *The Buddha on Mecca's Verandah*, 168.

¹⁸¹ Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction,” 313.

¹⁸² Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction,” 313.

incident and the Thai government's response. "In his speech on Friday, Thaksin defended the break-up of the protest, saying efforts to end it peacefully had failed and the crowd was becoming violent. The Thai leader said he regretted the deaths and denied his administration was mistreating Thailand's Muslim minority."¹⁸³ We see the Thai government's rhetoric in this report as one of denial and assignment of blame. It shows a consistent pattern exhibited by Prime Minister Thaksin to pivot blame while showing that the responsibility of the violence from the Thai security forces towards the protestors was justified by saying that the Thai and Malayu Muslims were radicalized by Islamic teachings.¹⁸⁴

This rhetoric of denial also revealed that the Tak Bai Incident had caused an enormous amount of trauma to the Thai state's sense of identity, as its ontological security routine was jeopardized. In response, the Thai state reverted back to its ontological security patterns, which is governed by the use of force and violence against the "other."¹⁸⁵ In doing so, the Thai state was able to insulate itself from being associated with negative terminologies while taking necessary actions to preserve its "Thainess" identity and values.¹⁸⁶ This security seeking behavior and reversion into patterns of violence and stereotypes had become a solution as to how the state could rationalized itself against the "otherness."¹⁸⁷

This continued security-seeking behavior by the Thai state can also be noted in the *Al Jazeera* report headlined "Thai PM criticized as Protest Grows" on October 31, 2004. "Muslims in the poor and underdeveloped south, which borders Malaysia, have long complained that the faraway Bangkok administration is insensitive to their culture and religion. Vinai Sama-oon, vice

¹⁸³ "Thai Muslims Tell of Harrowing Ordeal," *Al Jazeera*, Oct. 30, 2004, www.aljazeera.com/news/2004/10/30/thai-muslims-tell-of-harrowing-ordeal.

¹⁸⁴ Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 111.

¹⁸⁵ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 61.

¹⁸⁶ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 361.

¹⁸⁷ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 30.

chairman of Thailand's Islamic committee, said in *The Nation* newspaper that Thaksin's attitude made it difficult to solve the problems. 'Martial law is not working, and as long as the prime minister sticks to the use of force, the problems won't go away,' he said."¹⁸⁸ Vinai Sama-oon's comments and criticisms support this pattern of ontological insecurity and violent corrective behaviors of the Thai state in its attempt to preserve "Thainess" within the region. The contemptuous attitudes displayed by the Thai state, Prime Minister Thaksin, and, to some extent, the general public shows the consistent long standing discrimination towards the Muslim population. These stereotypical reconstructions of identity are especially important when examining the rhetoric of "Khaek," which identifies Thai and Malayu Muslims as non-Thai or "other."¹⁸⁹

We can also see this link to Gowing's research into Siamese government treatment of its Muslims subjects in reference to a British journalist's observations in 1947. "Siamese colonists openly scorn their Malay subjects as a race of illiterate and degenerate peasants."¹⁹⁰ The Thai state's handling of the Tak Bai Incident demonstrates that this same ideology was still prevalent in modern Thai society towards the issues of the Muslim South. We can see that this attitude was a form of ontological insecurity created by a limited construction of "Thainess" as linked to Buddhism. This limited the space for alternative inclusion of different cultural and religious traditions, such as Islam in the three southern provinces. In the pursuit to make sense of its own identity, relations between the entities of the Thai state and Thai and Malayu Muslims were reconstructed as the basis for sense making by the actors.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ "Thai PM Criticized as Unrest Grows," *Aljazeera*, Oct. 31, 2004, www.aljazeera.com/news/2004/10/31/thai-pm-criticised-as-unrest-grows

¹⁸⁹ Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 34.

¹⁹⁰ Gowing, "Moros and Khaek," 33. Siam was the historical name of Thailand.

¹⁹¹ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 357.

This idea is further supported by the rhetoric seen in *Aljazeera's* reporting on November 8, 2004 headlined "Academics want apology from Thai PM." "Since the tragedy, Thaksin has continued to take a hard line against armed dissidents blamed for an insurgency that has left at least 539 people dead since January."¹⁹² The continued policy of the Thai state and Prime Minister Thaksin even in the aftermath of the Tak Bai Incident shows a continuation of security seeking behavior due to the ongoing ontological insecurity. The only way for the Thai state to regain its sense of security was to enact competition, came in the form of repression directed at the Thai and Malayu Muslims.¹⁹³ This sense of being a competitor state had thus become a routine, which insulates it from instability to its sense of self. Ontological security's understanding of states as being attached to violence as an ontological tool supports this notion. Mitzen writes, "Because routines that perpetuate physical insecurity can provide ontological security, states can become attached to physically dangerous relationships and be unable, or unwilling, to learn their way out."¹⁹⁴ We can see that the Thai state had become attached to violence as a means of maintaining the security of the self. Once engulfed in this routine, it then perceives this status as security and stability, which prevented it from course correcting. Since such routines create a sense of stability and "cocoon" against challenges to its identity, the Thai state preferred to remain in such a state rather than attempt to challenge it.¹⁹⁵ This explains why the Thai state's policy towards the three southern provinces had mostly been unchanged for long periods of time. Any attempts to course correct was met with resistance as it challenged the ontological security of the state.

¹⁹² "Academics Want Apology from Thai PM," *Aljazeera*, Nov 8, 2004, www.aljazeera.com/news/2004/11/8/academics-want-apology-from-thai-pm.

¹⁹³ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 363.

¹⁹⁴ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 354.

¹⁹⁵ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 34.

Despite the scarcity of news and coverage, especially from local news agencies, we can see that the Thai state's rhetoric during the Tak Bai Incident period shows a state of ontological insecurity and identity anxiety. The Thai state had been impacted by the trauma of the events of the incident, backlash from international media, and disruptions to the long held belief in the idea of "Thainess" created by past kings and leaders.¹⁹⁶ However, this media rhetoric still does not provide a sufficient picture of the Thai state's ontological insecurity caused by the Tak Bai Incident. We see evidence from rhetoric and perspective at play from a series of transcripts of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's government-sponsored weekly national radio show called นายทศฯ ทักม็อบคุยกับประชาชน (Prime Minister Thaksin: Discussion with Citizens). The radio talk show first aired in 2002, one year after Prime Minister's Thaksin took office on February 1, 2001. It was a national radio broadcast that aired every Saturday morning at 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. on all radio stations. Each episode has a run time of roughly one hour long.¹⁹⁷ These series of transcripts were obtained from the Legislative Institutional Repository of Thailand from an official who had requested anonymity. The periods of the rhetoric examined in these transcripts are between October 16 and 23, 2004, two weeks before the Tak Bai Incident and between October 30 and November 6, 2004, nine and two days before and five and twelve days after respectively. These transcripts span two volumes, namely volumes 7 and 8. Although some may argue that minority factions in his government do not share his expressed opinion in these documents, Prime Minister Thaksin's rhetoric present here is the closest to being representative

¹⁹⁶ Thananithichot, "Understanding Thai Nationalism and Ethnic Identity," 258.

¹⁹⁷ ลมกรด (Lomkrod), "พูดน้อยลงหน่อยดีไหม? (Would You Say a Little Less?)," *ไทยรัฐ (Thai Rath News Agency)*, 17 Apr., 2015, www.thairath.co.th/content/493452.

of how the Thai state at that juncture viewed the incident and the overall issues of the Muslim South.

On October 16, 2004, Prime Minister Thaksin addressed the issues of security in the three southern provinces in his weekly radio show,

“This week saw increased violence in the three southern provinces. The situation had worsened but I believe that in the future the new appointed team headed by general Aksirichai Tanyasiri, deputy commander of the Thai Royal Armed Forces supreme command department, will carry out initiatives to promote peace in the three southern provinces. I believe that the response should be more rapid now as unified and more coordinated efforts will be improved. I just learned recently that there had been a satisfactory increase in raids, inspections, confiscations of bombs and guns. This will calm things down and provide a good resolution forward. Please be patient because all the issues have been ongoing for a long time.”¹⁹⁸

Prime Minister Thaksin’s interview before the Tak Bai Incident shows that the Thai state’s ontological security seeking behavior had been present even before the incident. His rhetoric exhibits anxiety over insecurity, which sees a reinvigorated military solutions rather than a political one to counter the perceived escalation of Islamic separatists.¹⁹⁹ This routine stems directly from the Thai state’s view of Islam as a significant threat to its national identity since historical times. The former Thai state, Buddhist Siam, reconstructed the meaning to associate the local conquered Muslim populations with the terminology in the Thai language as “Khaek,” or “visitor,” which cemented the image reappropriations of the local population as an “outsider” and foreign to Siamese values.²⁰⁰ Since they were considered as “Khaek,” they would never be considered as part of “Thainess” and mainstream Thai society. This reconstruction process is a

¹⁹⁸ ทักษิณ ชินวัตร (Thaksin Shinawatra), *นายกฯ ทักษิณคุยกับประชาชน Vol. 7 (Prime Minister Thaksin: Discussion with Citizens Vol. 7)*. (Office of Spokesperson: Secretariat of Prime Minister Office, Bangkok, Thailand: Legislative Institutional Repository of Thailand, 2004), 434.

¹⁹⁹ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 354.

²⁰⁰ Gowing, “Moros and Khaek,” 32.

way for the Siamese to reflect on their own identity in relations to the “other,” as it was challenged by the foreign elements which allowed it to demarcate the boundary between Thai and values of the “otherness.”²⁰¹ This rhetoric eventually became connected to the view that Muslims were inferior and dangerous to the Buddhists as violence escalated further allowing for Thai state’s justification for military actions in the region.²⁰² This idea certainly supports the evidence of the existence of historical stereotypes and violence towards the ethnic Muslim minority by the Buddhist majority since they were viewed as different and not part of the Thai citizenship community.²⁰³ We see this reconstruction of identity and demarcation in Prime Minister Thaksin’s decision to turn to a military solution to manage the situation.

On October 23, 2004, two days before the Tak Bai Incident, Prime Minister Thaksin once again revisited the issues of the three southern provinces during his discussion of the government agriculture program. “Citizens understood that by buying vegetables from this program that it will help their fellow Southerners gain employment, career opportunities, and wages. If they have access to career opportunities, wages, and jobs, they will escape poverty and be willing to bring back their children who have gone astray to return and do the right thing. The situation will improve. It is charity towards our brothers and sisters of this nation even though we believe in different religions.”²⁰⁴ This second rhetoric differs from the earlier comments on military actions in the three southern provinces, as it focuses on economic development as a solution to the violence. However, the rhetoric presented here creates an image of inferiority of

²⁰¹ Keyes, “Muslim “Others” in Buddhist Thailand,” 24.

²⁰² Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 105.

²⁰³ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 359.

²⁰⁴ Shinawatra, *Prime Minister Thaksin: Discussion with Citizens Vol. 7*, 459.

the Muslim South in comparison to the Buddhist communities, which was seen as a way for the Thai state to establish ethnic and religious hierarchy.²⁰⁵

In this context we can see that the Thai state's rhetorical intention is to show that the Thai and Malayu Muslims are helpless and unable to survive without the help of Thai Buddhists. This shows the Thai state presents a savior complex imagery, in which the more civilized, has a moral obligations to intervene in order to "save" the less fortunate.²⁰⁶ Steele argues that this is also an evidence of ontological security anxiety in states. "The 'rescue' of an Other depends largely upon how such a rescue will resonate with the project of self-negotiation. These identifications say more about how a state sees *itself* rather than how it sees the 'other' in relation to itself."²⁰⁷ Steele's analysis of the "rescue" fits in nicely with the rhetoric exhibited by the Thai state here. By "rescuing" the Thai and Malayu Muslims, the Thai state assumes a role of superiority, which resonates with its identity construction.²⁰⁸ Doing so, the Thai state reinforces the stability of its own perceived ontological security.

Doty also refers to this in her example of the roles between the US and the Philippines. In her case, the US is positioned as the "patient parent" who saw the Philippines as a "child" that required constant guiding hands.²⁰⁹ By reducing the Philippines to a "child," the US was compelled to manage and intervene in the Philippines' counter terrorism efforts. This same logic is played out in Thailand, as the Thai and Malayu Muslims are positioned as the "weak" who requires the support of the Thai state, the "strong," to survive and develop. Prime Minister's

²⁰⁵ Gowing, "Moros and Khaek," 31.

²⁰⁶ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 35.

²⁰⁷ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 35.

²⁰⁸ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 35.

²⁰⁹ Doty, "Foreign Policy as Social Construction," 313.

Thaksin's shift in policy at the beginning of his tenure. The past practice of allowing people in the local areas to participate in local management was changed to pure governance by Thai Buddhist officials and military commanders sent from other parts of Thailand.²¹⁰ By viewing the region and its people as "weak," the Thai state felt that it is required to take actions to control the issues through radical means in order to ensure security. This also serves to consolidate power by enabling the central government in Bangkok to justify sending loyal Buddhist officials to govern, which results in the denial of Thai and Malayu Muslims' right to autonomous rule.²¹¹ This rhetoric eventually became a routine for the Thai state, as it perceived issues and conflict with the Thai and Malayu Muslims as a security issue rather than political.²¹² Allowing any other alternative solutions to this problem would have been viewed as a challenge and disruption of its current ontological security and self-imagined identity.²¹³ The ethnic, cultural and religious differences between the Muslim minority and Buddhist majority in Thailand exacerbated the state of ontological security anxiety that enabled the Thai state to view other ideologies as a threat to stability.

In further examination, we see that the aftermath of the Tak Bai Incident had revealed an increased stress on the ontological security of the Thai state. On October 30, 2004, five days after the incident, the statements made showed crucial evidence regarding the Thai state's and Thai media's ontological security crisis and self-identity anxiety over the incident. Prime Minister Thaksin initially defended the state's handling of the protestors in his discussion.

