Compounding Fractures: State-Society Relations and Inter-Ethnic Estrangement in Thailand’s ‘Deep South’

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the effects of state-society relations on processes of ethnic boundary-making and boundary-shifting in two villages in the conflict-affected region of southernmost Thailand. The study builds on an existing body of research that attempts to explain the persistence of anti-state violence in the border region of southern Thailand through the examination of state-society relations and problems of state legitimacy. Rather than seeking to explain the factors driving violent conflict, however, this study takes as its focus relations between the distinct ethno-religious communities that comprise the region’s population. The substantive chapters of the dissertation analyse relations between residents of two adjacent villages and various institutions of the Thai state. These include state security agencies (most prominently, the Border Patrol Police), various state-sponsored militias (including the Or Ror Bor and Chor Ror Bor), the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre, the district administration, the subdistrict council and executive, and the village headmen and Village Administrative Committees. Thus, the analysis begins from a conception of the state as non-unitary and consisting of numerous distinct entities. The analysis proceeds by treating relations between residents of the villages and these various aspects of the state as distinct fields of social struggle. Comparisons are then drawn between various identifiable ethno-religious communities. Data for this study were collected over the course of 13-month period of ethnographic field research in two villages in an upland subdistrict of Bannangsata District, Yala Province. That district has been one of those most severely affected by the upsurge in organized anti-state violence in the region over the past 12 years. The villages are presented as fruitful sites for investigating the processes by which categories of identity shift and the boundaries that define them are made, remade and reinforced.

Keywords: Thailand; Ethnic boundaries; Decentralization; Citizenship; State-in-Society; state formation.
Dedication

For my parents.
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Chapter 1.
Introduction

1.1. Of Boundaries Blurred and Boundaries Hardened

On the morning of January 9, 2014, several dozen residents of Ban Lomyen village in the Changpa Subdistrict of Yala Province in Southern Thailand gathered at the local primary school to celebrate National Children’s Day (Wan Dek Haeng Chart). Proud parents sat in rows of plastic chairs under a large tarpaulin awning sheltering them from the steady rain that had prevented them from going to work in the rubber fields. In the middle of the front row, three dignitaries – the village headman, an officer of the Border Patrol Police and the deputy district officer (palad amphoe) – occupied a plush sofa. The proceedings began – as do virtually all official events in Thailand – with a series of prepared speeches delivered by the most senior officials in attendance. Following brief words of welcome from one of the school’s teachers (a Malay-speaking Muslim man), the deputy district officer took the podium. Known widely throughout Changpa Subdistrict as “Palad Somchai,” the deputy district officer delivered a lengthier speech that, among other things, touched on issues of ethnic identity in the village. He praised Ban Lomyen as a village in which Muslims (Chao Thai Islam) and Buddhists (Chao Thai Put) lived together in “harmony” (kwamsammaki) and in the spirit of close

1 All proper names in this dissertation – with the exception of those referring to well-known public figures, countries, provinces and districts – are pseudonyms.
2 The terms “Malay-speaking” and “Thai-speaking” are used throughout this dissertation and refer to the mother tongue of the person or group in question. It should be noted that the term “Malay Muslim” is preferred by some analysts as this term recognizes implicitly that the characteristics distinguishing this group from the rest of the Thai population extend beyond language and also that not all “Malay Muslims” speak Patani Malay. However, for the purposes of this study, households were classified according to the mother tongue of the head(s) of the household, which, in the two villages at hand, aligned perfectly with the ethno-cultural classifiers “Thai” and “Malay.”
familial relations (*pen pee nong gan*). This speech – echoing themes that were repeated by several officials who visited the village over the course of the 13-month period of field research that forms the basis of this dissertation – was notable for two reasons. First, it painted a picture of intergroup relations that clashed significantly with both my own observations and those of the villagers who, during numerous conversations, lamented to me the loss of a bygone era of inter-ethnic familiarity and friendliness. Secondly, the speech served to highlight religious identity as the most salient dimension of group differentiation in the village. To that extent, the speech was emblematic of the Thai state’s role in the politics of identity at the local level in the conflict-affected region of southernmost Thailand referred to in much of the scholarly literature as the “Deep South.”

This dissertation is based upon a detailed case-study of the role of the Thai state in the production and reproduction of inter-ethnic estrangement and antipathy in Thailand’s Deep South. It presents the argument that the “blurred boundary” between the state and society (Gupta 1995) represents an important and hitherto understudied site for the reproduction of interethnic boundaries and the expansion of social distance between the oppositional identity categories of “Muslim” and “Buddhist.” As the following chapters will show, processes of ethnic boundary making and boundary shifting (Wimmer 2013: Chapter 3) in southernmost Thailand take place in the context of the underdevelopment of democratic citizenship under what David Steckfuss (referring to the Thai Kingdom as a whole) has called a “permanent state of exception” (Streckfuss 2011: 32). This condition – made more acute in the Deep South region by the institution of emergency law since June 2005 (McCargo 2012a: 73) – effectively undermines the status of denizens of the Deep South region as “citizens” and instead renders them political subjects whose access to what would otherwise be considered “citizenship rights” is contingent on the discretion of various power-holders. Meanwhile, at the local level in rural areas of southernmost Thailand, the state is encountered as a number of

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3 The “Deep South” region is usually considered to include the provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat as well as four districts of the neighboring province of Songkla. Geographically speaking, it is the “southernmost” region of the kingdom.

4 It should be noted that the period of research for this dissertation coincided with Thailand’s transition from a flawed but functioning democracy to a system of military dictatorship under the leadership of General Prayuth Chan-Ocha and the National Council for Peace and Order via a military coup d’état on 22 May, 2014.
more-or-less discreet entities, each of which is embedded in local society in a distinct manner. This dissertation will show that successful engagement with various branches of the local-level state is often mediated by the ethnic identity of the individual in question. In this manner, the fragmentation of the state and its embeddedness in local society engender patterns of engagement and estrangement that differ according to ethnic and, more importantly, religious identity. Thus, state-society interactions at the local level encourage patterns of social organization and interaction that privilege religious identity and exacerbate intergroup estrangement and antipathy.

The next section of this introductory chapter situates the study at hand in the context of long history of conflict in southernmost Thailand. The chapter then provides an overview of studies of state-society and inter-ethnic relations in the region, highlighting the dearth of focused studies of relations between the region’s major ethno-religious communities. It proceeds to outline an analytical orientation to investigating such relations grounded in Bourdieuian sociology and informed by literatures on the “state in society” (Migdal 2001, 1994; Mitchell 1991), citizenship studies (Turner 1990; Tilly 1997; Isin and Wood 1999) and theories of ethnic boundary-making (Barth 1969; Wimmer 2013). The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the remaining chapters that comprise this dissertation.

1.2. Histories of Conflict in Southernmost Thailand

Since the early years of the 21st century, a region of southernmost Thailand often referred to in English-language publications as the “Deep South” and in Thai media and official parlance as “the three southern border provinces” (sam jangwat chaidaen pak tai) has been beset by near-daily acts of violence that have claimed the lives of more than 6,500 people (Deep South Watch 2015). In the view of most observers, the majority of this violence stems from an organized insurgent movement consisting of several distinct militant groups, the largest and most active of which being the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN). Several such analysts (e.g. McCargo 2009; Liow and Pathan...
2010) identify the principal grievances motivating this violence to be deficits in the responsiveness, accountability and legitimacy of the Thai state. Others, most notably Marc Askew (2007; 2010a), point out that casualty figures such as those referred to above fail to disaggregate political and non-political violence (i.e. “criminal” violence) in a region long plagued by lawlessness and organized criminal activity. Efforts to disaggregate the data in this manner are hampered by shortcomings in investigative police work in the region and by the fact that, over the course of more than a decade of fighting, militant groups have by-and-large failed to claim responsibility for specific incidents or to stipulate their grievances against the Thai state. However, anonymously distributed pamphlets apparently penned by insurgent operatives’ support the conclusion that insurgent violence is essentially political in nature (McCargo 2009: Chapter 4; McCargo 2013). This conclusion was further substantiated in June of 2013, when a group purporting to represent the insurgent movement in an ultimately doomed peace dialogue process with the Thai government issued a list of five demands (later downgraded to ‘negotiating positions’) that included recognition of ‘the sovereignty of the Patani Malay Nation’ (McCargo 2014: 6).

There exists a third stream of scholarship on Thailand’s Deep South that takes as its object of focus the links (or potential links) between this localized conflict and international ‘jihadist’ movements. These analysts reference several points of connection between Deep South insurgents and international Islamist militants, including links between individual insurgent operatives in the region to members of such organizations as Jema’ah Islamiya and Al Qaeda and the participation of some Deep South Malay Muslims in the conflict in Afghanistan in the 1990s. Ultimately, however, the ‘terrorism studies’ literature has failed to provide convincing evidence of either the direct involvement of such international groups in the Deep South conflict or of Deep South insurgents’ aspirations to involving themselves in a broader, international movement. Thus, the present study situates itself within the body of scholarship oriented toward explaining the role of state-society relations in the emergence of and perpetuation of conflict in the Deep South. Rather than seeking to explain the underlying causes of violent conflict, however, this dissertation addresses the development of inter-group estrangement and antipathy in the context of that conflict. To that extent, it represents a shift in focus from relations between the Deep South and the rest of Thailand to relations between ethnic/linguistic/religious communities within the Deep South region itself. At
the same time, this dissertation takes seriously the observations of scholars who highlight the murkiness of the conflict and the surrounding “market for violence” (Askew 2010a). Such observations are of particular value to efforts at understanding the experience of those denizens of the Deep South who, in their daily lives, struggle to understand and negotiate a world of dangerous uncertainty.

The ‘Deep South’ or ‘Patani’ region has a long history of troubled relations with Siamese and, more recently, Thai centres of power. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to explore it in a detailed fashion, it should be noted that this history is contested and that competing representations of it shape to a considerable extent the ways in which various individuals and groups understand present-day conflict. A strong indication of the officially accepted version of that history is to be found in the curricula of Thailand’s public schools. As Joseph Chinyong Liow (2009: Chapter 1) observes, mainstream historical textbooks used in Thai schools present a narrative in which, following the Sukhothai kingdom’s (1238-1583) successful struggle for independence from the Angkor Empire, Siamese political dominance extended as far south as present-day Singapore. Among the numerous kingdoms said to have come under Siamese dominance during this period was that of Patani, a political unit geographically coterminous with today’s ‘Deep South’. This officially sanctioned perspective also emphasizes the continuity of Patani’s status as a vassal state under Siamese/Thai dominance. This view was expressed perhaps most clearly by the so-called “father of Thai history,” Prince Damrong Rachanuphap (1862-1943), who viewed the histories of the Sukhothai, Ayuthaya and Bangkok periods as a continuous line of “Thai” history and claimed that “Patani has belonged to the Thai [Kingdom] since time immemorial” (Damrong quoted in Davisakd 2008: 72). It was further reinforced in the middle of the 20th century under the leadership of Field Marshal Phibun Songkram, who, during two tenures as prime minister, did much to promote the idea that ethnic Thais had historically dominated peninsular Southeast Asia and had only gradually lost much of this territory at the hands of rapacious neighbours (Thongchai 1994; 142). Accounts of historically continuous Siamese control over Patani have been bolstered further by some Thai

5 Following established convention, this dissertation uses the spelling “Patani” to refer to the region of the historical Patani Sultanate. The spelling “Pattani” refers to the modern Thai province and its capital city.
historians (e.g. Davisakd 2008), who argue that Patani remained a vassal state throughout the Ayutthaya period (1351-1767) and thereafter came under the direct control of the Siamese during the Chakri Dynasty (1782-present).

In contrast to this officially-sanctioned history, Malay historians have offered readings of Patani history that de-emphasize Siamese dominance and instead highlight the fluidity of relations between Patani and the Siamese kingdoms. Many such accounts refer to a traditional historical epic known as the Hikayat Patani (Teeuw and Wyatt 1970). Written in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the Hikayat Patani is an account of the Patani region’s ancient history, its early kingdoms, its conversion to Islam beginning in the early 16th century and its resistance to Siamese domination. Throughout, the Hikayat Patani emphasizes Patani’s status as an independent agent variously struggling against or reluctantly accepting Siamese dominance. Another important contribution to local history in the Deep South region is The History of the Malay Kingdom of Patani (Syukri 1985). Written in the post WWII period when the borders of mainland southeast Asia were in flux and a political movement against Patani’s reintegration into Thailand was afoot, the short volume builds on many of the themes of the Hikayat Patani whilst even more overtly emphasizing the historical independence of the kingdom, its Islamic character and the loyalty of its inhabitants to indigenous leaders (ibid.; Cornish 1997: 9). The text draws the reader’s attention to the Siamese kingdom’s military conquest of Patani in 1785 and the formal annexation of the Sultanate via the Anglo-Siamese treaty of 1909. In conjunction with the Hikayat Patani, The History of the Malay Kingdom of Patani represents the core of an understanding of Patani’s history widely shared among members of the Deep South region’s Malay Muslim majority.

These competing and, to some extent, irreconcilable understandings of local history are not simply fodder for debates between scholars and amateur historians. As a result of the expansion of compulsory primary education throughout the 20th century and the continued existence of traditional religious education institutions known as pondok schools, most young people in the region gain at least some knowledge of one or both versions of this history during their formative years. The expansion of compulsory primary education in the Deep South region, however, has been a matter of sometimes violent contention since the introduction of the Compulsory Education Act in 1921.
Government schools were viewed by many Malay-speaking Muslims as Buddhist institutions, their suspected purpose being to weaken and undermine the practice of Islam (Liow 2009: 20). In the intensely ethno-nationalist period of the 1930s (see Chapter 3, this dissertation), national curricula were introduced that excluded the study of languages other than central Thai, religions other than Theravada Buddhism and historical narratives other than those produced by the Ministry of Education in Bangkok (Liow 2009: 23). Over the latter half of the 20th century – and particularly during and after the 1980s – there has been some limited recognition in the national curricula of religious diversity. To a substantial degree, however, Malay-speaking Muslim parents in the Deep South continue to view Thai government schools as fundamentally Buddhist institutions. The region experiences some of the lowest rates of attendance in public schools in the country as well as very high rates (some estimates range as high as 85%) of enrolment in private Islamic schools (ibid: 32).

The first private Islamic school in southernmost Thailand was established in the 1930s by Haji Sulong Abdul Kadir Al-Fatani (Haji Sulong), an Islamic scholar and educator who played a leading role in the region’s post-WWII autonomy movement (McCargo 2009: 60-61). The number of such schools increased dramatically in the 1960s, however, in response to efforts by the Thai state to penetrate the traditional Pondok education system. Pondok schools have a vaunted place in the popular imagination of Patani Malay society. They are essentially religious boarding schools in which pupils occupy huts they have either built themselves or inherited from older students and in which older students participate in the tutoring of younger ones under the supervision of a tok guru (head teacher) (Liow 2009: 34). In the 1930s, the government of Phibul Songkram initiated efforts to introduce Thai language instruction into the traditional Pondok education system, which had long been an important repository of local Malay language and culture. In 1958, the government initiated efforts to register all Pondok schools in the region and subsequently introduced a program to supply registered Pondok schools with improved infrastructure and funding in exchange for greater influence over their curricula and an enhanced capacity to monitor their activities (ibid: 36). These policies offered the tok-guru of Pondok schools several options: to transform their schools into Private Islamic Schools that would teach the Thai curriculum alongside Islamic religious education, to register as “Pondok Institutes” (sathaban pondok) that would receive substantially less funding and oversight, to
operate surreptitiously as unregistered and unsupported *Pondok*, or to close (McCargo 2009: 40-41). Many of those who opted to become the proprietors of registered private Islamic schools gained substantial financial reward and the “*jao babor*” (babor baron)\(^6\) emerged as important political and economic elites in the Deep South (ibid: 45).

Traditional *Pondok* schools and private Islamic schools represent important sites for the transmission of local historical narratives at odds with the officially-sanctioned national history found in state school textbooks. The efforts of the Thai government to penetrate the Islamic education system, meanwhile, was a motivating factor in the establishment of militant separatist organizations that initiated a violent guerrilla campaign against the Thai state beginning in the 1960s. Organizations like the aforementioned BRN and the Patani National Liberation Movement (BNPP) were headed by religious teachers and used both *Pondok* schools and private Islamic schools to recruit guerrilla operatives (Liow 2009: 39; Che Man 1990: 146). The Patani United Liberation Organization (PULO), meanwhile, gained a great deal of support from young Malay intellectuals who had gone abroad to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan and elsewhere to pursue their education (Che Man 1990: 146) PULO was the largest, best organized and most active of the many insurgent groups (estimated to be as many as 20 in the early 1970s) whose guerrilla campaign against the Thai state peaked in intensity in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Yegar 2002: 148-152). Many of these organizations received support from sympathizers in Malaysia and the Middle East, including the national governments of Saudi Arabia, Syria and Libya (Che Man 1990: 153-154). They also supported themselves through voluntary and involuntary contributions from individuals within the Patani region, sometimes engaging in forms of extortion that blurred the line between insurgent activity and organized crime (ibid.). The military operations of these organizations included attacks on state security officials (including police), arson attacks on government buildings (including schools), kidnappings and the violent intimidation of Buddhist villagers (Yegar 2002: 144; Che Man 1990: 146-148).

The Thai government’s response to the insurgency was two-fold. First, intensified military operations against insurgent groups resulted in the death of more than 300 suspected insurgents, the arrest of over 1,300 more and the destruction of 250 guerilla

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\(^6\) “The term *babor* refers to a person of higher spiritual integrity and nobility.” (McCargo 2009: 38).
camps between 1968 and 1975 (Che Man 1990: 148). In 1976, the government enacted emergency legislation that suspended the right of appeal for suspected insurgents tried in military courts (Yegar 2002: 149). At the same time, a development strategy referred to as a “Policy of Attraction” was put in place to show the broader population the benefits of peaceful integration into the Thai nation-state. This program included overt demonstrations of the Thai government’s patronage of Islam through the construction of grand central mosques in the region’s provincial capitals as well as support for mosque building in district towns (ibid: 178). Efforts were also made to recruit more Malay-speaking Muslims into the state bureaucracy as a means of fostering closer relations between the state and local society. To a considerable extent, these and other efforts were undermined by a combination of mismanagement, poor planning, popular distrust of state officials and the continuation of abuses against the local population at the hands of state security forces. Vastly increasing development budgets largely failed to have a discernible impact on local livelihoods, Malay-speaking Muslims recruited into the bureaucracy found themselves distrusted by both their bureaucratic co-workers and their communities, and state patronage of Islam was often viewed as inappropriate meddling on the part of non-Muslims (Che Man 1990: 239; Surin 1985: Chapter 5). Meanwhile, enforced disappearances and assassinations carried out by state agents served to foment further disaffection on the part of the Malay-speaking Muslim population.