²¹⁰ Croissant, "Muslim Insurgency, Political Violence, and Democracy in Thailand," 9.

²¹¹ Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 113.

²¹² McCargo, *Mapping National Anxiety*, 150.

²¹³ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 362.

“What happened on the 25th of October was the enforcement of the rules of law in order to counter protestors who tried to pressure authorities for the release of the suspects. This demand had occurred on multiple occasions and the government had always consented. But if we continue to allow this, the laws of the land will not be effective in the future and this precedent will be imitated forever. We had used soft tactics to plead and negotiate many times including asking the suspects’ family members to intervene but to no results. Since this tactic is not effective, we were forced to disperse the crowd.”²¹⁴

The ontological security anxiety manifested in Prime Minister Thaksin's efforts to explain why the Thai state had used force to quell the violence. It was an attempt to assign blame on the Thai and Malayu Muslims in order to regain control over the sense of self identity constructions of “Thainess”. Although the Thai state’s ontological security had been rooted in a routine of conflict, as we have seen, its construction of “Thainess,” had been associated with peace and moral consciousness.²¹⁵ Thus, being publicly called to account for an appalling act disrupts this routine of the self since the Thai state’s self-identity was no longer consistent with its physical actions and security seeking behavior. This essentially forced the Thai state to self-reflect on its ontological security and sense of self-identity, which became an additional source of disruption for the state.²¹⁶ Although Prime Minister Thaksin expressed regret over the death of the detainees during the Tak Bai Incident, we can see that this remorse was overshadowed by his defense of the security forces actions. Once again we see Thai security forces’ actions being reconstructed through rhetoric as “forced” or coerced by the protestors, which portrays the security forces’ actions as necessary and justified.²¹⁷ Prime Minister Thaksin imbued positive qualities to the actions taken by the security forces by arguing that the purpose was to uphold the rule of law. In doing so the Thai state was able to reconstruct its own identity in relation to the Muslim

²¹⁴ Shinawatra, *Prime Minister Thaksin: Discussion with Citizens Vol. 7*, 463.

²¹⁵ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 17.

²¹⁶ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 363.

²¹⁷ Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction,” 313.

protestors, associating itself as the “good” who resisted the “bad.”²¹⁸ This allowed the Thai state to maintain and retain its “Thainess” against the “otherness” which had been deemed as a danger to its ontological security.

The next passage in Prime Minister Thaksin’s discussion further reveals that the Thai state’s ontological security was being disrupted by the events of the Tak Bai Incident.

“What made me sad the most was that there were attempts to distort the truth by people who do not like me, especially by the media. Thailand is unfortunate since we have two English media outlets that have reported the news in English for so long that they have forgotten Thai ideologies and identity....They caused significant damage in their biased reporting and acting in an unprofessional manner which is both irresponsible and dangerous. This is especially because this past Friday (October 29th), *Bangkok Post* newspaper was very irresponsible. They went and obtained statements from one person who had the intentions to disrupt the system. I thought you said you were for democracy. Democracy is by the people for the people. But instead this person talks only about changing the government, changing the Prime Minister.”²¹⁹

Prime Minister Thaksin’s anger towards the media, especially the two English language newspapers (the *Bangkok Post* and the *Nation*), shows an overwhelming presence of identity anxiety and ontological insecurity of the Thai state caused by the Tak Bai Incident since it challenged the Thai state’s legitimacy.²²⁰ His rhetoric frames these English language newspapers as “Farang,” or foreign, which is perceived as outside of the ideologies and values of “Thainess.” Chachavalponpun argues, “The *farang*, if not *farangness*, have continuously represented a real enough threat to the power interests of the Thai leaders.... Nowadays, the threat of *farang* comes in the form of international norms and practices because most of them originate in the West, or *farang*, world.”²²¹ The Thai state, in this case, assigned meaning to these Thai English

²¹⁸ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 362.

²¹⁹ Shinawatra, *Prime Minister Thaksin: Discussion with Citizens Vol. 7*, 464-465.

²²⁰ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 125.

²²¹ Chachavalponpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 19.

language news agencies as in line with “Farang” values, which were reconstructed in relation to “Thainess.” In doing so, the two news agencies were perceived to be an entity aligned with the West and thus unable to understand or relate to fundamental Thai culture and ideologies, qualities which actually enabled it to potentially discredit the Thai state.²²² As such, it had become constructed as a threat to the stability of Thailand and thus threatened the Thai state’s ontological security. Considered as a foreign entity, the reporting on the Tak Bai Incident by English language news agencies to the international sphere forced the Thai state to reflect upon its own sense of identity and ontological security in regard to its actions during the incident.²²³ This process of self-reflection, in turn, caused disruption to the self-identity and ontological security of the Thai state, further entrenching their beliefs in conflict as a means for security.

Further evidence of ontological security and self-identity anxiety of the Thai state after the Tak Bai Incident can be examined in Prime Minister Thaksin’s rhetoric during radio broadcast discussions over the issues concerning the victims of the attack.

“And today, the victims were both Thai Muslims and Thai Buddhist. Both groups were harmed which means that it is not a religious issue. It is about people who use religion as an excuse to hurt other people. If these people claim to be acting in the name of their religion, they will not hurt people of the same religious group. However, these people attack everyone which clearly proves that they are mere bandits, nothing more. This government is a government that understands the plight of our Muslim brethren. We had taken care of every need as well as maintaining consistent records for promoting acceptance of different religious practices.”²²⁴

We see that instead of previous threatening responses such as his comments in regard to the English language Thai news agencies, Prime Minister Thaksin switched rhetoric in order to

²²² McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 99.

²²³ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 158.

²²⁴ Shinawatra, *Prime Minister Thaksin: Discussion with Citizens Vol. 7*, 465.

downplay and defend the Thai state's handling of Thai and Malayu Muslims in the aftermath of the incident. Despite its reconciliatory rhetoric, it was in actuality a form of ontological security and self-identity anxiety since the Thai state was forced to confront its identity construct over its physical actions.²²⁵ Since the Thai state viewed its own identity and role as a sympathetic ruler to the Muslim communities, being associated with or accused of violent actions once again proved to have triggered a response that forced it to confront its own definition of "Thainess." As pressures and criticism mounted in the aftermath of the Tak Bai Incident from abroad and especially from other ASEAN members, the Thai state was forced to accept the reality that it had mishandled the situation.²²⁶ This was a significant challenge and disruption to its previously constructed identity, which was viewed and had become associated with a constructed sense of democratic values and justice.²²⁷ Being challenged by the fallout of the incident thus once again endangered the ontological security seen in the Prime Minister's rhetoric.

The attempt at reconciliatory rhetoric however was fleeting, and Prime Minister Thaksin reverted back to his rhetoric of violence in accusation of the Thai and Malayu Muslims insurgents' retaliatory attacks. "Because they want to disrupt progress. They want to create hardship so they can use people who have fallen on hard times, the uneducated, and the unemployed as a tool to hurt the innocent....This shows that these people do not want development to happen within the region. But this government will fight them by bringing prosperity, education, knowledge, work, and opportunities."²²⁸ The rhetoric in this passage is interesting since it reaffirmed the historical and modern perceptions of the Thai Buddhist

²²⁵ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 158.

²²⁶ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 67.

²²⁷ Croissant, "Muslim Insurgency, Political Violence, and Democracy in Thailand," 12.

²²⁸ Shinawatra, *Prime Minister Thaksin: Discussion with Citizens Vol. 7*, 466.

majority towards the Thai and Malayu Muslims in the three southern provinces as being uneducated and easily radicalized by radical Islamic teachings.²²⁹ This also framed the situation as the Thai and Malayu Muslims communities being responsible for the violence instead of the true perpetrator of conflict, which was the Thai state. This framing enabled the Thai state to retain its self-identity and ontological security since it was now able to construct its actions in the three southern provinces as one of “moral obligations” to intervene in order to prevent further violence rather than as one of aggression.²³⁰

Anxiety over the differences in educational structures is a recurring theme in Prime Minister’s Thaksin’s statements since the existence of the “pondoks,” or Islamic religious schools, which exists alongside state regulated public school systems in the three southern provinces, were seen as a direct challenge to Thai state’s values that rely on the teaching of Buddhism and allegiance to the monarchy.²³¹ Since the “pondok” teaches mainly Islamic-centric curriculum, it is seen as a nurturing ground for anti-“Thainess” and separatist sentiments. This view is widely shared by the Thai military, who constructed its identity as “guardian” or “protector” of the Buddhist religion and the monarchy.²³² In this examined statement, we once again see the process of reconstructions of identity through rhetoric by the Thai state as the “parent” and the Thai and Malayu Muslims as the “child.”²³³ This process justifies the way the Thai state ontological security is constructed in relations to the “other.” Ontological security anxiety of the Thai state is evident here, as it saw the three southern provinces as “different” and “uneducated” in comparison to the rest of the country, which created uncertainty over the

²²⁹ Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 115.

²³⁰ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 43.

²³¹ Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 109.

²³² Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 109.

²³³ Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction,” 313.

resolution of the escalating violence.²³⁴ The perceived and imagined differences in religion, cultural practices, and, to a certain extent, ethnicity compounded this pressure on the Thai state.

In closing his address on the issues of the three southern province that week, Prime Minister Thaksin called for the end to separatism and radicalizations of the region by alluding to the threat of the Islamization of education in the South.

“I am willing to let these people [Thai and Malayu Muslim youth who joined the separatist movement] return back to normal life because they have been encouraged and singled out for indoctrination and brainwashing. When their emotions run high, they are sent back to convince more friends to undergo the same brainwashing process while also taught to hurt other people. This is what happens since sometimes kids will become depressed from being pressured to swear allegiance to their religion by their community.”²³⁵

Prime Minister Thaksin’s rhetoric shows a stereotypical view that constructed the Thai and Malayu Muslim communities as ignorant and uncivilized while deprived from the “wrong” type of education that had enabled widespread radicalization of the youth.²³⁶ By being easily “brainwashed” and having propensity for violent acts, Thai and Malayu Muslims were constructed in the ontological security perception of the Thai state as a danger to the values of “Thainess” and Thai Buddhist society. McCargo supports this notion with his arguments, reasoning that these types of rhetoric allowed the Thai state to reinforce the idea of the imagined threats of the Islamization of the country. “The aim of the movement [Muslims separatists] was to occupy not just the three provinces, but the whole country.... The strategy of the separatists was to rule the whole country using their religious laws.”²³⁷ This belief of the “Islamization of

²³⁴ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 350.

²³⁵ Shinawatra, *Prime Minister Thaksin: Discussion with Citizens Vol. 7*, 467.

²³⁶ Gowing, “Moros and Khaek,” 33.

²³⁷ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 24.

Thailand” led by Thai and Malayu Muslims generated a state of ontological security anxiety for not only the Thai state but also the Buddhist majority public. By this framing, religion had become a contentious point where Thai Buddhist saw themselves as threatened and were forced to protect their values with violent actions.²³⁸

McCargo reasoned further that the political issue of separatism of the three southern provinces were also derived from other ontological security anxiety issues of the Thai state. “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 unraveling of the modern Thai state, as other ethnic minority groups in the North [Lanna] and Northeast [Isan/Lao] might demand parallel recognition and treatment.”²³⁹ McCargo’s argument here certainly supports the rhetoric exhibited by Prime Minister Thaksin’s radio interview, which we can reasoned is also representative of the view of the Thai state. By this reimagining and reconstructions of the relationship between itself and the Muslim South, the belief in their hierarchical relationship of the “parent” and “child” is further cemented.²⁴⁰ This process has allowed the Thai state to reinforce and assume its identity role as the “parent” who is justified in correcting the “child” through necessary violence in order to ensure protection from disruptions by outside elements, such as the “Farang” or the radicalized “Khaek.”²⁴¹ The ontological security anxiety of the Thai state here was directly in relations to how it perceived the “other.” By structuring its identity based on the “other,” the Thai state had become certain of its own self-identity since it knew for certain what values were associated with itself while attributing those that endangered such

²³⁸ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 24.

²³⁹ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 136.

²⁴⁰ Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction,” 313.

²⁴¹ Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 133-134.

values to the “otherness.”²⁴² Certainty, in this sense, helped stabilize the self-identity of the Thai state as it shattered the perception of the unknown and, along with it, the threat it posed to ontological security.

On the November 6, 2004, two weeks after the Tak Bai Incident, Prime Minister Thaksin addressed the nation on the ongoing problem of reconciliation between the Thai Buddhist state and Thai and Malayu Muslims in the three southern provinces.

“There had been news and rumors spreading around that the violence in the South is a religious conflict, this is false information. The truth is that the conflict is about the enforcement of the rules of law, which, sometimes there are mistakes made by us...but the most important thing to know is that the heartless insurgents had spread propaganda and enacted violent actions in order to show that this is in fact a religious conflict. And now they have assassinated many innocent Thai Buddhists almost every day. But not only Thai Buddhist but also some Thai Muslims as well...these people are not bandits from afar but ones that live amongst our villages.”²⁴³

The rhetoric in this passage is important as it shows that the Tak Bai Incident had not only escalated the tensions between the Thai Buddhist and Thai and Malayu Muslim communities but also pressured the Thai state to regain its ontological security. By referencing that these “bandits” who were “spreading propaganda” to promote “religious conflict” and had “assassinated many innocent Thai Buddhists,” the Thai state continued to reconstruct the relationship between itself and the Thai and Malayu Muslims communities.²⁴⁴ It is also important to examine that the reference to Thai Buddhist was associated with the term “innocent,” while Thai and Malayu Muslims were not linked to such adjectives. This rhetoric shows that the Thai

²⁴² Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 361.

²⁴³ ทักษิณ ชินวัตร (Thaksin Shinawatra), *นายกฯ ทักษิณคุยกับประชาชน Vol. 8 (Prime Minister Thaksin: Discussion with Citizens Vol. 8)*. (Office of Spokesperson: Secretariat of Prime Minister Office, Bangkok, Thailand: Legislative Institutional Repository of Thailand, 2004), 11.