Notwithstanding the shortcomings of the Royal Thai Government’s counter-insurgency operations, by the mid-1980s there were signs that the insurgency was slowing down. Between 1982 and 1983, some 450 suspected insurgents surrendered to the government under an amnesty program (Che Man 1990: 245). Waning support from foreign allies (including the Libyan government and the Parti Islam se-Malaysia) further undermined the movement’s activities. Perhaps most importantly, a raid on PULO’s headquarters in Saudi Arabia in 1984 resulted in the deportation of as many as 700 PULO operatives and seriously diminished the group’s organizational and fundraising capabilities (ibid.: 248). Another large-scale surrender of suspected insurgents took place in 1988 and, while sporadic attacks continued though the late 1980s and 1990s, the intensity of the insurgency had, by that time, diminished considerably. By the mid-1990s PULO was actively engaging with the Thai government in pursuit of a peace agreement (Yeger 2002: 177). Another major blow to the movement came in 1998, when Malaysian police arrested the head of PULO’s military wing (Haji Sama-ae Thanam) and
turned him over, along with three of his men, to Thai authorities (ibid.: 179). Hitherto, the Malaysian government had been extremely reluctant to assist the Thai authorities in their campaign against the insurgent movement for fear of alienating its base of support among Muslim Malaysians. Thanam’s arrest was indicative of a major shift in that dynamic. Such was the reduction in the activities and capacities of the insurgent movement that, by the end of the 1990s, analysts and officials alike began expressing confidence that the insurgency was a thing of the past.

To the extent that the Thai state’s counter-insurgency operations were responsible for the reduction in insurgent activity throughout the 1980s and 90s, some analysts credit conciliatory measures enacted under a reformed institutional structure unique to the Deep South region. The Southern Border Provinces Administration Centre (SBPAC) was established in 1981 as a special coordinating body between the military and civilian bureaucracies to address administrative problems and coordinate the implementation of development projects in the area (Cornish 1997: 26). Under the leadership of Fourth Army commander Harn Leenanon, SBPAC was at the forefront of a program known as “Tai Rom Yen” (The South under a Cool Shade) (McCargo 2007a: 39). Some analysts have suggested that the conciliatory and consultative orientation of SBPAC was instrumental in bringing about the marked reduction in separatist violence in the 1980s and 90s and a general improvement in relations between the state and Malay-speaking Muslims in the region (e.g. Ornanong 2012; Liow and Pathan 2010). Among its key accomplishments were creating openings for (elite) participation in the region’s administration and acting on complaints about abusive officials, many of whom were transferred out of the region. Duncan McCargo (2007) characterizes this orientation to governing the Deep South as the institutionalization of “virtuous rule” and situates SBPAC within a broader network of power centred on the monarchy. This power network – what McCargo (2005) refers to as the “network monarchy” – connects military, bureaucratic, political and economic elites to the informal power of the monarchy and has long been the central node of power in the kingdom.

The rise to the premiership of Thaksin Shinawatra in 2001 heralded a disruptive shift in this administrative arrangement. Sixteen months into his tenure as Prime Minister, Thaksin disbanded SBPAC on the grounds that it had been put in place to manage a conflict that no longer existed. Thaksin and his deputies asserted that
whatever sporadic incidents of violence continued to erupt in the region were the work of “ordinary criminals” or “interest groups” and not of an organized movement with political aims (Askew 2007: 42). The move was seen by critics as a self-serving effort on Thaksin’s behalf to create political inroads for his electoral machine in a region that has long been a stronghold of the Democrat Party (McCargo 2007a: 39). Thailand’s oldest political party, the Democrats are strongly associated with the Bangkok establishment and have dominated electoral politics in the southern region (although less so in the Deep South) for most of Thailand’s post-absolutist history (see: Askew 2008). Some have gone so far as to claim that the resurgence of violence in 2004 was a direct result of dismantling the carefully constructed system of “benefit sharing” between Thai officials and Malay-Muslims elites that SBPAC helped maintain (McCargo 2007a: 49-54). Others point out, however, that the elite-oriented approach of SBPAC in the 1980s and 90s may have pushed elements of the resistance movement further underground and thus inadvertently paved the way for the clandestine organization of a new and more intractable insurgent movement (Askew 2007: 49-53). Former Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudth has argued that a new wave of separatist militants organized themselves and spread their ideology in a far less centralized manner than had the previous generation. He concluded that, even had SBPAC been kept in place, it would have failed to detect the rise of this new movement just as it had done throughout what is now seen as the movement’s incubation period during the 1990s (ibid.: 40-41).

In the same year that Thaksin disbanded SBPAC, the conciliatory orientation of the Thai state toward Malay-Muslim society in the Deep South was further shaken by the initiation of a violent “war on drugs.” Beginning in 2002, security officials were given a free hand to deal with drug traffickers and large numbers of extra-judicial executions soon followed. Both Thaksin and his Interior Minister, Wan Muhammad Nor Matha (a Malay-speaking Muslim from Yala province), maintained that this was effective means of dealing with a social menace, but at least some security officials seized upon the opportunity to settle old scores (McCargo 2009: 79). Meanwhile, the period immediately following this war’s prosecution witnessed a rash of bold attacks against state targets, beginning with a well-coordinated raid on an army base in the Deep South province or Narathiwat in January, 2004 (Askew 2007: 8-9). State security officials responded with heavy-handed and at times brutal tactics. This was the case on April 28 2004, when militants launched near simultaneous attacks on 12 targets across the Deep South
Although some carried guns, many of the young men involved in the attacks were armed only with knives or were without any weapons whatsoever (McCargo 2009: 139). Many were killed by security forces within the first minutes of the attacks and evidence suggests that at least some may have been summarily executed (ibid.: 140). The day’s tragic events culminated in a siege of the historic Kru-ze Mosque on the outskirts outside of Pattani town, where 32 militants and 3 members of the security forces died in a raid on what is seen by many to be the most sacred Islamic site in the region (ibid.: 135). All told, 105 “militants,” one civilian and 5 security officers were killed in the attacks. The perceived excesses of Thai security forces’ response to these attacks left many in the Deep South with the impression that state agents had scant respect for the rights and humanity of Malay-speaking Muslims. These feelings were only reinforced in the wake of protests in the town of Tak Bai, Narathiwat on October 25 of the same year, where seven protesters were shot by soldiers and another 78 killed by suffocation when stacked one on top of the other in military trucks during transportation to a detention centre (ibid.: 110-113). The events of 2004 marked an important turning point in relations between the state and Malay-speaking Muslims in the Deep South and the undoing of whatever progress had been accomplished in the preceding two decades. Both events retain a prominent position in the popular consciousness as examples par excellence of the injustices perpetrated by the state security apparatus.

In the months that followed, Thaksin’s overly aggressive and ineffectual response to the resurgent violence in the Deep South became one of the key themes in a Democrat party-aligned protest movement that painted the Prime Minister as an incomparably corrupt autocrat bent on destroying the core institutions of Thai society. This movement eventually led to a coup d’état and the appointment of General Surayud Chulanont as Prime Minister. The new government signaled its intention to revert to ‘tried-and-tested’ means of managing the conflict, including the reinstatement of SBPAC. The re-establishment of the state’s conciliatory orientation toward Malay-Muslims in the Deep South was made clear in November 2006 when Surayud issued a public apology for the massacre at Tak Bai that took place two years before (Askew 2010a: 1118). In subsequent years, as a political crisis in the capital monopolized national and international attention and pushed the southern conflict into the background, SBPAC continued to pursue a strategy of making overt conciliatory gestures toward the Malay-Muslim community. Under the leadership of Police Colonel Thawee Sodsong from 2011-
2014, SBPAC enacted a number of symbolic gestures, including restoring the original Malay names to a large number of villages that had been renamed in Thai as part of an earlier “Thaification” policy (Nation 2014). On multiple occasions, Thawee made reference to the famous “seven demands” – issued in 1947 by the Patani People’s Movement under the leadership of the aforementioned Haji Sulong – as a potential framework for addressing local grievances. In addition to these symbolic gestures, SBPAC has supported religious activities through such initiatives as the Quality of Life Improvement Program (kronggan panom) that many communities have used to improve religious education facilities (tadika) for their children.

In addition to the conciliatory efforts of SBPAC, improved counter-insurgency tactics may have been a factor in deescalating the high levels of violence witnessed during the early years of this new phase of the conflict. Neither approach, however, has succeeded in fostering peace. In the first three years of the new insurgency (January 2004 and December 2007) the Deep South region experienced an average of slightly more than 160 violent incidents per month (Srisompob 2014). These incidents included bombings, arson attacks and targeted assassinations, including the murder of several Buddhist monks and school teachers. Srisompob Jitpiromsri, director of the Deep South Watch conflict analysis group based at Prince of Songkla University’s Pattani campus, has pointed out that, beginning in late 2007, the conflict entered into a new phase characterized by a somewhat lower and notably stable rate of such incidents. From January 2008 to December 2011 this translated to an average of slightly more than 77 incidents per month, while between January 2012 and April 2014 the rate jumped to almost 97 incidents per month (ibid.). However, despite the lower rate of violent incidents since 2008, the rate of casualties has remained stable throughout the period in question (ibid.). The Deep South Incidents Database (an affiliate of Deep South Watch) reports that, between January 2004 and December 2014 there were 14,688 violent incidents that resulted in 6,286 deaths and 11,366 injuries (DSID 2014). The vast majority of those killed and injured have been civilian non-combatants. Notably, nearly 59% of those fatalities were Muslims (who make up roughly 80% of the local population) while slightly more than 59% of those injured were Buddhists (Srisompob 2014). This seemingly incongruous finding is at least partially explained by the fact that Buddhists are often the targets of indiscriminate violence (i.e. bombings in public places) and that security personnel targeted by improvised explosive devices (IEDs e.g. roadside bombs) are
overwhelmingly Buddhist. Muslim victims, on the other hand, are often the objects of more lethal targeted assassinations. On many occasions this has been the case with respect to Malay-speaking Muslims who take up positions in local and village-level government.

As was the case in the earlier phase of separatist violence that lasted from the 1960s into the 1990s, the current wave of violence in the Deep South region involves a number of insurgent groups. In practice, the perpetrators of violence do not claim responsibility for their actions, so attributing attacks to specific groups is a problematic endeavor. Nonetheless, according to at least one of the most well-connected analysts of the conflict, the insurgent group exercising control over the bulk of militant operatives is the aforementioned BRN (Pathan 2015a). At the same time, however, there remain persistent questions as to what portion of the violence can be attributed to the separatist insurgency. As noted, Marc Askew (2010a) has argued that insurgent violence in the Deep South has to be understood in the context of a wider “market for violence” that includes violence related to personal, political or business conflicts. Since the renewed outbreak of violence in the first years of the 21st century, politicians have sought to downplay the insurgency by lumping insurgent violence in with the general violence and lawlessness that has long plagued the region. However, the problem of criminal violence in the region notwithstanding, Srisompob and McCargo (2010) marshal detailed data collected by Deep South Watch in making the case that the upsurge in violence is clearly the result of an organized insurgency. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that the lack of clarity surrounding violence in the Deep South plays a prominent role in shaping perceptions of the conflict in the eyes of the region’s residents themselves. In combination with a deep distrust of state officials, the murkiness of the Deep South conflict helps fuel widely circulated rumours and conspiracy theories. The conspiracy theories through which many residents of the Deep South regions try to come to grips with the volatile and dangerous conditions of their existence tend to differ markedly according to the ethnic/religious identity of the individual in question.
1.3. Ethnic Relations in The Deep South

Relations between the Malay-speaking Muslim majority of the Deep South region and the Thai state have been an object of scholarly interest since the middle of the 20th century. Studies spanning several decades (e.g. Fraser 1960; Surin 1985; Cornish 1997; McCargo 2009) suggest that heavy-handed state administration in the Deep South has resulted in widespread feelings of political, social and cultural alienation amongst much of the region’s Malay-speaking Muslim majority. Fraser (1960), for example, presents a picture of Malay-Muslim villagers who “dislike and fear the power of the men who were sent to administer them” (93) and who largely refrain from engaging with officials and availing themselves of state services. Cornish (1997), on the other hand, presents a more nuanced account of Malay-speaking Muslim villagers’ selective engagement with state development schemes, wherein villagers engage with the state only in so far as it serves their interests and does not upset the internal dynamics of their communities. Both Surin (1985: Chapter 5) and McCargo (2009: Introduction) detail the ways in which the heavy-handed assimilationist orientation of the Thai state toward Malay-speaking Muslims has effectively undermined the state’s legitimacy in the region. Taken together, these studies provide significant data regarding relations between Malay-Muslims and the highly centralized Thai state both historically and in recent times.

In contrast to this sustained interest in relations between Malay-speaking Muslims in the Deep South and the Thai state, there exists a relative dearth of scholarly literature pertaining to relations between Malay-speaking Muslims and members of the other ethnic/religious communities that populate the region. Historically, this absence may well have been justified on the grounds that majority of non-Malay-speaking Muslims in the region were either Thai officials (including teachers, police officers and bureaucrats) or Sino-Thai traders who made up a small fraction of the population and enjoyed smooth if not always close relations with their Malay-speaking Muslim neighbours. However, although Thailand’s southernmost provinces are sometimes referred to as “Malay Muslim provinces,” they are in fact characterized by considerable diversity rooted in a long history of ethnic intermingling (Montesano and Jory 2008; Reid 2008, 2013). Moreover, partially as a result of resettlement programs that will be
described in detail later in the dissertation, the non-Malay-speaking population increased measurably over middle decades of the 20th century. Thailand’s 2010 Population and Housing Census estimated that Thai-speaking Buddhists (including Sino-Thais) account for approximately 17 per cent of the population in the three provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala (NSO 2012 a, b and c). Moreover, among the region’s over 1.4 million Muslims, a small but significant portion (approx. 4.5% in 20007) do not speak Malay (NSO 2000). Given the centrality of ‘identity’ and questions of assimilation and accommodation to the ongoing conflict in the region, relations between ethnic communities in the region should be considered an important and potentially fruitful subject of study.

One aspect of inter-group relations that has been little researched is that of the relationship between the Deep South’s Malay Muslim majority and those Muslims in the region and elsewhere in the kingdom whose mother tongue and ethnic identity is Thai. However, insightful comments regarding such relations can be gleaned from the work of numerous analysts of the conflict in southernmost Thailand and of Muslims in Thailand in general. McCargo, for example, points out that Malay Muslims tend to view Thai Muslims from the “upper south” region as “over assimilated, less devout and too willing to tolerate or embrace negative features of Thai society” (2012a: 113). In a study of Thai Muslims in the Andaman coast province of Krabi, Wanni Anderson observes that members of that group are “more culturally syncretic than are the Malay Muslims to the southeast” (i.e. the Deep South) and that, as a result, Malay Muslims sometimes label their Thai coreligionists as “not Muslim enough” or “not Muslim” (2010: 133). In an essay reviewing research into Buddhist-Muslim relations in the region, Horstmann states that “Thai Muslims of the south who identify as Malay resent Thai Muslims who do not, for not supporting their struggle for a Malay state independent of Thailand” (2004: 78). Other researchers interested in the position of Muslims in Thai society, meanwhile, point to language as a major barrier between the Malay-speaking population in the Deep South and Muslims elsewhere in the country. This is not simply a matter of a language

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7 A 2010 survey conducted by the Asia Foundation (Asia Foundation 2010) drawing on a representative sample of 750 individuals suggests that a significantly larger proportion of Muslims in the Deep South (12%) speak central or southern Thai as their first language. Relevant figures for 2010 from Thailand’s National Statistics Office were not available at the time of writing.
barrier inhibiting mutual understanding, but a product of the complex intermingling of religious and linguistic identity in the constitution of Malay ethnicity. As Omar Farouk Bajunid (2005: 9) remarks “Malay remains the definitive Islamic medium and the undisputed marker of Islamic identity among Muslims...in the provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat.” These observations point to important points of differentiation between Thai-speaking and Malay-speaking Muslims in Thailand and offer valuable insights into the construction of ethnic identity in the kingdom. However, there remains a shortage of focused studies that examine relationships between Thai and Malay Muslims in Thailand on the basis of first-hand empirical observation.

Conversely, such direct, empirically grounded research can be found with respect to relations between Muslims and Buddhists in southern Thailand. However, much of this literature refers either to relations between Thai Muslims and Thai Buddhists or to relations between Muslims and Buddhists outside of the conflict-affected Deep South (i.e. in the Thai provinces of Songkla and Satun and the Malaysian states of Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah). For example, in both her doctoral dissertation (Burr 1974) and a book chapter based on the same research (Burr 1988), Angela Burr describes the integration of Thai Buddhist spiritual beliefs and practices into the cosmology and religious practices of Muslims in two southern Thai fishing villages. She observes that the ‘groupness’ of Buddhists and Muslims in the villages was predicated on a ‘veneer’ social identity that obscured the absence of cultural, social or economic difference between the two groups. Burr notes that the boundaries between the two groups are maintained through the reproduction of derogatory stereotypes of the ethnic other. Ultimately, however, her study is of limited relevance to the questions of inter-ethnic relations in the Deep South owing to the fact that the Muslim residents of her study villages were Thai speakers who did not identify as ethnically Malay. Similarly, Nishii (2000) describes movement across inter-group boundaries by both Muslims and Buddhists in the Thai-Malay border region between Satun province in Thailand and the Malaysian state of Kedah. Golomb (1978), meanwhile, observes the recourse taken by Malay-Muslims in Kelantan to Buddhist “spirit-doctors” (mor pii) who were widely reputed among the Muslim community to possess potent spiritual powers. In his aforementioned review essay, Horstmann (2004) points to these and other studies as evidence of a “shared cosmos” that, as a result of the spread of a more doctrinal approach to Islam through the dakwah movement and the re-emergence of the ethnic-nationalist
movement in the Deep South, is in the process of giving way to intergroup “hatred.” Certainly there is much to be gained from these insights, but without focused empirical studies of inter-communal relations within the Deep South, there remain open questions as to whether such a “shared cosmos” ever existed in in the region and the extent to which ethnic hatred has, in fact, taken hold.