²⁴⁴ Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction,” 314.

state perception of Thai Buddhist in comparison with Thai and Malayu Muslims as being unequal in values since it perceived one group's lives to be superior to the other.²⁴⁵ Another important point is that Thai state's response to the violence was associated with "enforcement of the rules of law," which constructed and associated the Thai state as being the "good" in the handling the conflict.²⁴⁶ Subsequently, Thai and Malayu Muslims were associated with the opposite connotations, which alluded to them as being the "bad." This idea is supported by his reference to insurgents as "bandits" living in local villages. By framing Thai and Malayu Muslims in that manner, Prime Minister Thaksin inferred that they were disloyal since they had decided to harbor and support the insurgents who opposed the Thai state's efforts to stabilize the region.²⁴⁷ By being in opposition to the Thai state's efforts, Thai and Malayu Muslims were by default seen as in opposition of the values of "Thainess" and Thai identity.

Prime Minister Thaksin continued to use language that addressed the issues of "Thainess" in relation to the Thai and Malayu Muslims communities. "We will help each other to solve this problem as long as lasting peace is able to return. But for those individuals who still want to cause problems and believe that violence will force us to negotiate the separation of the country, I can confirm that I will never concede, under no circumstances will I ever allowed the separatism movement to succeed in breaking our country."²⁴⁸ The anxiety over the insurgency and separatism in the three southern provinces had been central to the ongoing conflict. The lack of understanding of the grievances of the local Muslim population and will to hold discussions over this issue had negated any goodwill efforts to stabilize the region. We can reason that this

²⁴⁵ Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 133.

²⁴⁶ Doty, "Foreign Policy as Social Construction," 314.

²⁴⁷ Croissant, "Muslim Insurgency, Political Violence, and Democracy in Thailand," 9.

²⁴⁸ Shinawatra, *Prime Minister Thaksin: Discussion with Citizens Vol. 8*, 14.

lack of will is due to the disruption of the ontological security caused by the threat to its legitimacy.²⁴⁹ The Thai state had become anxious that if such sentiments were allowed to thrive, the three southern provinces could drift towards Malaysia, a regional competitor, since the region is more culturally and religiously similar.²⁵⁰ If this process were to occur, it would have undermined and hindered the legitimacy of the Thai state. Since it had prided itself on the idea of Chat, or nation, as one of the core pillars, a breakup of its territory would have had a devastating effect to its sense of identity and pride in the historical belief of its sovereignty.²⁵¹ This essentially disrupted the Thai state's ontological security as it struggled to make sense of its constructed self-identity. Since its ontological security had been tied to conflict, the Thai state employed force directed at the source of anxiety which was the question of sovereignty threatened by another competitor state.²⁵² The attachment to conflict in this sense returned back control over its ontological security and sense of self-identity as the Thai state regained control over the situation in the three southern provinces.

This anxiety over separatism and territorial integrity of the Thai state was also seen in the rhetoric of Prime Minister Thaksin's opponents. Abuza's discussion of Privy Council Prem Tinsulanonda rejecting the recognition of Bahasa Malayu, the local language of the three southern provinces, recognition as an official second language of the South is one that shows a deepening anxiety over Thai identity. "Prem made this clear: 'We cannot accept that (proposal) as we are Thai, the country is Thai, and the language is Thai, so we have to make efforts to learn Thai and command it as good as the rest of the kingdom.'"²⁵³ The sentiment on this issue by

²⁴⁹ Thananithichot, "Understanding Thai Nationalism and Ethnic Identity," 257.

²⁵⁰ Johnson, *The Buddha on Mecca's Verandah*, 66-67.

²⁵¹ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 39.

²⁵² Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 360.

²⁵³ Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 193.

Privy Council Prem, a well-respected figure in Thai society and politics, reveals the same ontological security and self-identity anxiety we see in Prime Minister Thaksin's rhetoric. The push for separatism by the Muslim insurgents, escalated by the Tak Bai Incident and other attacks, created disruption, uncertainty and self-reflections for the Thai state as it was forced to confront its own self-identity definitions and the possible loss of its distinctiveness.²⁵⁴ In the rhetoric of both Prime Minister Thaksin and Privy Council Prem, we can see evidence that "Thainess" and its values had come to be defined by its opposite relationship with the threat of "otherness."²⁵⁵ Through this process of forced reflections, the Thai state had undergone through self-identity reconstruction in order to regain control and address challenges to its ontological security posed by the "other." In doing so, the Thai state's attachment to conflict forced it to return to its security seeking behavior by using force to counter challenges to its ontological security and self-identity as seen in the case of the Tak Bai Incident.²⁵⁶ By insulating itself within the routine of conflict, the Thai state was able to regain a sense of ontological security and reconstructed its self-identity.

We can further see that the trauma on the ontological security of the Thai state created by the Tak Bai Incident since it forced the Thai state to confront its own constructed self-identity through a reflective process.²⁵⁷ In this last passage of the transcript, Prime Minister Thaksin's rhetoric continues to show that the Thai state's ontological security anxiety persisted long after

²⁵⁴ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 352.

²⁵⁵ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 159.

²⁵⁶ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 363.

²⁵⁷ Keyes, "Muslim "Others" in Buddhist Thailand," 30.

the Tak Bai Incident. This incident, in a sense, had effectively deepened and entrenched the beliefs of the Thai state over the perils posed by the “other” in relations to “Thainess.”

“We arrested an imam today; these guys are dangerous as well...brainwashing and equipping children who learn from them with HK guns that were stolen from Bang Lang dam in Narathiwat province....I think we will have to conduct mass operations to rid them of these weapons. I have to ask the media to not report falsely that Prime Minister Thaksin is using violent tactics again. This is not state violence. You must understand that all weapons of war are dangerous and carry a death sentence in accordance with the law. So no matter the cost, we must wipe them out for sure.”²⁵⁸

This rhetoric targeted not only Thai and Malayu Muslims as the source of conflict but also aspects of Islamic culture. We see that the Prime Minister Thaksin’s singling out of the case involving an imam and radicalization of Muslim youths reveals the anxiety over the imagined Islamization of the country.²⁵⁹ Ontological security was jeopardized in this sense since the Thai state was unable to cope with the increased radicalization of the youth populations which has led to instability since the Thai state had been unable to incorporate non-Buddhist elements into the ideas of “Thainess.”²⁶⁰ The role of religious schools and especially religious leaders had been beyond the Thai state’s control in the past, which provided an unknown element which had been perceived as a breeding ground for extremism due to its differences from the mainstream Thai education system.²⁶¹

Since the Thai state’s perception of security was one of force and conflict, its response to this new threat was to employ military solutions rather than political. These types of rhetoric thus became the manifestation of deepened ontological security and self-identity anxiety that further

²⁵⁸ Shinawatra, *Prime Minister Thaksin: Discussion with Citizens Vol. 8*, 15.

²⁵⁹ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 24.

²⁶⁰ Gowing, “Moros and Khaek,” 37.

²⁶¹ Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 127.

escalated a political environment that nurtured resentment, stereotyping and insensitivity from Thai Buddhist security forces towards Thai and Malayu Muslims communities.²⁶² This is what ontological security theorists see as states becoming attached and invested in its own socially recognized identity of itself. The Thai state in this sense had become a “competitive state” which is always motivated to compete with another entity even if it means jeopardizing its own safety.²⁶³ Since competition had become a routine, the Thai state felt that the more it competed with the “other,” the more it became secure. By using rhetoric of violence and reconstruction of self-identity, the Thai state was justified in its actions under the perception of law enforcement and moral interventions as a means to achieving peace and regaining its ontological security.²⁶⁴

As we have analyzed in this section, ontological security and self-identity anxiety of the Thai state manifested itself in the rhetoric of both the media and the Thai state, represented by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra’s radio interviews transcripts. Not only did the Tak Bai Incident cause ontological security and self-identity anxiety to the Thai state but the rhetoric from the media, especially international media agencies, seen as a source of destabilization of the Thai state’s identity. Rhetoric examined in this research is powerful since it gave meaning and established relations between the two forces, which translated into actions.²⁶⁵ We see patterns of progression of these rhetoric in the reporting and radio transcripts between periods before and after the Tak Bai Incident which the Thai state’s rhetoric gradually increased in its violence directed towards Thai and Malayu Muslims throughout the period. This could have been attributed partly to the pressure from the media and the international communities, who

²⁶² Croissant, “Muslim Insurgency, Political Violence, and Democracy in Thailand,” 11.

²⁶³ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 359.

²⁶⁴ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 64.

²⁶⁵ Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction,” 302.

demanded accountability from the Thai state for its anti-human rights and military actions. However, it is possible to conclude that this shift in rhetoric was also attributed to the self-reflective process of the Thai state over its self-identity anxiety.²⁶⁶

Once it was forced to confront its self-identity in relations to the Thai and Malayu Muslims, the Thai state was able to reconstruct “Thainess” in order to confront the threat to its perceived values. These values are directly connected to the historically constructed core pillars of *Chat*, *Sasana*, and *Phramahakasat* (Nation, Religion, and Monarchy), which, by framing it against the different values of the “others,” allowed the Thai state to be certain of its self-identity.²⁶⁷ By focusing on the differences, the Thai state was able to justify its course of action in repressing these ethnic minority groups, as it had perceived routine conflict and use of force as a means to become more ontologically secure. After the Tak Bai incident, the violence in the three southern provinces intensified further with continued arrests of suspected Thai and Malayu Muslims insurgents by the Thai security forces. This action by the Thai state instigated renewed retaliatory attacks from Muslim insurgent groups. This eventually led to Prime Minister Thaksin and his government being ousted by the military under General Sonthi Boonyaratglin on September 19, 2006.²⁶⁸ Initially, the coup ushered in new policies towards the South where the new military government favored compromise and negotiations over violence. However, this change did not last, as it did not result in the de-escalation of violence nor did it force insurgent groups to the negotiating table.²⁶⁹ This was because although more open to compromises, the Thai state still sees the three southern provinces as an issue to be deal with through force and

²⁶⁶ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 363.

²⁶⁷ Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 108.

²⁶⁸ Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 194.

²⁶⁹ Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 203.

through violent means. One noticeable example of this continued violence was the 2009 standoff between Thai security forces and insurgents in Yala province. This resulted in fifteen dead insurgents and two dead policemen.²⁷⁰ This event reinforces the Thai and Malayu Muslims perception that the Thai state has no intentions to de-escalate the violence in the region.

We also see that the new form of the Thai state still remained attached to ontological security routines, which favors the use of force as a means to secure self-identity.²⁷¹ In this sense, we see that the Thai state attachment to force allows it to construct its self-identity in relations to the “other,” since it knows how to react and act in the face of the challenge to its ontological security. By knowing, the Thai state is able to take military actions to subdue the source of challenge that generated self-identity anxiety. In this case, the new Thai government in 2006 fell back into the same self-identity routine and attachment to the use of force, which had previously been championed by Prime Minister Thaksin.²⁷² This use of force and harsh treatments subsequently reinforces the idea that the Thai state saw Thai and Malayu Muslims as outsider to the mainstream Thai society.²⁷³ These factors deepened animosity further and resulted in the continuation of conflict between the Thai state and Muslim insurgent forces in the three southern provinces. In the next section, we will analyze the Thai state and media rhetoric towards the Ratchaprasong bombing in 2015. This examination will allow us to see the similarities and differences of ontological security and rhetoric of violence when confronted with the issues of Thai and Malayu Muslims between the two cases.

²⁷⁰ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 158.

²⁷¹ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 359.

²⁷² Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 362.

²⁷³ Gowing, “Moros and Khaek,” 39.

Case Two: Ratchaprasong Bombing

At 6:55 p.m. Bangkok time on August 17, 2015, an improvised explosive device detonated at the busy tourist area called Ratchaprasong Intersection next to the Hindu-Buddhist Erawan Shrine in Bangkok. The explosion killed 20 people, 12 of whom died at the scene, and injured 163.²⁷⁴ Out of the 20 dead, 6 were Thais while 14 others were from China, Malaysia, Hongkong, Indonesia, and Singapore. 60 Thais were injured, and the remaining 103 were foreign tourists, the majority coming from China.²⁷⁵ The next day, another improvised explosive device detonated in the Chao Phraya river at Sathorn pier on August 18, 2015, at 1:20 p.m. Bangkok time. During the event, the Thai government had been under the control of former General Prayut Chan-ocha following a coup d'état in 2014. This transition established him as the de facto leader of Thailand and elevated him to the position of Prime Minister.²⁷⁶ Initially, no groups claimed responsibility for the attack, but the Thai security forces publicly alleged that the attacker had been linked to radical Islamic movements, a reference to the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) and the Patani United Liberation Organization (PULO), who were branded as Muslim separatist groups fighting against Thai security forces in the three southern provinces.²⁷⁷

Authorities speculated that the attack was carried out in hope of creating chaos to Thailand's major tourist industry while at the same time forcing the Thai government to negotiate on three southern provinces' autonomous governance agendas. As new details emerged, Thai authorities were forced to retract those claims and instead revealed that the attacks

²⁷⁴ "Bangkok Bomb: What Do We Know?," *BBC News*, Aug. 20, 2015, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-33969671.

²⁷⁵ Nash Jenkins, "Thailand: PM Prayuth Says Suspect Identified in Bangkok Explosion," *Time*, 18 Aug. 2015, time.com/4001160/bangkok-bombing-erawan-suspect-thailand/.

²⁷⁶ "Thailand Military Seized Power in Coup," *BBC News*, May 22, 2014, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-27517591.