With respect to the first question (regarding the historical existence of a “shared cosmos”), there exist a small number of relevant studies. Golomb (1985), for example, extends the aforementioned inquiry into Malay Muslim use of Thai Buddhist spiritual healers in Kelantan to several districts in Thailand, including the province of Patani. The author finds instances of Malay Muslims and Thai Buddhists fluidly transgressing ethnic boundaries in a manner similar to that found in the earlier research in Kelantan. Chavivan Prachuabmoh finds similar cross cultural healing practices in her doctoral dissertation (Chavivun 1980) and discusses ethnic interaction in the region in some greater detail in a book chapter drawing on that same research (Chavivun 1982). With respect to the second question (regarding the emergence of ethnic hatred) there exist even fewer focused empirical studies, with Marc Askew’s 2009 article (Askew 2009) being perhaps the sole exception. Askew examines the “landscapes of fear [and] horizons of trust” in a number of villages in the districts of Thepa and Khok Pho, both in the conflict-affected region of the Deep South. Through a number of personal narratives, Askew explores how the condition of insecurity brought about by unpredictable and unexplained violence places serious strain on relations between Malay Muslims and Thai Buddhists in the area. As he observes, however, networked relationships and community bonds that cross-cut ethnic groupings constitute a countervailing force that militates against the emergence of full-blown ethnic hatred and distrust. He recounts conversations in private places that suggest a serious breakdown in relations between the two groups, but also a series of private and public actions that demonstrate a commitment to resisting the total breakdown of a historically multi-ethnic community.

Askew’s article provides important insights into the effects of escalating violence on inter-communal relations in the Deep South region, many of which correspond with observations detailed in this dissertation. Notwithstanding this example, however, there appears to be a need for additional focused empirical research on the subject. While the existing literature provides some valuable background knowledge, observers should be
wary of reading into shared spiritual beliefs and curing practices an excessively rosy view of the history of Buddhist/Muslim or Siamese/Malay relations in the region. Just as importantly, neither should a high level of inter-ethnic antipathy in the present period be assumed. Askew is likely correct in observing that “most areas of the borderland have not seen the emergence of those mutually hostile ‘communities of fear’ that mark fully-blown ethno-nationalist conflict elsewhere in the world” (Askew 2009: 61). Nonetheless, there exist numerous, relatively recent observations from researchers for whom inter-ethnic relations may not have comprised the primary object of focus (e.g. McCargo 2009; Jerryson 2011) that support the notion that violent resistance to Deep South’s incorporation into the Thai nation state has contributed to widening of social distance between ethnic communities. Such social distance is made readily apparent to even casual observers of everyday social life in the Deep South. Malay Muslims, Buddhist Thais and Sino-Thais, though they may be neighbours in a single village, often inhabit unambiguously separate communities that live together, but separately. This daily reality contributes to the emergence of “hidden transcripts” of inter-ethnic suspicion. Thus, when members of various ethnic communities come together in village meetings, markets and other forums, they might be observed to engage with one another amicably. However, it is upon retreating back to the tea shops and community defence bunkers\(^8\) of their respective ethnic enclaves that discourses of distrust and resentment begin to emerge. This condition not only promotes mutual misunderstanding and suspicion, but also undermines the possibility of active collaboration in the development of a peaceful and prosperous society. The question of how such inter-group estrangement and antipathy come into being is of both theoretical and practical relevance. The central contention of this dissertation is that, while the effects of violent separatist conflict on inter-communal relations cannot be ignored, the ways in which the Thai state is embedded in local society constitutes another, equally important factor.

\(^8\) There exist several state-sponsored civilian militias in the Deep South region, one of which (the *Or Ror Bor*) being almost exclusively Buddhist (see chapters 2 and 5).
1.4. State Fragmentation and Social Embeddedness

The core arguments forwarded in this study are predicated on an understanding of the state (substantiated by empirical observation) as being fundamentally non-unitary. Various branches or ‘faces’ of the state – police and military forces, district governments, subdistrict governments, to name a few – present themselves at the local level as distinct and only partially coordinated entities. The manner in which these various aspects of the state interact with or are embedded in society is equally distinct. The pattern of embeddedness of a fragmented state into a fragmented society not only reinforces existing lines of fragmentation, but indeed shifts and moulds those lines. In this way, the dynamics of state-society inter-penetration inform the process of reproducing and shifting ethnic boundaries.

This conception of a fragmented state embedded in a correspondingly fragmented society is drawn primarily from a body of literature that one of its most prominent contributors has dubbed “the state-in-society approach” (Migdal 2001). Migdal points out that the uncritical application of Max Weber’s famous conceptualization of the ideal-type state as “a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical violence over a given territory” (Weber 1958: 82) has led to a view of the state in much of the social science literature as a “tight knit, purposeful organization, with autonomous goals, using violence and legitimacy as successful tools in maintaining social control and implementing policy” (Migdal 2001: 14). Analyses that take Weber’s definition as their starting point, according to Migdal, are forced to render the everyday workings of real-world states in terms of deviation from this ideal type. Such an approach tends to overlook the fragmentation of authority, the development of competing interests within the state itself, the influence of social forces over state priorities and the other less “legitimate” ends to which state actors sometimes employ violence. Migdal therefore proposes an alternative definition of the state as “a field of power marked by the use and threat of violence and shaped by (1) the image of a coherent, controlling organization in a territory, which is a representation of the people bound by that territory, and (2) the actual practices of its multiple parts” (ibid.: 16). This definition has the advantage of being grounded in empirical observations of the day-to-
day functioning of actual states (as opposed to theoretical ideal types) and of the image of the state those day-to-day practices generate in the minds of political subjects.

According to Migdal, the image of the state as a “dominant, integrated, autonomous entity that controls, in a given territory, all rule making” is one that hardly stands up to empirical scrutiny but is nonetheless prevalent across the majority of modern nation-states (Migdal 2001: 16). This image is generated through the day-to-day practices to which Migdal’s definition of the state refers, from the practice of issuing passports that reinforce the image of the state’s control over a given territorial unit, to the conduct of state activities in special buildings such as court houses to reinforce the image of the state’s fundamental separation from society. This image-producing effect of state practices has been aptly described by Timothy Mitchell as the “structural effect” of the state (Mitchell 1991: 94). Taking aim at both political systems theorists of the mid-twentieth century (e.g. Almond 1954; Easton 1953) and the statists who followed them (e.g. Krasner 1978; Nordlinger 1988; Skocpol 1979), Mitchell argues that the problem of determining the boundary between the state and society can best be addressed by taking the boundary itself as the principal object of study. That boundary, he claimed, does not represent the “real exterior” of the state (or “political system”), but is instead “a line drawn within the network of institutional mechanisms through which a certain political order is maintained” (ibid.: 90). Nevertheless, the state takes on the appearance of an autonomous structure as an outcome of specific practices that are characteristic of all modern states. Drawing on the influential work of Michel Foucault, Mitchell argues that the disciplinary practices of modern states generate the appearance of a binary order in which the soldiers, bureaucrats, parliamentarians, students etc. who populate state institutions are seen as distinct from “an inert structure that somehow stands apart from [them], precedes them and contains and gives a framework to their lives” (ibid.: 94). That “inert structure” is the “structural effect” of the state: “a powerful, metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist” (ibid.).

Mitchell is quick to assert that his approach does not imply the existence of a “single totalizing structure of power” (1991: 90). Instead, his approach emphasizes the conflicts that take place between state actors and social forces, between various state agencies or corporate organizations, and within such agencies and organizations themselves. Neither the state nor society should be conceived in unitary terms, to say
nothing of the state/society “system.” This view accords once again with Migdal’s elaboration of state-in-society approach, which observes that “states may be badly fractured” and that, through this fracturing and through their encounters with social forces, the state’s various branches may be severely weakened or, in other cases, strengthened in their capacity to act autonomously (Migdal 2001: 250). In an earlier introduction to this analytical approach, Migdal (1994: 3) submits that one of the core assertions of the state-in-society “perspective” is that “states must be disaggregated.” Further support for this contention is found in the work of anthropologist Akhil Gupta (1995; 2012), who argues that the state “far from being a unitary organization acting with singular intention…is characterized by various levels that pull in various directions” (2012: 46). Gupta advocates an ethnographic approach to studying the ‘blurred boundaries’ between society and the various aspects of the state, that focuses on the lowest levels of the state’s administrative hierarchy, where the majority of face-to-face interactions between citizens and state agents take place. These are the interactions, he argues, through which regular people negotiate their relationships to state power and through which the state imaginary finds construction.

The insights of these authors and of the “state-in-society” approach more generally constitute a central point of orientation for this dissertation. The following chapters take as their focus the boundaries or sites of interpenetration between several distinct branches of the Thai state and “society” in two villages in the Deep South region. They observe a population of villagers who, far from being completely taken in by the “structural effect” of the Thai state, are cognizant of the competing interests and social influences that infect the state in its various guises. The residents of these two villages navigate their engagement with and avoidance of the state and its agents on the basis of this knowledge, which is itself formed and transmitted through the near ubiquitous rumours and conspiracy theories that circulate throughout the region. The analysis presented here will show how strategies for engagement/disengagement with various aspects of the state are informed by the ethnic/religious identity of the individual in question and perceptions of how that particular aspect of the state is embedded in a fundamentally fragmented local society. To that extent, this dissertation offers unique insights into how state/society relations shape and condition inter-group relations in the Deep South region of Thailand.
1.5. Analytical Approach: State/Society Interfaces as Fields of Power

This dissertation envisions the points of interface between the fractured state and society as distinct fields of power in which individuals and groups struggle to fulfil their needs, achieve their goals and forward their interests. As such, it owes much to the pioneering sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. According to Bourdieu, “fields” represent sites of struggle in which individuals bring to bear power in the form of “capital” (economic, cultural, social and symbolic) in pursuit of various interests (economic, social, political etc.) and, indeed, to shape representations of the social world in a manner that is complementary to those interests (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 97-98; Bourdieu 1986: 242). In the simplest terms, economic capital refers to that which can be readily exchanged for money, cultural capital refers to cultural competencies, social capital refers to more or less stable networks of mutual recognition and symbolic capital refers to prestige or honour (Bourdieu 1986: 243-252). The value of a given stock of any one form of capital is directly tied to the field of social relations and struggle in which it is put to use. Practices of any given agent in any given social field are further structured by “cognitive and motivating structures” that endow agents with a “feel for the game” and an embodied conception of where they and others “belong” in it (Bourdieu 1977: 76; 1986: 245). These “structuring structures” are inculcated through material conditions that tend, on average, to be more common among members of a single social class or group. Thus, a group habitus develops through which members of a class or group develop common, durable dispositions that are manifest in their orientation toward various fields of social relations (Bourdieu 1977: 81). The various fields that constitute the social world interact and influence one another in important ways that, as Bourdieu argued, cannot be theorized in the abstract and must be understood on the basis of empirical observation (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 110).

Taken as a whole, the relationship between individuals (or groups) and the state can be conceived of as the field of “citizenship.” According to the highly influential work
of T.H. Marshall (2009[1950]), citizenship can be understood in terms of three distinct kinds of rights enjoyed by members of the political community: civic rights, political rights and social rights. The concept suggests a kind of quasi-contractual relationship that “designates a set of mutually enforceable claims relating categories of persons to agents of governments” (Tilly 1997: 600). The contention of this dissertation, however, is that the overarching conditions of citizenship in Thailand are such that the enforceability of citizens’ claims on the state is significantly undermined by the frequent usurpation of state power by bureaucratic elements (usually the military), the suspension of many citizenship rights that accompanies such seizures of power and the threat of military or judicial coups d’état that has been a near constant in Thailand’s post-absolutist history dating back to 1932. Thailand’s perpetual cycle of promulgating, abrogating and rewriting constitutions (the core institution defining the citizen-state relationship) and the progressive institutionalization of extra-judicial power centred around the monarchy has resulted in what David Streckfuss (2011: 304) characterizes as the “permanent state of exception.” Citizenship rights, under such conditions, are rendered tenuous and access to the benefits of membership in the political community become contingent on maintaining good relations with power-holders and on demonstrations of worthiness as a “good citizen.” In Thailand, demonstrations of good citizenship have become inextricably tied up with the quasi-ethnic identity category of “Thai” and an amorphous and shifting collection of behaviours and dispositions referred to as “Thainess” (kwam pen Thai) (McCargo 2012a: 121-122). For this reason (as discussed in more detail in Chapter 3), this dissertation adopts the conceptual definition of citizenship offered by Isin and Wood (1999: 4) as “both a set of practices (cultural, symbolic and economic) and a bundle of rights and duties (civil, political and social) that define an individual’s membership in a polity” (Isin and Wood 1999: 4). This definition offers a means by which to move beyond the formal/legal definition of citizenship better to grasp the lived experience of citizen/subjects.

Another group of concepts put to frequent use in this dissertation centre around the notion of the “ethnic group.” The term is often used in both popular and academic literature to refer to categorizations of people on the basis of culture, language, religion, nationality or race. As numerous scholars of ethnicity point out, however, the specific characteristic that differentiates one ethnic group from another often depends on context: an ethnic group might be defined in terms of religion in relation to another group
whose members speak the same language and in terms of language in relation to linguistically disparate group of coreligionists (Horowitz 1985: 41-42; Wimmer 2013: 21-25). This observation points to one of the core insights of Fredrick Barth (1969: 15), who understood that the formation of ethnic groups occurred as a result of encounters with the “ethnic other” and the most salient aspect of such groups was not the “cultural content” enclosed within them, but indeed the boundaries by which they maintained themselves as groups. Building on Barth’s boundary metaphor and infusing it with Pierre Bourdieu’s conception of a social world comprised of distinct fields of struggle, Andreas Wimmer (2013: Chapter 3) develops what he considers to be a comprehensive classification of the mechanisms through which ethnic boundaries are “made” and “moved.” This dissertation adopts Wimmer’s conceptual language of “boundary making” and “boundary shifting” (described in greater detail in chapter 4) better to understand the process through which actors seek shape representations of the social world in a manner that best suits their interests (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 242).

In conjunction with a shift in the conception of citizenship from the formal/legal to a more encompassing view that emphasizes practice, an understanding of ethnicity that emphasizes boundary-making and boundary-shifting helps illuminate important points of interrelationship between citizenship/subjecthod and ethnic identity. Where the ideal of universality implied by the concept of citizenship fails to obtain, ethnic identity can be of instrumental value in the struggle to gain access to public goods. This is particularly the case if access to such goods is in any way contingent on the performance of a constructed national identity (i.e “Thainess”) that is itself largely ethnic in character. It can also be the case when the state/society boundary is blurred to the extent that official power (Thai: amnaat) becomes inextricably tied up with unofficial influence (Thai: ithipon). As several chapters in this dissertation will detail, this can be the case when branches of the state are “captured” by powerful individuals or groups whose own networks of influence are largely contained within a given ethnic community. Under both sets of circumstances, the boundaries that define ethnic groups themselves become sites of strategic struggle. This dissertation presents the argument that the institutional structure of the Thai state in the Deep South region and the nature of its embeddedness in local society can engender the reproduction of ethnic boundaries in such a manner as to de-emphasize intermediate and cross-cutting categories of belonging and extend the social distance between identity groups.
1.6. The Chapters

The dissertation proceeds in four major sections. The introductory section continues in Chapter 2, which describes the research design and case selection strategy of this study before introducing the two villages that comprise its empirical focus. The second section deals with relations between the residents of both villages and the security apparatus of the centralized Thai state. Chapter 3 examines the nature and history of citizenship in the Thai kingdom in order to forward the argument that the quasi-contractual relationship that is the *sine qua non* of citizenship as a distinct form of political subjecthood is largely absent in the kingdom. Consequently, the chapter argues, Thai “citizens” – particularly in the Deep South – are better understood as what Partha Chatterjee (referring to the subaltern classes in India) termed “only tenuously rights-bearing” political subjects (Chatterjee 2004: 38). Chapter 4 examines the state provision of security in the two villages and argues that relations between state security agencies and residents of the villages as well as perceived bias in the provision of security have served to elevate religious identity as the most salient dimension of social differentiation. Chapter 5 extends this argument by examining the participation by village residents in state-sponsored village defence groups. It shows how, in one of the villages, the implementation of security policies promoting the direct participation of citizens in the provision of security has led to the emergence of two ethnically segregated militias operating side by side in a single village. Once again, the outcome is that citizen engagement with the state is mediated first and foremost by the religious identity of the person in question.