²⁷⁷ Joseph Chinyong Liow, "The Bangkok Bombing Blame Game," *Foreign Policy*, Aug. 21, 2015, foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/21/the-bangkok-bombing-blame-game-thailand-junta-erawan/.

were carried out by the Uighur, a Chinese Muslim ethnic minority group. The motivation for the attack, as stated by the authorities, was a retaliatory measure against the Thai state's extraditions of Uighur refugees and asylum seekers back to China.²⁷⁸ Speculations were, however, rampant that the attack was instead politically motivated in nature and carried out by the supporters of the exiled former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his sister Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra in order to undermine the legitimacy of the military government.²⁷⁹

The rhetoric expressed in the aftermath of the bombing reveals evidence of the ontological insecurity of the Thai state. We can see that the attack not only questioned the legitimacy of the Thai state but also undermined the belief in the self-identity of the Thai state over its perception of its ability to ensure security and stability after the 2014 coup d'état.²⁸⁰ Joseph Chinyong Liow's article *The Bangkok Bombing Blame Game* published on August 21, 2015, argues that this issue had been a core concern for the Thai state's self-identity. The bombing subsequently represented a pivotal challenge for the Thai state as its popularity and legitimacy were beginning to wane after one year of coup d'état.

A threshold has been crossed with this single, unprecedented act of terrorist violence against innocent civilians, many of whom were foreigners....the very premise of the military junta's legitimacy has been its claim to have restored security and stability to a country rocked by several years of massive street protests and political violence. The Bangkok bombing poses a direct challenge to this claim."²⁸¹

²⁷⁸ "Bangkok Bomb: Deadly Blast Rocks Thailand Capital," *BBC News*, Aug. 17, 2015, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-33963280.

²⁷⁹ Liow, "The Bangkok Bombing Blame Game".

²⁸⁰ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 156.

²⁸¹ Liow, "The Bangkok Bombing Blame Game".

From 2006 to 2015, Thailand had faced two coups by the military, new constitutions and numerous violent street protests by both the pro and anti-government factions known as the red shirts and yellow shirts.²⁸² This unrest had severely damaged the reputation of Thailand's democracy as well as its economy. What the Thai state valued most in 2015 was its ability to gain legitimacy and ensure political stability after the coup d'état which became linked to its self-identity construction. The chaos created by the attack and alleged involvements of the Uighur and Thai and Malayu Muslims disrupted the Thai state's ontological security as it created an environment of anxiety which challenged this sense of self.²⁸³

In this section, I will analyze the rhetoric from the Thai state and media in discussing the Ratchaprasong bombing. These rhetoric will play a key role in understanding how the Thai state reacted to the disruptions of its ontological security. This section will focus mostly on Thai and English language media sources as well as some international journalism. Unlike the Tak Bai Incident, the availability of a speech transcript by Prime Minister Prayut was not available or accessible to the public. Instead, I will examine his rhetoric from the publicly available government statements issued on August 21 and 28, 2015, four and eleven days after the bombing. The examined data are from the Thai government's television program called "แถลงการณ์ "คืนความสุข ให้คนไทย" โดยพล.อ.ประยุทธ์ จันทร์โอชา นายกรัฐมนตรี" ("Return Happiness to Citizens" by Prime Minister Prayut Chan O Cha), which was aired weekly on every Saturday in 2015. An episode runtime is between twenty five to thirty minutes each. These two briefings were uploaded on the Thai government's official YouTube channel for public viewing.

²⁸² McCargo, *Mapping National Anxiety*, 157-158.

²⁸³ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 359.

During the data collection process for this research, I was not able to obtain documents on internal government discussions and meeting minutes in regard to the issues of Thai and Malayu Muslims before the Ratchaprasong bombing on August 17, 2015, since these documents were not made available to the public. There was also a lack of discussion in the media on the Thai state's policy towards the conflict region. Despite this, I was able to obtain some primary sources that show the Thai state's policy and rhetoric prior to the month of August 2015. This report is useful as it provides us with context on the Thai state's policy and views of the issues with the three southern provinces through rhetoric.

On January 7, 2015, *Khaosod English*, a Bangkok-based English language newspaper, wrote an article headlined "Prayut: Southern Peace Talks Depend on Willingness of Insurgents," which outlined the initial stance of the military government towards the insurgency in the three southern provinces.

"We are ready in all aspects to organize a long-lasting peace dialogue, but the problem is: are the people who use violence to fight us ready as well? Do they want to talk about peace?" Gen. Prayuth said to reporters at the Government House yesterday....How many [separatist] groups are out there? If there are many groups, do all of them want to have peace with us?" Gen. Prayuth asked."²⁸⁴

Prime Minister Prayut's expressed views differ from what we had seen from Prime Minister Thaksin during his premiership. Instead of the advocacy of force, Prime Minister Prayut focused on peaceful resolutions and negotiations with insurgents, which was consistent with the Thai military's stance following the military coup d'état of 2006 by General Sonthi

²⁸⁴ Khaosod English Reporter. "Prayuth: Southern Peace Talks Depend on Willingness of Insurgents." *Khaosod English*, Jan 7, 2015, www.khaosodenglish.com/politics/2015/01/07/1420613439/.

Boonyaratglin that ousted Prime Minister Thaksin.²⁸⁵ However, his statement shows us that despite rhetoric of peace, the violence in the three southern provinces had challenged the ontological security of the Thai state. We see this in the Thai state rhetoric that alluded to the “good” and “bad” constructions of the involved actors.²⁸⁶ In this case, the “good” was associated with the Thai state who are ready to negotiate for peace. On the other hand, the “bad” was associated with the insurgents who are Thai and Malayu Muslims.

The reference to the willingness of the Thai state in comparison to the assumed unwillingness of the Thai and Malayu Muslim insurgents to negotiate peace was a way that the Thai state not only reconstructed its identity but also reaffirmed stereotypes of the uncooperative “Khaek.”²⁸⁷ By this identity construction process, the Thai state viewed its self-identity as the “good” which enabled it to justify its actions towards the Thai and Malayu Muslims insurgents since the state was the only side who had taken steps for negotiating peace. This routine of conflict is discussed by Mitzen, “Ontological security can conflict with physical security. Even a harmful or self-defeating relationship can provide ontological security, which means states can become attached to conflict.”²⁸⁸ By publicly questioning the sincerity of the insurgents, the Thai state acted in an aggressive manner which could provoke retaliatory aggression against itself to the point of physical harm. The attachment to conflict can be noted in the rhetoric used, which is seen as detrimental to the Thai state’s security which Mitzen considers as self-defeating activities.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁵ Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 194.

²⁸⁶ Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction,” 314.

²⁸⁷ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxiety*, 115-116.

²⁸⁸ Mitzen, “Ontological Security In World Politics,” 342.

²⁸⁹ Mitzen, “Ontological Security In World Politics,” 342.

As the conflict between the Thai state and Thai and Malayu Muslim insurgency escalates in the three southern provinces, we see this attachment to the routines of conflict continued by the Thai state as it perceived the Thai and Malayu Muslim insurgents as a disruption to its ontological security and sense of self. The Thai state's perception of ontological security had become one of conflict and violence against the "other" since it view this condition as stability and security.²⁹⁰ This rhetoric shows the perspective of the Thai state towards the insurgency in the three southern provinces, which is representative of not only its policies towards the region but also its stereotypical views of the Muslim community. We see that anxiety and perceived challenge to ontological security can manifest itself from different types of rhetoric, even those that may not seem harmful at first glance.²⁹¹ We will now examine the rhetoric of the Thai state and media in the period after the Ratchaprasong bombing.

In the aftermath of the Ratchaprasong bombing, the Thai state and media issued several explanations and accusations in regard to the perpetrator. On August 19, 2015, two days after the bombing, a *แนวหน้า (Naew Na News)* report headlined “ล่า 'แขกขาว' ต้องสงสัยมือระเบิด! คลิปมัดวางเป้ก่อนboom” (Hunt for the 'White Khaek', the bombers suspects! Clip shows the suspect drop backpack before boom) shows rhetoric from the media in regard to the suspects. “We report that, before the incident, there was evidence that local terrorist groups were preparing to create chaos in Bangkok in retaliation to the Thai government's deportation of the Uighur back to China to stand trial....the suspect looks to have khaek bloodline and white skin.”²⁹² We see the first instance of the Thai media rhetoric using the terminology of the “Khaek” in discussion over violence and

²⁹⁰ Mitzen, “Ontological Security In World Politics,” 361.

²⁹¹ Mitzen, “Ontological Security In World Politics,” 361.

²⁹² ผู้สื่อข่าวแนวหน้า (Naew Na Reporter), “ล่า 'แขกขาว' ต้องสงสัยมือระเบิด! คลิปมัดวางเป้ก่อนboom” (Hunt for the 'White Khaek', the bombers suspect! Clip shows the suspect drop backpack before boom), *แนวหน้า (Naew Na News)*, Aug. 19, 2015, 6.

Thai and Malayu Muslims in the media. It is common for the Thai media to use overly strong language to grab the attention of readers as well as to express their views. McCargo explains this in his work, “Other problematic issues included the widespread use of strong language by the Thai print media, especially in headlines designed to dramatize and exaggerate issues; and the related deployment of offensive visual images, including gruesome pictures of crime and accident victims calculated to generate newspaper sales.”²⁹³ The type of language we see in the headlines support McCargo’s critique, as Thai media used intended rhetoric to generate not only sales but also “shock and awe” effects, especially when it came to issues involving the “other” such as the Thai and Malayu Muslim community. We see this used twice in the report, first in the headline as “White Khaek” and second in reference to the police description of the suspect as having “Khaek bloodline and white skin.” These types of rhetoric served to establish and create relations between the unknown attacker and the Thai and Malayu Muslim’s community.²⁹⁴

The focus on the “Khaek” was prominent in this case as the Thai media publicly and irresponsibly speculated about the nature of the suspects based on its imagined profile. Gowing also sees this issue as a way for the Thai Buddhist majority to reconstruct the identity of Thai and Malayu Muslim population as foreign and different from “Thainess.” “The Muslims of southern Thailand, being Malays, are also called “Khaek,” which they deeply resent for they are neither foreign visitors nor immigrants.”²⁹⁵ The media’s use of the word was intended to show that the attacker was someone not from the “peaceful” Thai society but from a foreign place which held different values. It is also important to see that the mentions of skin color in this case, i.e., white

²⁹³ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxiety*, 97.

²⁹⁴ Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction,” 306.

²⁹⁵ Gowing, “Moros and Khaek,” 32.

skin color, was noted. As mentioned in the term identification section, the “Khaek” is commonly associated with dark skin tone, which symbolizes the unknown and the inferior.²⁹⁶ At the same time, white skin tone had long been associated with the concept of the “Farang,” which evolved from a negative connotations to a more positive qualities associated with wealth and purity in the Thai context.²⁹⁷ This association of the “Khaek” to white skin tone could possibly have been ambiguous description of the suspect’s complexion. It could, however, be interpreted as a way for the Thai state to have constructed different types of “Khaek” identity which would reflect a hierarchy amongst the “other” in Thai perceptions. By having fairer skin, the suspect could have been considered as a more superior class of “Khaek” in comparison to the local Thai and Malayu Muslims due to his foreign origins.²⁹⁸ The “Khaek” in this sense was a source of challenge since its presences provided an unknown factor which disrupted the certainty in the ontological security of the Thai state.²⁹⁹ By not knowing, the Thai state was unable to control the situation, which generated further anxiety to its self-identity.

The report elaborated further by citing Prime Minister Prayut and the Thai state’s policy position in regard to the attack, especially on the media’s speculations of the suspect’s identity.

“The prime minister when asked about the numbers of suspects remarked that the early investigation revealed that there was only one person who planted the bomb at the busy intersection to create chaos for society and the economy...For the news that the suspect is a Muslim Uighur, the Prime Minister strongly questioned why the media had to speculate

²⁹⁶ Gowing, “Moros and Khaek,” 32.

²⁹⁷ Keyes, “Muslim “Others” in Buddhist Thailand,” 36.

²⁹⁸ Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 111.

²⁹⁹ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 359.

unfounded information since the government still does not know yet who is responsible for the attack.”³⁰⁰

Prime Minister Prayut as the representative of the Thai state, showed a different type of rhetoric from the Thai media when discussing the attack. Although his remarks had been diplomatic and in line with the military’s stance on the insurgency of the three southern provinces, we see that there was significant disruption to the Thai state’s ontological security routine by not only the attack but also from the challenges posed by the Thai media.³⁰¹ The Thai media posed a challenge to the Thai state’s ontological security since it disrupted its routine, which was based on restraint and the unwillingness to commit to certain positions in regard to the identity of the suspect. We see that the Thai state at this time was under the military control, which had maintained its commitment to the examples set by the military government since the 2006 coup d’état, which had exercised an attachment to routine that stressed conflict avoidance.³⁰²

As such, Mitzen sees this type of disruption as a challenge to the state’s attachment to routine. “Compounding the problem, the more aware the actor is of her need for the routines, the more anxiety she feels, and the more compulsively she clings on to routines.”³⁰³ The Thai state’s ontological security routine in this case was to maintain silence and not accuse anyone of the wrong doing until further evidence had been gathered. We see that the Thai state exhibits what Steele refers to as risk calculation. It saw that the calculated identity cost in sharing information would have affected both the trust in the state’s ability to protect the country and international

³⁰⁰ ผู้สื่อข่าวแนวหน้า (Naew Na Reporter), “ล่า 'แขกขาว' ต้องสงสัยมือระเบิด! คลิปมีดวางเป้าก่อนboom” (Hunt for the 'White Khaek', the bombers suspect! Clip shows the suspect drop backpack before boom), 7.

³⁰¹ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxiety*, 109.

³⁰² Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 196.

³⁰³ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 350.

relations with foreign nations whose citizens were impacted, which outweighed the reward.³⁰⁴ In speculating on the suspects, the Thai media challenged this sense of ontological security of the state as well as its self-identity constructions. The uncertainty which was generated by the attack and the media provided significant risk to the sense of self and endangered the Thai state's ontological security, which prompted it to retaliate against the media's conduct as a way to regain control over its self-identity.³⁰⁵

On the same date, the *Bangkok Post*, an English language newspaper, released an article headlined "City Police Probe Uighur Revenge Motive for Blast: Sathorn Bomb Fizzles as cop hunt for suspect," discussing the refusal by the Prime Minister and Thai state to verify the suspect's identity.