The third section shifts the focus from relations between village residents and the security apparatus of the centralized state to those between residents and the partially decentralized local state. Chapter 6 presents an overview of the decentralization process in Thailand in order to highlight shortcomings in institutional design and policy implementation that result in a local-level state that is susceptible to capture by local power-holders. Chapter 7 then investigates the subdistrict government of “Changpa
Subdistrict,” examining popular representation, participation and attitudes toward that level of government among residents of the two study villages. It shows how official power at the subdistrict level has become inextricably tied up with informal power networks that span and further blur the boundary between state and society. These power networks, the chapter shows, operate almost exclusively within a particular, Malay-speaking Muslim milieu and thus alienate local Buddhist society from the local-level state in a manner that is, to some extent, the inverse of that observed in relation to the centralized security state. Chapter 8 examines the role of village-level office-holders (e.g. village headmen or poo yai ban) and the relationship between the two arms of what Nagai et al. (2008: Chapter 3) characterize as Thailand’s ‘dual system’ of local level government. The chapter shows how village-level officers who occupy the lowest position in Thailand’s deconcentrated system of centralized administration readily fall under the influence of the same informal power networks that dominate decentralized government at the subdistrict level. Thus, the distinction between deconcentrated and decentralized lines of local administration become blurred and ethnically mediated access to informal networks of power comes to play a key role in workings of power at the village level. Chapter 9 concludes by revisiting core arguments and suggesting how a more disaggregated conception of the state, of society and of the ‘blurred boundaries’ (Gupta 1995) between the two can facilitate better understanding of the role of state power in the reproduction of inter-ethnic antipathies.
Chapter 2. Research Design, Case Selection and Cases

2.1. Introduction

The research strategy employed in this study centred on in-depth, ethnographic research in two adjacent villages in the Deep South province of Yala. The decision to take an ethnographic, case-study approach to this research was motivated, first, by the conviction that no other research methodology is equally well-suited to investigating the dynamics of inter-communal relations and the everyday workings of the state-society interface. Second, the decision to invest considerable time and energy into the detailed examination of just two villages was taken in light of an observed dearth of “long term in situ” investigation of inter-ethnic relations in Thailand’s southernmost region (Askew 2009: 60). The present chapter details the considerations that went into the research design and case selection process for this study before providing an introductory overview of the study villages themselves.

2.2. Research Design

At the outset, this research was conceived as a single village study in the manner of what some qualitative methodologists refer to as a “heuristic case study” (George and
According to George and Bennett (2005), “Heuristic case studies inductively identify new variables, hypotheses, causal mechanisms and causal pathways” by studying cases that are not necessarily typical or “representative” of a broader population of cases (75). The present study pursues that same inductive, theory-generating strategy in investigating the role of state/society relations in the (re)production of interethnic tensions. The method of focused and sustained investigation of a small number of cases (‘small n research’) is of particular value to theory building exercises of this kind because it opens up the researcher to multiple, often unanticipated forms of evidence pertaining to causal processes that are not necessarily predicted by existing theories.

George and Bennett (2005: 75) point out that “deviant” or “anomalous” cases can often serve as useful subjects for the development of heuristic case studies. They define such cases as those in which the value of the X or Y variables is anomalous to relationships observed in the broader population of cases. On the basis of that particular definition, the cases investigated in this study should not be considered “anomalous” or “deviant”; there was no expectation at the outset of this study that the villages under examination would exhibit patterns of state-society interpenetration that differed qualitatively from those found elsewhere in the region, nor was it expected that relations between the villages’ principal ethnic communities would deviate substantially from what one would find in other Deep South villages. To that extent, the cases at hand could be considered “typical” or “representative” cases. In other important respects, however, the villages of Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai were very much atypical of Deep South villages, including the ethnic composition of the villages as well as the manner and timing of their establishment. The atypical qualities of these villages (discussed in detail below) do not render these villages “most likely” or “least likely” cases for the emergence of inter-ethnic antipathies and are thus not presented as “crucial tests” of a given theory. Instead, the contention here is that villages represent particularly fruitful sights for the gathering of “causal process observations” (Brady and Collier 2011: 24).

It should also be noted that the research design for this study evolved through the course of conducting the research. As noted, the initial research design involved the in-depth study of a single village (Ban Lomyen), known to house a significant population of Thai-speaking Muslims, in addition to Malay-speaking Muslims and Thai-speaking
Buddhists. The presence in the village of southern Thai-speaking Muslims (an ethno-religious grouping not normally associated with the Deep South region) rendered the village an interesting site for studying the production and reproduction of ethnic boundaries. Largely for this reason, Ban Lomyen remained the primary focus of research for slightly more than half of the period of field research and occupies the greater share of the analytical attention in this dissertation. It was during the course of conducting research in Ban Lomyen, however, that I became more familiar with the neighbouring village of Ban Namsai. This village had once been home to a substantial population of Thai-speaking Buddhists, who had evacuated the village en masse in 2006 and were later resettled in a nearby village (see chapter 4). This outcome differed so drastically from that in Ban Lomyen – where the vast majority of Thai-speaking Buddhists had remained in place throughout the recent upsurge in insurgent violence – that it seemed necessary to investigate further, if only better to contextualize the dynamics observed in Ban Lomyen. Subsequently, the untimely death of Ban Namsai’s village headman triggered an electoral process to select a new headman. The opportunity to observe this process in action demanded the expansion of the research design to a two-village study. However, the purpose of adding a second village to the study was not to facilitate comparative analysis, per se. It was instead to gather further data pertaining to the causal processes under investigation.

2.3. Case Selection

The process of selecting appropriate sites for data collection for this project entailed careful consideration of a number of factors. These included considerations that impinge on all those who engaged in case study research, including locating research sites that are either representative of the broader universe of cases to which the research ultimately relates or that afford particular analytical leverage with respect to the questions at hand. They also included considerations that are particular to research projects in conflict-affected areas, where the ethical imperative to ‘do no harm’ must be considered with respect to both the research subjects and the researcher him/herself.
The process of case selection for the present study consisted of two steps: (1) identifying a range of candidate villages through a review of statistical data and (2) leveraging a network of contacts to ensure that access to a given village and its inhabitants could be achieved without violating ethical obligations.

The first stage of the process was carried out with the generous assistance of a team of researchers at the local conflict monitoring organization Deep South Watch and the Centre for Conflict Studies and Cultural Diversity (CSCD) at Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus. Those researchers were engaged in a project to map the distribution of violent incidents over the most recent phase of the separatist conflict by plotting each incident on a Geographical Information System (GIS) map embedded with population data from the 2000 census. Through reference to these maps, I was able to obtain a list of some two dozen villages that met the criteria of having a religiously and linguistically diverse population (at the minimum, having at least 30% of the population of the village having religious or linguistic characteristics that differed from the village majority) as well as being of a size that would make feasible a comprehensive census survey of the village (i.e. between 100 and 300 households). The villages included in the list were also located in subdistricts (the lowest level for which geographic data on violent incidents was available) that had been at least moderately affected by violent incidents over the preceding ten-year period.

Once this list was complete, the next step was to narrow the list of potential research sites through consultation with a number of researchers based in the Deep South region. Once again researchers at Deep South Watch and CSCD proved an indispensable source of detailed knowledge pertaining to local communities, politics and insurgent activities throughout the region. It was on the advice of one of these researchers that I began looking more closely at the village that is referred to in this dissertation as “Ban Lomyen.” Moreover, it was through this researcher’s network of contacts – most crucially that with former Member of Parliament Burhanuddin Useng – that I was able to arrange meetings with local leaders and gain access to the community. Useng, a member of the Wahdah faction of Malay Muslim politicians, had extensive kinship and political ties to the district of Bannangsata in which Ban Lomyen is located. Several months prior to the beginning of the research period for this study, Useng escorted me personally to the home of the sub-district chief executive (or “mayor”) of
Changpa subdistrict to arrange for my stay in the village. Both Useng and the mayor (referred to throughout this dissertation as “Nayok Loh”) assured me that I would be well looked after in Ban Lomyen and could conduct extended field research there in safety.

As noted, the decision to include the second village (“Ban Namsai”) as a focal point for this research resulted from a more organic process. While conducting research in Ban Lomyen I quickly became familiar with the local history of violence and inter-communal relations in Changpa District, including the aforementioned mass-exodus of Buddhist villagers from Ban Namsai. I soon began making trips to that village as well as to the village to which the Buddhist former residents of Ban Namsai were relocated (referred to in this dissertation as “Ban Borhaeng”). I also began making regular trips to Ban Namsai and other villages in Changpa subdistrict to observe village meetings pertaining to a village-level development project (*Kronggan Panom*) and a rubber farmers’ support project (for details of both projects, see chapter 7). It was during these trips that I began to build up a rapport with the village headman of Ban Namsai as well as several other members of the community. I soon became convinced of the value of Ban Namsai as a source of data and insight complimentary to that which I was gaining in Ban Lomyen. This conviction was reinforced rather tragically a few months later when the village headman of Ban Namsai succumbed to an unexplained illness and shortly thereafter passed away. Given that village headmen in Thailand are permitted to retain office without seeking re-election until the mandatory retirement age of 60 (see chapter 8), I considered the process of electing a new headman for Ban Namsai a rare opportunity to observe local politics in action. Thus, the research program evolved from a single village study to a two village study.

2.4. Research Methods

The core research method at the heart of this study was that of participant observation. This method aims to facilitate the direct observation of the phenomena of interest through the researcher’s sustained presence in the research site over a
substantial period of time. To the extent possible, those engaging in this kind of research participate directly in the daily life of the village (or neighbourhood, factory, firm, etc.) whilst constantly formulating and asking questions that help illuminate the lived experience of the research subjects. In both Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai, this meant taking part in the daily routines of life: rising before dawn to join rubber tappers in their fields, passing the night in the Or Ror Bor (Village Defence Volunteers Bunker), sitting with the Women’s Handicraft Group (glum satree) as they ground herbs into curry paste (krueng geng) and watching the evening news with various groups of people as, night-by-night, a protest movement in Bangkok evolved into a military coup d’état. It also meant taking part in public meetings to determine the best use of village development funds, sitting in while the subdistrict council approved the annual budget, and accompanying villagers travelling to the agricultural extension office to inquire about undelivered relief funds. At every stage, the objectives were twofold: gradually to overcome – to the extent possible – the problem of research subjects adjusting their behaviour and utterances to the researcher’s presence (i.e. the problem of “reactivity”) and to probe continuously the observed behaviours of research subjects through questions and purposeful conversation. The ultimate aim of this approach is to develop an account of the phenomena under investigation that is genuinely representative of the lived experience of the research subjects. That is, to achieve a high degree of internal validity (De Volo and Schatz 2004).