"This incident shows us that our country still has a person or a group of people with hostility to the nation operating actively," he said.... "Whether this incident was motivated by domestic politics or an international issue, I don't want to give you an opinion because it could mislead investigators and cause panic," he said.... "The bomb has already scared foreign tourists, with China, this country's biggest source of overseas arrivals, issuing a travel warning to its citizens."³⁰⁶

The report shows that Prime Minister Prayut and the Thai state had remained consistent in their restrained rhetoric as well as their unwillingness to speculate the identity of the suspect. We see that the Thai state's allusion to "a person or a group of people with hostility to the nation operating actively," could have been a reference to the Thai and Malayu Muslims insurgents in the three southern provinces since the Thai state had associated incidents involving explosives

³⁰⁴ Steele, *Ontological Security In International Relations*, 71.

³⁰⁵ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 350.

³⁰⁶ Post Reporters, "City Police Probe Uighur Revenge Motive for Blast," *The Bangkok Post*, Aug 19, 2015, www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/660640/city-police-probe-uighur-revenge-motive-for-blast.

attacks on civilians with insurgent activities.³⁰⁷ Although speculations over the identity of the responsible party were still rampant, the possibility of Thai and Malayu Muslims insurgents' involvement challenged the ontological security and self-identity of the Thai state since its inability to ensure security had been questioned.

These anxieties also became associated with the narrative of the international community perspectives of the Thai state's legitimacy, which is evident in the reference to the Chinese government's decision to issue travel warnings to its citizens.³⁰⁸ This is seen as a national embarrassment by the Thai state and created a sense of shame.³⁰⁹ Steele explains this in his work, "Individuals feel ashamed about both their actions and how those actions relate to their sense of Selves. Second, vicarious shame demonstrates that 'distanciation' is a natural, and necessary reaction to a self-identity threat."³¹⁰ Steele claims that when a state experiences shame in its failure to achieve goals that would serve the Selves, the ontological security of the state becomes jeopardized and can trigger the desire to distance itself from the source of shame. In this case, shame was caused by the Thai state's inability to protect foreign tourists and the local population from violence, which disrupted its sense of self-identity as a strong military government. Steele's work also explains the Thai state's unwillingness to commit was a way to distance itself from the source of shame that disrupted its ontological security.³¹¹

³⁰⁷ Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 141.

³⁰⁸ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 20.

³⁰⁹ Steele, *Ontological Security In International Relations*, 53.

³¹⁰ Steele, *Ontological Security In International Relations*, 54.

³¹¹ Steele, *Ontological Security In International Relations*, 54.

The เดลินิวส์ (*Daily News*), a Thai language news agency, reported on the same day with the headline of “โฉมหน้ามือปืนทมิฬภาพมัดที่เอ็นทีถล่มกรุงเลือดนองเข็มหนักประชิดท่าเรือสาทรอีก” (The face of the bomber, picture shown handling of TNT that exploded, attempted attack at Sathorn Pier after) also shows the Thai media’s speculations of the suspect which was a source of ontological insecurity and questioning of self-identity for the Thai state. It cited an anonymous state official’s comment, “There had been evidence of movements from the internationally funded southern insurgency groups, but we haven’t arrested a suspect yet.”³¹² This was the first example of the Thai media obtaining a concrete statement from a Thai state official in regard to the suspect of the bombing. Further along in the article, เดลินิวส์ (*Daily News*) cited Prime Minister Prayut, “This incident shows that the country still has traitors who can move around easily. The attack could be politically motivated in order to destroy the economy and the tourism industry or whatever the reason, this government will swiftly investigate.”³¹³ Despite the Thai state’s routine position in the aftermath of the bombing, both comments alluded to the involvement of perceived Thai and Malayu Muslims separatists as being responsible for the bombing at Ratchaprasong. By publicly entertaining this notion, the Thai state was attempting to construct its identity in relation to its competitor whom they are familiar with, in order to make sense of itself and the situation.³¹⁴

³¹² ผู้สื่อข่าวเดลินิวส์. (Daily News Reporter), “โฉมหน้ามือปืนทมิฬภาพมัดที่เอ็นทีถล่มกรุงเลือดนองเข็มหนักประชิดท่าเรือสาทรอีก” (The Face of Bomber, Picture Shown Handling of TNT That Exploded, attempted attack at Sathorn Pier after), เดลินิวส์ (*Daily News*), Aug. 19, 2015, 15.

³¹³ ผู้สื่อข่าวเดลินิวส์ (Daily News Reporter), “โฉมหน้ามือปืนทมิฬภาพมัดที่เอ็นทีถล่มกรุงเลือดนองเข็มหนักประชิดท่าเรือสาทรอีก” (The Face of Bomber, Picture Shown Handling of TNT That Exploded, attempted attack at Sathorn Pier after), 6.

³¹⁴ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 359.

Mitzen refers to this, “States have acquired a crucial, behavioral kind of certainty. They ‘know’ whom they face in the sense of knowing how the other will respond to their actions, which means they know how to act.”³¹⁵ Mitzen’s argument is important in the process of examining ontological security anxiety of the Thai state from the bombing since this behavior provided the state with a sense of consistency, which allowed it to deal with a competitor who it had familiarity with since it enables the state to how with certainty how to respond or act.³¹⁶ At the same time, the state was able to identify the source of the disruption to its ontological security routine and self-identity. The “known competitor” element enabled the state to plan and gauge the responses of those entities with the necessary means at its disposal. By “knowing,” the Thai state regain control over parts of its ontological security by dispelling the “unknown” while ending its state of uncertainty, which was a source for the disturbance thus helping it maintain a sense of consistency in its recognition of self-identity.³¹⁷ Certainty is important to a state, as it verifies and allows for a response to the threat it faces while locating the source of ontological security disruptions. Once it was able to respond, the Thai state was able to reconstruct its self-identity and ontological security.

The Ratchaprasong bombing not only commanded the attention of the Thai media but also international news as well. We see that rhetoric of the Thai state’s ontological security anxiety extended to the *Aljazeera* report on August 19, 2015, headlined “Thai Police Hunt for Foreigners over deadly Bangkok bombing,” by Scott Heidler, who provided a foreign media perspective on the attack and responses. “Thai authorities have said they are hunting a foreigner

³¹⁵ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 359.

³¹⁶ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 360.

³¹⁷ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 359.

and at least two other men suspected of carrying out the devastating bombing of a Bangkok shrine....the prime suspect had been overheard speaking a foreign language other than English....10,000 additional security forces have been deployed in Bangkok after the bombing, reassuring some tourists.”³¹⁸ The article by *Aljazeera*’s Heidler shows both the anxiety over the presence of the “other” as well as the Thai state’s response to the disruption of its ontological security. The anxiety over foreigners, or “Farang,” had been a part of how the Thai state defined its self-identity. Chachavalpongpun argues this, “While adopting their administrative techniques, the Siamese king wrote off the Westerners as un-Thai and alien to Thai identity. These Westerners, named locally as *farang*, were regarded as destabilizing factors against Thainess.”³¹⁹ As discussed in the earlier terms identification section, “Farang” has been seen as representative of the “other” that threaten the values and identity of “Thainess”. Although the word has evolved through the years, it still evokes ideas of a foreign threat.³²⁰

The Thai authorities' reference to foreigners or “farang” in this article shows that the Thai state’s ontological security routine and sense of self-identity had been challenged by it.³²¹ In order to secure itself, the Thai state turned to force as a way to resolve this disturbance, which came in the form of additional security forces deployed as a means for physical and ontological security assurances. This method of assurances shows that the Thai state viewed its self-identity as being tied to the use of force to resolve conflict, which became the means of affirmation of its legitimacy since there was a higher costs to not taking any actions.³²² In doing so, we see the

³¹⁸ Scott Heidler, “Thai Police Hunt Foreigner over Deadly Bangkok Bombing,” *Al Jazeera*, Aug. 19, 2015, www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/8/19/thai-police-hunt-foreigner-over-deadly-bangkok-bombing.

³¹⁹ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 41.

³²⁰ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 19.

³²¹ Mitzen, “Ontological Security In World Politics,” 360.

³²² Steele, *Ontological Security In International Relations*, 70.

Thai state's attachment to conflict as its ontological security and self-identity construction, which was detrimental to its physical security since ongoing conflict subsequently would result in further physical violence.³²³ In this case, we see how ontological security of the Thai state was severely impacted by the bombing. We also see the way its security seeking behavior was conducted in order to regain and reconstruct its self-identity in relation to the "other."

On August 20, 2015, three days after the attack, a มติชนสุดสัปดาห์ (*Matichon The Weekend*) article headlinedระเบิดที่แยกราชประสงค์เป็นการก่อการร้าย? (Is the explosion at Ratchaprasong Intersection an act of foreign terrorism?) speculated whether or not there were links between international terrorist groups and the local Thai and Malayu Muslim separatists. It quoted an anonymous government official. "There are only two groups who should be considered as 'medium to high threat level,' which are first international terrorism group 'Islamic State' or ISIS while the second being the Muslim insurgent groups in the three southern provinces."³²⁴ This anonymous official went on further to explain the threat posed by local Muslim insurgents in the three southern provinces to Thai society. "The group 'BRN' or 'BRN-Coordinate' in the three southern province that 'recently been operating outside its usual territory' such as the bombing of Lee Garden Hotel in Hat Yai Province in March 2013 and in Samui Province this past April which I believe is the work of BRN."³²⁵ The statements from the quoted anonymous government official reflected the frustration and anxiety of the Thai state over the ongoing insurgency in the three southern provinces and separatist movements. We see rhetoric that constructed identity

³²³ Mitzen, "Ontological Security In World Politics," 342.

³²⁴ ผู้สื่อข่าวมติชนสุดสัปดาห์ (Matichon The Weekend Reporter), "ระเบิดที่แยกราชประสงค์เป็นการก่อการร้าย?" (Is the Explosion at Ratchaprasong Intersection an Act of Foreign Terrorism?), *มติชนสุดสัปดาห์ (Matichon The Weekend)*, Aug. 27, 2015, 110.

³²⁵ ผู้สื่อข่าวมติชนสุดสัปดาห์ (Matichon The Weekend), "ระเบิดที่แยกราชประสงค์เป็นการก่อการร้าย?" (Is the Explosion at Ratchaprasong Intersection an Act of Foreign Terrorism?), 111.

relations between ISIS, an international terrorist group in the Middle East, with the domestic insurgency and separatist movements.³²⁶ The constructed identity hierarchy of these groups served to reimagine the local BRN insurgent groups as equally dangerous and threatening to Thai values and freedom as to what ISIS represented to the world.³²⁷

In addition, we can speculate that the Thai state's identity construction of the two organizations was due to their perceived shared Islamic cultural and religious practices. This provides the evidence for the Thai state's stereotyping of Thai and Malayu Muslims as they are constructed as a way to differentiate "Thainess" from the "other."³²⁸ By associating the movements together, the Thai state constructed a stereotypical image of the dangerous "other" that enabled it to justify further military actions in the three southern provinces. The Thai state in this sense had taken on the identity of what Mitzen refers to as a "security seeker" who had become attached to the routines of conflict.³²⁹ Only through conflict would the Thai state be able to reconstruct self-identity. Essentially, the Thai state's security seeking behavior was done in order to regain its ontological security despite the substantial threat to its physical security since it perceived that the loss of the ontological security as more damaging for its sense of self-identity and ability to survive.

Further evidence of self-identity anxiety and ontological security disruptions by the religious differences during the Ratchaprasong bombing can be seen in the *เดลินิวส์ (Daily News)* article on August 22, 2015, headlined "ผบ. ตร. พันธต่างชาติคลังศาสนาโยงแก้งบอมบ์ถล่มกรุง" (Police General

³²⁶ Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 161.

³²⁷ Doty, "Foreign Policy As Social Construct," 316.

³²⁸ Liow, *Religion and Nationalism In Southeast Asia*, 120.

³²⁹ Mitzen, "Ontological Security In World Politics," 361.

concluded that religion-crazed foreigners behind the bombing in city center). The article cited the Police General Somyot Poompanmoung’s official statements in regard to the group responsible for the Ratchaprasong bombing. “Police General Somyot revealed that the incident was not an act of terrorism or international terrorism since normally a prominent terrorist group would publicly claim responsibility by now, whether it be ISIS, Hezbollah, Mujahideen, or Al-Qaeda....The attack and violence were most likely committed by a local demented mind (คิดความคลุ้มคลั่ง) under the influence of religion. This is not terrorism. But for sure, the group that caused this are supported by foreigners.”³³⁰ Police General Somyot’s rhetoric shows ontological security anxiety of the Thai state in its interactions with the “otherness” of the person or group responsible for the bombing of Ratchaprasong intersection.³³¹ In this case, the Thai state’s refusal to assign blame to international terrorism but targeting “local demented mind under the influences of religion” instead can be interpreted as a way to place blame on the Thai and Malayu Muslims insurgents who were associated with the idea of “uncivilized religious fanatics.”³³²

Liow discusses this stereotypical perception of the Thai state in his work, “The tendency among Buddhist Thai officials and politicians to refer to the insurgency as the work of a ‘misguided youth’ who had been taught the ‘wrong Islam’, and extrapolating from this, that the conflict can be resolved once those youths are instructed in the ‘right Islam’, which further alienated Malay Muslims.”³³³ We can see that the Thai state’s perspective on “right” and

³³⁰ ผู้สื่อข่าวเดลินิวส์ (Daily News Reporter), “พ.บ. ดร. พันธตรงต่างชาติดลั้งศาสนาโงงแก้งบอมบ์ถล่มกรุง”(Police General Concluded That Religion Crazed Foreigners behind the Bombing in City Center)., *เดลินิวส์ (Daily News)*, Aug. 22, 2015, 8.

³³¹ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 357.

³³² Gowing, “Religion and Nationalism In Southeast Asia,” 33.

³³³ Liow, “Moros and Khaek,” 116.

“wrong” Islam is constructed by the Thai Buddhist majority who sees the “right” Islam as being within the norms of Thai society while adhering to the values of “Thainess.” The Thai state still clung onto this belief that the type of Islam being practiced in the three southern provinces was the source of violence and conflict, which, in doing so, constructed and assigned the meanings of radicalization to Thai and Malayu Muslim identity.³³⁴ This shows that the Thai state believed re-education of the three southern provinces would lead to the end of violence which also meant an end to the disruptions to its ontological security.

This process of identity reconstructions by the Thai state and its Buddhist populations generated what Doty terms as the “hierarchy” between Thai Buddhist and Thai and Malayu Muslims communities. The Thai state, in this sense, became the “good guy” who protects the nation from the “bad guy,” i.e., the radicalized Thai and Malayu Muslim insurgents.³³⁵ This “hierarchy” construction was based on the perceived relationship between the Thai state and the “other,” which is a mechanism that enabled the Thai state to use violence and conflict to justify its pursuit of security and stability.³³⁶ Additionally, the idea of the unknown threat in this case also challenged the ontological security of the Thai state since its routine had become disrupted by its inability to gauge the actions of the “other,” resulting in uncertainty. Mitzen discusses this by saying, “Both states begin as security seekers, but uncertainty causes each to act as if the other is hostile, which, in turn, prompts the other to respond accordingly.”³³⁷ Although Mitzen describes a state-to-state relations, we can apply this same logic to the case of the Ratchaprasong bombing, where the unknown facts about the party responsible for the attack generated

³³⁴ Liow, “Moros and Khaek,” 127.

³³⁵ Doty, “Foreign Policy As Social Construction,” 314.

³³⁶ Doty, “Foreign Policy As Social Construction,” 314.

³³⁷ Mitzen, “Ontological Security In World Politics,” 360.

uncertainty for the Thai state, which caused it to become a security seeking entity since it did not know how to behave in the face of chaos.

Under this state of uncertainty, the Thai state became irrational and reacted with force, which we see in its actions to deploy additional military personnel in Bangkok and popular tourist destinations in the aftermath as a means to obtain security.³³⁸ These actions show that the Thai state had become attached to conflict due to a state of ontological security anxiety. This ontological security anxiety also meant the Thai state used conflict as a means to secure and strengthen its sense of self.³³⁹ In doing so, the Thai state regained this important self-identity and became insulated from challenges against its ontological security, as engaging in conflict provided certainty, which enabled it to react towards its surroundings. We also see that in doing so, the Thai state's actions can be perceived as detrimental to its goals for legitimacy since additional security forces on the streets provided a visual reminder of the anxiety that came from the bombing. It also served as the symbol for the recent military coup d'état in 2014, which exposed the Thai state to criticism. Despite this, the Thai state took calculated actions regardless of the risk to its ontological self because it viewed that the value of security of the ontological self as more crucial than the physical self.³⁴⁰

The ontological anxiety of the Thai state during the aftermath of the Ratchaprasong bombing can also be inferred from the statement made by Prime Minister Prayut.

³³⁸ Post Reporter, "Security Clampdown, Tourist Areas on High Alert," *The Bangkok Post*, Aug. 18, 2015, www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/659952/security-clampdown-tourist-areas-on-high-alert.

³³⁹ Mitzen, "Ontological Security In World Politics," 347.

³⁴⁰ Steele, *Ontological Security In International Relations*, 71.

“I ask that all citizens trust us and maintain consciousness. Our [the government] campaign of ‘Our Home, Our Country, Stronger Together’ or ‘เราจะเติบโตและแข็งแกร่งไปด้วยกันเพราะที่นี่ คือ ประเทศของเรา [Thai slogan]’ must not be used as a source of conflict but of unity in order to survive this threat....Thais must help each other and show the power of the unity of the people.”³⁴¹

This appeal by Prime Minister Prayut to the public symbolized the Thai state’s attempt not only at reconstructing both its self-identity and legitimacy in the wake of the bombing but also in creating a new definition for “Thainess.”³⁴² We see that “Thainess,” in this sense came in the form of nationalism and public display of patriotism by using the government’s slogan. These values comprised of trust in the Thai state, unity in shared ethnicity, respect for the monarchy, and maintained consciousness, which is tied to the precepts of Buddhist belief in being present and alert, the core principles of how the Thai state perceived “Thainess.”³⁴³ In this context, a person is Thai when he or she embodies these qualities associated with the self-identity of the Thai state. We see that instead of rhetoric of violence or playing the “blame game,” the Thai state exhibited security seeking behavior to regain control of its disrupted ontological security routine by promoting rhetoric of nationalism that helped define its self-identity while reflecting on what or who is considered as Thai vis-a-vis the “other.”³⁴⁴ The demarcation of identity allowed the Thai state to reconstruct identity to suits its ontological security needs, enabling it to return back to the familiar routine of security defined by conflict.

Similar meanings were communicated in an article in the Thai-language newspaper ไทยรัฐ (*Thai Rath*) on August 31, 2015, two weeks after the Ratchaprasong bombing. Headlined “ขยายผล

³⁴¹ ผู้สื่อข่าวเดลินิวส์ (Daily News Reporter), “ผบ. ตร. พบฆตกรต่างชาติดังศาสนาโงงแก๊งบอมบ์ถล่มกรุง”(Police General Concluded That Religion-Crazed Foreigners behind the Bombing in City Center), 9.

³⁴² Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 17.

³⁴³ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 17.

³⁴⁴ Mitzen, “Ontological Security In World Politics,” 352.

จับอีก4ปาเลสไตน์สารระเบิดพิษซุกอพาร์ทเมนต์เขตหนองจอกทหารเค้นขำคืบหนุ่มตุรกีเช็ก ‘ดีเอ็นเอ’เทียบบีม2จุด (4 more
Palestinians arrested with bomb chemicals hiding in apartment in Nong Chok. Soldiers also
interrogate young Turkish nationals overnight, DNA checked to confirm involvement in 2
bombing areas), the article discussed the security seeking behavior of the Thai state as it
struggled to regain its sense of ontological security and routine. The comments from Police
General Somyot stated,

“Today everyone is working hard against the clock in order to arrest the person responsible. We are not only doing this because of pressure from outside the country to create trust in Thai people and foreign tourists. I ask that the all media refrain from publishing news without checking the facts since it will have an impact on individuals, agencies, and our country. This will make the case harder and will damage our ongoing investigation....It is time that Thai people start to care about their country and work with the authorities in order to restore the situation back to normal.”³⁴⁵

The statement made by Police General Somyot at this juncture shows a general frustration with the way the media had portrayed the situation and the criticism of the Thai state’s efforts to apprehend the suspect. As mentioned before, Thai media in general had been known to release sensitive information with inflammatory rhetoric, depending on the political of the specific media agency whether anti-or pro-government.³⁴⁶ Up until now, we have seen the Thai state maintain a policy of restraint in its rhetoric while the Thai media instead generated more explosive reporting that inflamed the situation. This reveals the internal conflict between the Thai state and media over the bombing, which severely disrupted the Thai state’s sense of

³⁴⁵ ผู้สื่อข่าวไทยรัฐ (Thairath Reporter), “ชายผลจับอีก4ปาเลสไตน์สารระเบิดพิษซุกอพาร์ทเมนต์เขตหนองจอกทหารเค้นขำคืบหนุ่มตุรกีเช็ก ‘ดีเอ็นเอ’เทียบบีม2จุด” (4 More Palestinian Arrested with Bomb Chemicals Hiding in Apartment in Nong Chok. Soldiers Also Interrogate Young Turkish Nationals Overnight, DNA Check to Confirm Involvement in 2 Bombing Areas), *ไทยรัฐ (Thai Rath News Agency)*, Aug. 31, 2015, 13.

³⁴⁶ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 102.

self that it derived from its belief in its own legitimacy and ability to carry out justice.³⁴⁷ In this sense, the Thai state was forced to self-reflect on its identity constructed in relation to the actions it had taken.³⁴⁸ In response to this disruption, the Thai state retaliated by reprimanding both the Thai media and, to some extent, the Thai public through strong rhetoric that highlighted the lack of unity and camaraderie in dealing with the aftermath of the Ratchaprasong bombing.

We see that this process is a way for states to use identity reconstructions and reaffirmation to force what Steele calls a “conforming of elites and the masses in order to quiet discourses that challenges identity.”³⁴⁹ It is an effective means as it plays on the emotional response of the actors towards the idea of shame. This manifests in a form of “Private sense of transgression and produces a deeper feeling of insecurity because it means that someone behaved in a way he or she felt was incongruent with their self of identity.”³⁵⁰ By inducing shame, the Thai state sought to end dissent and regain its ontological security from its subjects. Steele elaborates that, “Shame occurs when actors feel anxiety about the ability of their narrative to reflect how they see themselves; or, put another way, when there exists too much distance between this biographical narrative and self-identity. We recognize shame as a discursive expression of remorse or regret, and it is not something ‘real’ so much as a shared ‘experience.’”³⁵¹ In this context, Police General Somyot’s statement is representative of the Thai state’s attempt to induce shame on the Thai media and public for their perceived negative actions as part of the state’s security seeking behavior. The Thai state was able to take back control of its

³⁴⁷ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 158.

³⁴⁸ Mitzen, “Ontological Security In World Politics,” 363.

³⁴⁹ Steele, *Ontological Security In International Relations*, 151.

³⁵⁰ Steele, *Ontological Security In International Relations*, 53.

³⁵¹ Steele, *Ontological Security In International Relations*, 55.

perceived security while also generating a sense of shared experience, effectively ending the disruption to its ontological security and self-identity.³⁵²

In this final set of data, we examine the rhetoric from Prime Minister Prayut over the Ratchaprasong bombing in his weekly television broadcast called “แถลงการณ์ ‘คืนความสุข ให้คนในชาติ’ โดยพล.อ.ประยุทธ์ จันทร์โอชา นายกรัฐมนตรี” (Royal Thai Government Briefing on "Return Happiness to Citizens" by Prime Minister Prayut Chan O Cha), which aired on August 21 and 28, 2015, four and eleven days after the bombing. The rhetoric from the tv show was drawn from the official Royal Thai Government’s YouTube channel, which is accessible to the public. The briefing also included English language subtitles which was meant to inform not only local Thais but also international community audiences.

The broadcast briefing on August 21, 2015, Prime Minister Prayut addressed the government’s response to the bombing, showing evidence of rhetoric of nationalism and the reconstruction of “Thainess.”

“We all need to be more vigilant and careful as well as to inform authorities if there is anything that seems irregular. In many ways this is an appeal for Thailand to be a more attentive society. We need to pay more attention to what’s going on around us, not what’s going on with our phones....I would like to thank all members of the press as well as social media agents for their efforts in promoting unity and for their resolve in not letting anyone damage our country. Come together by showing our strength and unity as we continue promoting the “Our Home, Our Country, Stronger Together” campaign as a symbol of unity, generosity, and moral support we have for one another.”³⁵³

³⁵² Mitzen, “Ontological Security In World Politics,” 363.

³⁵³ รัฐบาลไทย (The Royal Thai Government), “แถลงการณ์ ‘คืนความสุข ให้คนในชาติ’ โดยพล.อ.ประยุทธ์ จันทร์โอชา นายกรัฐมนตรี 21 สิงหาคม 2558” (Returning Happiness to People in the Nation’ Statement by Gen. Prayut Chan-o-cha Prime Minister, 21 August), YouTube Video, “National Broadcasting Services of Thailand,” Aug. 21, 2015, 6:36 and 9:25, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IC5wtKjQi-4>.

The rhetoric of Prime Minister Prayut's television broadcast shows a state of ontological insecurity and self-identity similar to the rhetoric found in the examined media reports on August 21, 2015. This rhetoric shows a security seeking behavior of the Thai state to regain its ontological security by inducing both the sense of "shame" as well as appeal to the need for "honor," which are seen as collective moral actions.³⁵⁴ The "shame" in this instance is rhetoric referring to individuals who were stuck on their phones rather than being "vigilant" or "careful". In this context, the Thai state was again inducing "shame" to the Thai public for not being "vigilant" and active in taking actions to ensure the security of Thai society.³⁵⁵ In doing so, the individuals who were outside of the self-identity of the Thai state were coerced back into the fold.

At the same time, the collective moral actions comes from the appeal for the public and media to work together to promote "Our Home, Our Country, Stronger Together" campaign, which could have been seen as a form of nationalism. Steele defines this as a part of honor. "Honor might serve the self-interest of an agent, in that by acting 'honorably' that agent gains a certain reputation or credibility which it can then use, as a currency, to ensure survival-based interest."³⁵⁶ In this case, by promoting the government sponsored campaign, the Thai state, media and the public acts in an "honorable" way, which affirms the self-identity of the state. Since perception is important, the Thai state's restoration of "honor" allowed it to regain its sense of self-identity, which was tied to the way other states perceive it.³⁵⁷ This is especially important to the Thai state's agenda since it viewed its ontological security and sense of self-

³⁵⁴ Steele, *Ontological Security In International Relations*, 45.

³⁵⁵ Steele, *Ontological Security In International Relations*, 53.

³⁵⁶ Steele, *Ontological Security In International Relations*, 39.

³⁵⁷ Steele, *Ontological Security In International Relations*, 148.

identity as being able to provide security and safety for the international tourism community, which was the economic lifeline for Thailand.

Prime Minister Prayut's rhetoric also served to construct what Doty calls the "good" and "bad" relationship that became associated with how the Thai state perceived the public behavior during the aftermath of the bombing.³⁵⁸ The "good" were associated with words such as "unity," "generosity," and "moral support," while the "bad" were opposite, negative terms used to label Thais who did not exhibit such "good" qualities.³⁵⁹ In this sense, the Thai state reconstructed "Thainess" by attaching this rhetoric which produces meanings in relation to it. An individual who was Thai would embody these positive qualities while the "other" would not be associated with such principles. In its use of rhetoric to reconstruct self-identity, the Thai state created a sense of ontological security for itself since it then "knew" what and who were a part of its self-identity construction.³⁶⁰ By knowing, the Thai state secured itself by acquiring a sense of certainty since it then knew how its own people and the "other," associated with anti-"Thainess" values, would respond to its actions.³⁶¹ Although chaos and anxiety derived from the bombing could not be prevented, the Thai state could at least be certain to an extent that it was able to regain control over the situation while taking actions that would prevent further disruption to the self.

³⁵⁸ Doty, "Foreign Policy As Social Construction," 312.

³⁵⁹ Doty, "Foreign Policy As Social Construction," 312.

³⁶⁰ Mitzen, "Ontological Security In World Politics," 359.

³⁶¹ Mitzen, "Ontological Security In World Politics," 359.

We see this type of self-identity construction and ontological security seeking behavior of the Thai state in Prime Minister Prayut's statements on August 28, 2015. He reiterated the importance of unity and selflessness of Thais in the aftermath of the Ratchaprasong bombing.

“It is the responsibility of every one of us to help guide Thailand through this crisis. Everybody has the capacity to help out by being a good host to tourists, by advocating for the good qualities about our country or by rebuilding the confidence of our international friends. Everybody has the capacity to help out. The private sector-companies, shopping malls, hotels, and stores can help out by installing or improving devices such as CCTV cameras. I would like to thank all concerned officials, policemen, and soldiers for the progress being made in their efforts to track down the culprit. Please give the officials some time to work.”³⁶²

The appeal for unity and collective actions from the public shows that the ontological security of the Thai state under the military was based on the self-identity linked to its legitimacy and trust from the public towards the institution, since it considered itself as one of the key pillars of Thai society.³⁶³ This call for unity served as a way to appeal to the “honor” and “shame” concepts that Steele previously discussed, which serve to motivate states to take certain actions that would help it regain its sense of ontological security and self-identity because physical survival is perceived as less important than the continuation of its ontological self.³⁶⁴ In this case, Prime Minister Prayut's rhetoric was directed at preventing any negative perception by the international community over the Thai state's handling of security measures in the aftermath of the bombing especially since Thailand's international reputation and identity was tied to the idea of a “welcoming” and “safe” destination for foreigners.

³⁶² รัฐบาลไทย (The Royal Thai Government), “แถลงการณ์ ‘คืนความสุข ให้คนไทยในชาติ’ โดยพล.อ.ประยุทธ์ จันทร์โอชา นายกรัฐมนตรี 28 สิงหาคม 2558” (“Returning Happiness to People in the Nation” Statement by Gen. Prayut Chan-o-cha Prime Minister, Aug. 28, 2015), YouTube Video, “National Broadcasting Services of Thailand,” Aug. 28, 2015, 14:45, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RV43edHjV40>.

³⁶³ Thananithichot, “Understanding Thai Nationalism and Ethnic Identity,” 258.

³⁶⁴ Steele, *Ontological Security In International Relations*, 149.

Because the tourism industry provided the Thai state with economic security, which is linked to physical security, it had to find a way to protect the legitimacy and reputation of Thailand as welcoming and safe in order to ensure that the industry was not affected by this disruption.³⁶⁵ By not being perceived as a “good host,” the Thai state saw its routine disrupted since it could not fulfill the self-identity construction in relation to the “other.”³⁶⁶ In this case, the Thai private sector becomes the “other” in opposition to the Thai state since their perceived lack of actions was seen as a disruption to the Thai state’s self-identity. The Thai state, in this context, became a security seeking state since its ontological needs were not met by members within its society, which triggered a forceful response by means of public pressure to elicit compliance and cooperation.³⁶⁷ As its ontological routine had become conflict and the use of force, the Thai state was unable to detach itself from these tactics since doing so would also mean a disruption to its existing ontological security, even when applying these tactics to members of its society.³⁶⁸

In conclusion, we see that the rhetoric of the Thai state and media significantly differed from one another during the Ratchaprasong bombing. While the Thai state focused on the message of unity and accommodation towards foreigners, the Thai media’s rhetoric centered on distrust and accusations of the “other,” represented by the assumed involvements of Uighur, Thai and Malayu Muslims. The source of ontological security disruptions for the Thai state came in many different forms, as can be noted here. Not only did the bombing generate self-identity anxiety but also the pressure from the Thai media and the public, forcing the Thai states to become a security seeking state.³⁶⁹ Once it had taken on this security seeking behavior to regain

³⁶⁵ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 160.

³⁶⁶ Mitzen, “Ontological Security In World Politics,” 357.

³⁶⁷ Mitzen, “Ontological Security In World Politics,” 361.

³⁶⁸ Mitzen, “Ontological Security In World Politics,” 362.

³⁶⁹ Steele, *Ontological Security In International Relations*, 155.

its ontological security routine, the Thai state's willingness to use force and conflict as a solution became evident. Through its attachments to conflict, the Thai state constructed new meaning in its self-identity and dispels the unknown that disrupted its sense of certainty.³⁷⁰ By knowing who the "other" or where the source of disruption was, the Thai state was able to regain its ontological security, which was derived directly from the idea of legitimacy and trust from the public and international communities.

We can see the impact of the Ratchaprasong bombing on the Thai state's ontological security in the escalations of violence in the South. Despite the Thai state's insistence on negotiations and peace talks as seen in 2015, the following year had shown that the conflict between the security forces and insurgent groups had instead intensified since the bombing in Bangkok.³⁷¹ A series of bombings and shootings against local businesses, villagers, government offices, and security forces' complex from March 13 to August 25, 2016 by the Muslim insurgents and the subsequent arrest and retaliations by Thai security forces was seen by Human Rights Watch, a non-government agency, as an act of "war crime" committed by both the Thai state and the Muslim separatists. "Human Rights Watch also remains deeply concerned by violations of international human rights law and the laws of war by Thai government security forces and militias. Killings, enforced disappearances, and torture cannot be justified as reprisals for insurgent attacks on the Thai Buddhist population and security personnel."³⁷² The Human Rights Watch report in 2016 shows that the Thai state had reverted back into the ontological security routines embedded in the attachment to force. By using force, the Thai state under Prime

³⁷⁰ Mitzen, "Ontological Security In World Politics," 361.

³⁷¹ "Thailand: Insurgents Targets Civilian in South: Systematic Bombings possible Crimes Against Humanity," Human Rights Watch, August 25, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/08/25/thailand-insurgents-target-civilians-south>.

³⁷² "Thailand: Insurgents Targets Civilian in South: Systematic Bombings possible Crimes Against Humanity"

Minister Prayut exhibited the same outlook towards the Thai and Malayu Muslims similar to the policies of Prime Minister Thaksin's government in 2004. We see that the Thai state after the Ratchaprasong bombing continues to construct its self-identity and routines based on conflict with the "other."³⁷³ These routines allows the Thai state to feel secure and protected from ontological challenges of the presence of the "other," which jeopardizes the way it sees self-identity. As Mitzen stated, "This is because even where competitive routines gets disrupted, the habit of conflict is easily restored. Leaving old routines behind generates ontological insecurity."³⁷⁴In the case of the Thai state, we certainly see this evidence of re-attachments to old routines by their actions after the Ratchaprasong bombing.

³⁷³ Mitzen, "Ontological Security In World Politics," 361.

³⁷⁴ Mitzen, "Ontological Security In World Politics," 362.

Conclusion

The goal of this research was to examine how the Tak Bai Incident in 2004 and the Ratchaprasong bombing in 2015 had impacted the ontological security and self-identity constructions of the Thai state and media. I argue that these examined rhetoric changes had shaped the situations that enabled the Thai state to use force against the “other,” in this case the Thai and Malayu Muslim communities in the three southern provinces. This analysis was based on the examinations of the existing rhetoric in the periods before and after each of the cases. I particularly focused on how these rhetoric were framed and constructed into meanings associated with “Thainess,” or the self-identity of Thailand in relation to the “other.”³⁷⁵ This research specifically focuses on the discourse over the presence of Thai and Malayu Muslims during these events, which relates to the ongoing conflict in the three southern provinces of Thailand. I attempted to discern and understand not only how the Thai state constructed its self-identity but also the way it exhibited security seeking behavior when confronted by disruptions to its ontological security and self-identity. In doing so, I drew from both the Ontological Security Theory and the Discursive Practices Approach to analyze the collected data and evidence. In particular, I focused my research theory on both Jennifer Mitzen and Brent Steele, with heavy focus on Mitzen’s work while relying on Roxanne Lynn Doty for my methodological approach.

Ontological security is a critical tool in political science since it provides another dimension to explain why a state behaves the way it does in the face of security challenges. In particular, it shows how a particular state views security of the self in relation to its physical security.³⁷⁶ The theory is also important since it enables us to understand the anxiety which states go through when confronted by the existence of the unknown or the “other.” As Jennifer Mitzen

³⁷⁵ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 12.

³⁷⁶ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 37.

explains, “Ontological security is security not of the body but of the self, the subjective sense of who one is, which enables and motivates action and choice.”³⁷⁷ Ontological security allows us to explore the questions of a state’s identity anxiety, which challenges its perception of the self. It explains the choices made by states in response to the self-identity disruptions that create uncertainty and a break of its ontological security routine, which leads to states being forced to take certain dangerous actions to end the challenges to the self.³⁷⁸ States will at times also make choices that are detrimental to the physical security of the state. However, we see that the loss of ontological security is more detrimental to its survival than the loss of physical security.³⁷⁹ Since certainty and routines are central to the state’s sense of ontological security, its attachments to routines at times will involve the perception of conflict and violence as a means to security. In this sense, routines serve as a tool for the state to retain a sense of certainty while also allowing it to suppress the source of disruptions and dispel the unknown.³⁸⁰ By being certain, the state can construct its self-identity which then leads to the stabilization of its ontological security. Certainty of the self’s ontological security subsequently allows the state to know how to respond to situations that are a danger to its physical self.

Ontological Security Theory also sees states as actors who construct self-identity in relations to the “other” through a set of routines.³⁸¹ These routines are critical for states as they provides what Mitzen calls a “cocoon,” which insulates it from disruptions and uncertainty. In the two Thai cases that we examine, both instances shows that the source of the Thai state’s ontological security disruption came from its anxiety over the Islamic insurgency in the three

³⁷⁷ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 344.

³⁷⁸ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 350.

³⁷⁹ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 354.

³⁸⁰ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 354.

³⁸¹ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 357.

southern provinces.³⁸² The involvement of Thai and Malayu Muslims disrupted the ontological security of the Thai state because the introduction of the “other” challenged the self-identity construction of “Thainess,” as they did not conform to its identity narrative and values. Because the Thai state perceived conflict as a means to secure itself, engaging in a violent relationships with the unknown or the “other” allowed the unknown to become known and restored the Thai state’s sense of control over its self-identity.³⁸³ The sense of not knowing disrupted not only the self since the state did not know how to act in the face of disruptions but also generated anxiety over its ability to maintain control and security, which led to a disruption to its legitimacy.³⁸⁴ Essentially, the Thai state feared the loss of its ontological security since the ending of the self is much more dangerous than the danger posed to its physical security, as the loss of its ontological security would destroy the core values and identity narrative of the nation.³⁸⁵ All states, in this sense, undergo a crisis assessment process in which they are forced to make decisions based on whether or not to take actions against the source of the disruptions. This involves the calculation of risk versus reward, which most states, similar to the Thai state, would take actions to end the source of disruption since it endangers its legitimacy and control.³⁸⁶ Ontological Security Theory thus shows us that states value their sense of self over physical security because the cost of losing ontological security is much more damaging to self-identity.

Roxanne Lynn Doty’s Discursive Practices Approach as a methodological tool enabled me to analyze rhetoric in the Tak Bai Incident and the Ratchaprasong case since it examines how rhetoric could be framed and constructed to create meaning in a security environment. As Doty

³⁸² Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 357.

³⁸³ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 354.

³⁸⁴ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 64.

³⁸⁵ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 71.

³⁸⁶ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 71.

states, “A Discursive Practices Approach emphasizes the *linguistic construction of reality*. The productive nature of language does not depend on nor necessarily coincide with the motivations, perceptions, intentions, or understandings of social actors. Language is seen as a set of signs which are part of a system for generating subjects, objects, and worlds.”³⁸⁷ Language and rhetoric are important to the study of identity since it allows us to understand the power dynamics between different rational political actors. It also allows us to perceive how the manifestations of the rhetoric of the “foreign” or “others” are being constructed at various different levels in relations to the subjects.³⁸⁸ By seeing how rhetoric shapes and conveys the way states position themselves against one another, we are able to analyze how these relationships are constructed to convey a certain roles and positions amongst the actors.

In using Doty’s Discursive Practice Approach, we are able to examine how states frame identity in relations to other actors through the creation of meanings which manifest within rhetoric expressed by states and policy makers. She states, “What I do claim to have shown is how discursive practices themselves constructed both the subjects (with varying degrees of agency) and the relations among them....Their significance and power is to be found in their ability to frame interpretive possibilities, create meanings, and thereby naturalize a particular state of affairs.”³⁸⁹ We see that this approach allows for rhetoric to construct reality, which shows the importance of a linguistic approach in the study of international relations. The construction of roles and power is important in understanding how these realities play a part in the world since it allows for actors to justify their actions in relations to the other.³⁹⁰ We can examine the way states justify such security actions by this approach since it allows us to

³⁸⁷ Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction,” 302.

³⁸⁸ Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction,” 316.

³⁸⁹ Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction,” 314.

³⁹⁰ Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction,” 314.

examine how rhetoric generates reality. “An approach that focuses on discursive practices as a unit of analysis can get at *how* this ‘reality’ is produced and maintained and *how* it makes various practices possible.”³⁹¹ The Discursive Practices Approach enabled me to examine and analyze the rhetoric expressed by the Thai state and media during the Tak Bai Incident and the Ratchaprasong bombing case by providing explanations of how roles and identity are constructed to justify certain actions by the state against the “other.”³⁹² By being able to examine such data through this unit of analysis, I was able to show how ontological security anxiety of the Thai state manifested in its linguistic expressions towards the source of disruption, derived from the presence of the Thai and Malayu Muslims.

As stated, I combined both the Ontological Security Theory and the Discursive Practices Approach to help explain and analyze the Tak Bai Incident and the Ratchaprasong bombing cases, both of which show disruptions to the Thai state’s ontological security and self-identity construction. This anxiety seen in the rhetoric of the Thai state and media provided a thorough analysis of how the Thai state security seeking behavior and attachments to the routines of conflict manifested in dealing with the issues of ethnic minorities in Thailand.³⁹³ This paper presents two specific cases involving security issues which deals with Thai identity and that were pivotal in Thailand’s history rather than aiming to provide a general overview and outcome of the Thai state’s ontological security behavior. By focusing on these selected cases, this approach allowed us to see how the Thai state uses these ethno, cultural, and religious nationalist rhetoric such as the narratives of “Thainess,” “Farang,” “Khaek,” and “Thai and Malayu Muslims” in discussing the identity issues surrounding Islam in the three southern provinces as well as its

³⁹¹ Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction,” 303.

³⁹² Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction,” 308-309.

³⁹³ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 360.

presence in these two cases. Both The Tak Bai Incident and the Ratchaprasong bombing cases are important to Thai identity, as the events provided a challenge Thai national identity. They also highlight the lack of understanding by the Thai state over the issues of ethnic minorities and the conflict in the three southern provinces.³⁹⁴ The Tak Bai Incident escalated violence in the three southern provinces because the Thai state's actions had proven to the locals that it cannot be trusted due to the use of force and insensitivity towards the cultural and religious practices of the Thai and Malayu Muslims.³⁹⁵ The Ratchaprasong bombing, on the other hand, revealed a disruption to the legitimacy of the Thai state which was run by the military junta at the time. It also triggered a wave of nationalism that the Thai state used to justified future military actions against the three southern provinces and Thai and Malayu Muslim insurgents.³⁹⁶ By focusing on the two cases, we are able to understand and explain how the Thai state reacted to the disruption of its ontological security and sense of self-identity when faced with the issues of the Thai and Malayu Muslims.

In comparing the two cases, the differences that we see in the analysis of the cases are the way rhetoric were constructed by Prime Minister Thaksin and Prime Minister Prayut. We see that identity rhetoric by the Thai state was different between the Tak Bai Incident and the Ratchaprasong bombing case. The evidence from the Tak Bai Incident shows a rhetoric that framed Thai and Malayu Muslims insurgents as “bandits,” “evil,” “uncivil,” and “weak” while constructing the local Muslim villagers as “disloyal” and “uncooperative.”³⁹⁷ At the same time we see rhetoric that framed the Thai Buddhist security forces as “law-enforcer,” “good,” “civil,” “loyal,” and “strong”. The framing of identity allowed the Thai state to assume the role of the

³⁹⁴ Gowing, “Moros and Khaek,” 37.

³⁹⁵ Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 65.

³⁹⁶ Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 66.

³⁹⁷ Keyes, “Muslim “Others” in Buddhist Thailand,” 30.

superior while assigning the role of the inferior to the Thai and Malayu Muslims, thus creating a hierarchy.³⁹⁸ This hierarchy enabled the Thai state to justify the use of force in the three southern provinces after the Tak Bai Incident. However, we did not see any use or reference to that type of framing from Prime Minister Prayut's government briefing. Instead we see this framing in the Thai media, where repeated terms of "Farang" and "Khaek" presented to speculate the identity of the suspect. As we have discussed earlier, both "Farang" and especially "Khaek" are terms in the Thai language that work to separate what is "Thainess" and the "other."³⁹⁹ While "Farang" had evolved to frame the "other" as foreign and became associated with more positive qualities, the "Khaek" still served as a way to connect negative meanings to Thai and Malayu Muslim's identity in the Thai context such as "dark skinned," "uneducated," "lazy," and "radicalized."⁴⁰⁰

As pointed out by Gowing, "It is likely that there are elements of 'scapegoatism', of atavistic fears, and of feeling of racial superiority [on the part of Thai Buddhists] mixed into such prejudice."⁴⁰¹ By using such terms, we see a different approach and framing between the Thai state in both cases as it attempted to construct its self-identity in relations to the Thai and Malayu Muslims. As the ontological security of the Thai state became disrupted by the "other," the Thai state's use of force and framing served to shed the blame from itself for security failures and place it on the Thai and Malayu Muslims.⁴⁰² Doty also refers to this in her work, "When one uses language, one is implying something about the existence of subjects, objects, and their relation to one another."⁴⁰³ This framing process allowed the Thai state to justify its actions in response to the perceived threat of the "other" since these groups were seen as different or "foreign" in

³⁹⁸ Doty, "Foreign Policy as Social Construction," 314.

³⁹⁹ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 19.

⁴⁰⁰ Gowing, "Moros and Khaek," 32.

⁴⁰¹ Gowing, "Moros and Khaek," 32.

⁴⁰² Doty, "Foreign Policy as Social Construction," 313.

⁴⁰³ Doty, "Foreign Policy as Social Construction," 306.

comparison to the representative values of “Thainess.” It also reinforced the idea of the “parent” and “child” hierarchy, which allows for states to take certain actions against the inferior subject.⁴⁰⁴ By defining what is different from itself, the Thai state is able to reconstruct its sense of self-identity and restore its ontological security routines.

We also see the rhetoric between both cases by the Thai state and media change over time and differ from one another. Before the Tak Bai Incident and Ratchaprasong bombing, we see Prime Minister Thaksin’s government focusing on more security-and military-driven rhetoric, which differed from the less heavy-handed approach by Prime Minister Prayut’s government that focused on negotiations and peace talks. Both Thai state rhetoric also changed and differed from one another in the period following each event. After the Tak Bai Incident, we see rhetoric by the Thai state and media that assigned blame for the conflict on Thai and Malayu Muslims, which the state used to justify further military actions in the region.⁴⁰⁵ However, the aftermath of the Ratchaprasong bombing saw continued restraint from the Thai state while the media was more heavy-handed in its framing of Thai and Malayu Muslims. This change in rhetoric shows to us that there was a shift in how the Thai state viewed ontological security and self-identity in the different phases of the cases. As Steele explains it, “While the drive to ontological security remains constant, self-identities change in order to properly situate the self by successfully confronting the environment which is in constant transformation.”⁴⁰⁶ Since the environment before and after the examined cases changed, the Thai state's construction of its self-identity also changed. The Thai state’s ability to shift positions in the face of self-identity disruptions served to protect its ontological security and make certain of the threat it faced. Thai identity, or

⁴⁰⁴ Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction,” 310.

⁴⁰⁵ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 45.

⁴⁰⁶ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 34.

“Thainess,” in this sense, can be seen as fluid and ever changing in accordance with the needs of the Thai state and its relations to the “other.”⁴⁰⁷

In addition, we see that Prime Minister Thaksin’s policy towards the three southern provinces was considered as one that favored conflict through military engagements. “Over the course of Thaksin’s term in office, the situation was compounded by the hawkish outlook of his security advisors, many of whom prioritized the use of force to curb the growing trend of violence in the southern provinces.”⁴⁰⁸ We certainly see this evidence in Prime Minister Thaksin’s radio talk show transcripts along with his rhetoric in the media. This is also another example of the Thai state’s attachment to the routine of conflict, which it viewed this as a means to protect its ontological security and sense of self-identity.⁴⁰⁹ On the other hand, we see Prime Minister Prayut and the Thai state under the military control advocating for more restraints and less heavy-handed approach to security and force in the Ratchaprasong bombing. This could have been attributed to the lesson learned by the Thai military who saw the futility of the aggressive security approach by Prime Minister Thaksin’s use of force in the post 2006 coup d’état era.⁴¹⁰ Since the use of force resulted in the escalation of violence and international criticism over its handling of the conflict in the three southern provinces in the aftermath of the Tak Bai Incident, the Thai state in 2015 may have felt insecure in attempting such actions again to secure its ontological security. Despite this reluctance, we can still see that the Thai state’s action in 2015 is still considered as a form of security seeking behavior of an insecure state.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁷ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 11.

⁴⁰⁸ Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 105.

⁴⁰⁹ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 350.

⁴¹⁰ Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 196.

⁴¹¹ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 362.

The rhetoric of Prime Minister Prayut and the Thai state during the Ratchaprasong bombing may also be an attempt of self-reflection since the Thai state was forced by the media to justify its inability to provide security.⁴¹² The actions of the media served as a source of self-identity disruptions alongside the bombing since it generated speculation that challenged the Thai state's self-identity and legitimacy, which were rooted in the desire to resolve conflict through negotiations and resolutions.⁴¹³ Despite this self-identity reflection process, the Thai state still chose to deploy additional security forces as a means to combat the source of self-identity disruptions. Mitzen discusses this, "I would hypothesize that situations in which states have climbed their way out of entrenched conflicts through processes of rational updating are few and far between, because the condition of rationality requires leaving previous, identity-stabilizing relationships behind."⁴¹⁴ The act of leaving an ontological security routine would be considered as a source of disruption to its self-identity since uncertainty would become the norm. This makes the state perceive this process of detaching from familiar routines as a danger to the self. Thus, we see that the self-reflection process in this case had failed and the Thai state instinctively returned to its ontological security routines attached to conflict since they provides the most "certainty."⁴¹⁵

Aside from these differences, the similarities between the Thai state's behavior during the Ratchaprasong bombing and the Tak Bai Incident feeds into the Ontological Security Theory, which is evident from the rhetoric of the Thai state and media. In both cases, we see that the Thai and Malaya Muslims' involvement challenged the Thai state's sense of self and identity through

⁴¹² Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 363.

⁴¹³ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 99.

⁴¹⁴ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 362.

⁴¹⁵ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 361.

the conception of anxiety over the “Islamization of Thailand.”⁴¹⁶ Liow explains this imagined fear in his work, “More recently, the dangers of a majoritarian identity emerging around the notion of ‘Thai-ness’ have been compounded by a growing chorus of right wing sentiments articulating how Buddhism in Thailand was coming under threat from the greater assertiveness on the part of the Malay-Muslims.”⁴¹⁷ Since Buddhism had been constructed and interwoven with the concept of “Thainess,” we see that in both cases the Thai state and media concentrated on this fear, disrupting its sense of being. Buddhism had become the basis on which the Thai state constructed its self-identity that created the idea that Thais must fight “otherness” in order to safeguard its values.⁴¹⁸ By creating self-identity against the threat of Islam and drawing on the anxiety of the Buddhist majority, the Thai state created an imagined threat that enabled it to use force in response to end disruption to its ontological security. “Thainess,” in this sense, was constructed in order to establish sets of important values drawing from the religious aspects of Buddhism, which were pitted against the “other.”⁴¹⁹ This allowed the Thai state to define who belongs to Thai society and who is considered to be a part of the “otherness.”

Ontological Security Theory provides a valuable framework to understand the Thai government's response to the two cases, yet it leaves a number of unanswered questions. Since this research focused mainly on the behavior of the Thai state in relations to the “other.” It was not able to expand on the overall sentiments and identity anxiety of the general public and how this sentiment played in the role of the ontological security and self-identity of the Thai state. Future research in this field could focus analysis on the individual levels in order to see if or how different groups of the Thai public exhibited the same security seeking behavior as the Thai state

⁴¹⁶ McCargo, *Mapping National Anxieties*, 24.

⁴¹⁷ Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 109.

⁴¹⁸ Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation*, 34.

⁴¹⁹ Thananithichot, “Understanding Thai Nationalism and Ethnic Identity,” 256.

during these two events. We could also focus on how ethnic groups such as the Thai Muslims, Malayu Muslims, Lana, Laos, etc., suffer from ontological security anxiety and self-identity crises because of the two events. Although this would require more resources and a longer period to conduct the study where in person interviews of the subjects would be essential in providing a large sample size of data, it would allow the researcher to gauge how an individual's rhetoric framed and constructed ontological security anxiety and self-identity in Thai society. If we treat these individual groups the same as the Thai state, we could possibly examine how “Thainess” and the anxiety over self-identity affected the individual persons. By including the general public, we get additional perspectives on Thai identity which would make the research of this specific case more well-rounded.

Furthermore, to be able to reach a more generalized conclusion beyond the two case studies, future research can expand the scope and number of cases being examined. Since this research only focused on two specific cases, an expansion of cases would allow for more data to be collected and analyzed, which could be done from a quantitative methodology approach. The research could focus on mapping specific key words such as “Farang” and “Khaek” from larger quantities of data from the media during the Tak Bai Incident and the Ratchaprasong bombing. Once collected, the data could be analyzed to see the frequencies of these keywords, which could be analyzed again by using Ontological Security Theory and the Discursive Practice Approach. By understanding the frequency of these key phrases, one can draw a conclusion based on the assumptions of how these key phrases contributed to ontological security and self-identity anxiety of the Thai state.

Lastly, future research could look at the differences between government types in response to ontological security disruptions and self-identity anxiety. We have seen some minor

evidence of the differences between policies of the civilian government under Prime Minister Thaksin and the military government under Prime Minister Prayut in handling the issues in the three southern provinces. However, more research into this topic would be required to effectively conclude if in fact the type of government affects the way the Thai state's ontological anxiety is affected by Thai and Malayu Muslim identities, which depends on how they are framed and constructed in relations to "Thainess." These different options for future research would allow us to look at the issues from a different angle. It would enable us to conduct a further research that provides analysis on different areas that are affected by the two cases and how ontological security anxiety manifests itself in these different levels of Thai society.

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