In addition to sustained participant observation, research for this study entailed the conduct of comprehensive census surveys in each village. Over the course of several weeks, I visited each house in Ban Lomyen and, later, Ban Namsai, spending between 20 minutes and two hours completing a 20-part survey with the help of either the male or female head of the household. The survey covered topics included household composition, spoken language, religion, family origins, kinship relations, land ownership, cropping patterns, economic activities, household debts, access to state support programs, associational membership and political opinions. In most cases, the formal survey concluded with an open-ended conversation on any number of topics, but usually touching on local politics. The benefits of conducting these surveys were several. First, they facilitated the accumulation of basic demographic and economic data for each village. Second, they allowed me to personally introduce myself to the heads of each household in both villages and to inform research subjects of my purposes in the village.
and their right to participate or abstain from participating in my study.\(^1\) Third, data
gathered throughout the survey process substantially informed the lines of inquiry
pursued in subsequent phases of the research. Additional research methods included
the review of documents including project reports, development plans, budgets and the
minutes of subdistrict council meetings and public forums. I also observed public forums,
council meetings, observances of public holidays, religious ceremonies and celebrations.
Finally, on several occasions I conducted semi-structured interviews with village
headmen, the subdistrict mayor (nayok tesabahn), the subdistrict chief (kamnan), the
deputy district officer (palad amphoe) and others.

2.5. The Villages

The villages of Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai are located in a highland area of
Changpa subdistrict of Bannangsata district, Yala province. A rural district, Bannangsata
is predominantly Muslim with minority populations of Thai Buddhists and Sino-Thais.
According to Thailand’s 2010 Population and Housing Census (NSO 2012a), 76.6% of
Yala province’s total population of 433,176 were Muslim and 23.3% were Buddhist. The
portion of Yala’s population professing Islam has increased steadily from 63.8% in 1990
and 68.9% in 2000. The Buddhist population, meanwhile, is largely concentrated in
urban centres (including district towns) where they make up 39.7% of the population.
Thailand’s National Statistics Office has yet to release detailed demographic data from
the 2010 census disaggregated to the district level, thus it is not possible to give precise
figures as to the demographic breakdown of Bannangsata district. However, given that
90% of Bannangsata’s population live in rural areas and that the municipality of the
district capital of Bannangsata has only one Buddhist temple and 24 mosques
(Municipality of Bannangsata 2013), it is reasonable to estimate that the predominance
of Muslims in the population of Bannangsata is at least as great as the provincial

\(^1\) An informed consent protocol was recited to each respondent at the outset of each survey
interview. No one in either village declined to participate.
average, if not greater. In fact, most of the Buddhists in Bannangsata district are to be found in villages established under population resettlement schemes that operated from the 1950s through the 1980s. Such is the case in the village of Ban Lomyen.

During the period of field research for this study, Ban Lomyen consisted of 144 continuously occupied households and a village population of 527 persons. The village is located some 20 kilometres from the district capital of Bannangsata and is accessible by a sealed road that is of very good quality for most of the journey, but that deteriorates significantly over the final 3.5 kilometres to Ban Lomeyn. The village itself is situated at the confluence of a number of small streams high in the jungle-clad hills that cover much of the border region between Thailand’s Yala province and the Malaysian states of Kedah and Perak. In the 1950s through 1980s, the area surrounding Ban Lomyen was used by members of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) who maintained jungle camps on the Thai side of the border throughout their period of conflict with the Malaysian government (Metzger 2012). The remnants of a large MCP camp complete with kitchen structures and underground storage spaces is still visible just a few kilometres from the village. Ban Lomyen itself was established in 1983 following the completion of a major infrastructure project, the development of which opened up previously impenetrable highland areas, first to logging operations and later to settlement and agricultural development.

Ban Lomyen was established as part of a nationwide, multi-decade program to settle poorly populated peripheral regions of the country with “Self-Help Land Settlement Villages” (Nikhom Sang Ton Eng). The “nikhom” project began at the national level in 1940, when Field Marshal Plaek Phibulsongkram established a colony in Saraburi province (in the central region) for the resettlement of Bangkok pedicab drivers (Yoongyut 2015). In the 1960s, under the leadership of Sarit Thannarat, the program was adapted to the task of securing Thailand’s administrative control and cultural dominance over the restive southernmost provinces. Having visited the region in 1960 and finding, to his surprise, that the local people were not conversant in the Thai language, Sarit called upon “Thai brethren in the Northeast, the North and the Central part to go South and settle on land and earn a livelihood there” and thereby to “increase the loyal Thai blood there…for the sake of yourselves, your families and your nation.” (Sarit quoted in Thak 2007:132. Emphasis in the original). The following year, a cabinet
order was issued establishing the first “Self-Help Land Settlement” for the Deep South region. A fund was established through a loan from the Asian Development Bank to supply settler families with land, rubber saplings, farming implements, housing, foodstuffs and monthly stipends. Settler families purchased usufruct title over the agricultural land and homesteads (a form of land title referred to locally as “Nor Kor 3”) by taking a loan from the ADB fund. This could be upgraded to full legal title only upon repayment of that loan. Without such an upgrade, settler families are unable to transfer ownership of their land and are thereby prevented from selling or borrowing against it.

The “Self Help Land Settlement Program for Developing the South: Yala Province” covers an area of over 210,000 rai (33,600 hectares) and maintains a membership of over 6,000 members in 26 administrative villages in Bannangsata district as well as two in the neighbouring district of Than Tho (Nikhom 2013). Ban Lomyen is the most recently established of these villages. During the first phase of the program to populate Ban Lomyen, successful applicants from the “Upper South” provinces of Surat Thani, Nakorn Sri Thammarat and Pattalung as well as from the Northeastern provinces of Mahasarakham and Sisaket were offered a 2 rai homestead, 18 rai of cleared land, inputs to establish a rubber grove, a monthly stipend and food (primarily broken rice and canned fish) (ibid.; Interviews with villagers). This same offer was subsequently made to landless Buddhist families in Pattani province (also in the Deep South region) in order to make up a shortfall in phase one registrants. Village homesteads were established in two clusters. The “Upper Village” (kang bon) consists of 11 lanes (soi) along two forks of the main road (see Map 1 in the appendix). All of the Buddhist families were settled in the Upper Village, as were a handful of Thai-speaking Muslim families who originated in Pattalung province in the upper south. The vast majority of Thai-speaking Muslim families, however, were settled in an area known as the “Lower Village” (kang lang). Thereafter, a number of original nikhom members sold their plots and homesteads (usually without legal transfer of ownership) or moved out of the village to became absentee landlords. As a result, there has been a slow but steady influx of non-nikhom members into the village, most of whom are Malay-speaking Muslims.

2 1 rai = 0.16 hectares
At the time of research, the “Lower Village” contained 58 households, 29 of which were headed by Thai-speaking Muslims, 23 by Malay-speaking Muslims and 6 by mixed couples of Thai and Malay-speaking Muslims. The entire Buddhist population of Ban Lomyen, meanwhile, resided in the “Upper Village,” where they accounted for 56 of the neighbourhood’s 86 households (65%). These two sections of the village are separated by an approximately 0.8km stretch of uninhabited land where the main road abuts a steep embankment on one side and a fast-flowing creek on the other. Before reaching the Upper Village, one arrives at the village centre (soon glang), site of the village school, teachers’ quarters (ban pak kru), an open air meeting hall, a storage facility and a small pond. The first thing one encounters upon reaching the village centre from the Lower Village, however, is a rising arm barricade extending from the “Village Defence Volunteers” bunker (Assasamak Raksa Moobahn or Or Ror Bor). The Or Ror Bor is an all-Buddhist self-defence corps whose members take it in turn to guard the village against attack (see chapter 5). According to the leader of Ban Lomyen’s Or Ror Bor group, the location of the defence bunker in the middle of the village allows the group’s members to play an important role in protecting the village school against arson attacks (a regular tactic of Deep South insurgents). Nevertheless, the existence of a fortified bunker manned 24 hours a day by armed guards and separating the exclusively Muslim Lower Village from the predominantly Buddhist Upper Village gives the distinct impression of a community guarding itself against its own neighbours.

The Upper Village was also home to a unit of Border Patrol Police (Tor Chor Dor), a heavily armed police force charged with maintaining border security (Border Patrol Police in Ban Lomyen typically carried assault rifles, body armour and grenade launchers while performing their duty). The Tor Chor Dor base was located adjacent to the village temple, a small nondescript building that underwent several renovations and improvements during the period of field research. Tor Chor Dor officers did not conduct regular patrols in the village and spent the majority of their time within the confines of their fortified barracks. Notable exceptions included the participation of Tor Chor Dor officers in religious ceremonies at the village temple (see chapter 4) and the twice-weekly escort of school teachers in to the village on Mondays and out again on Fridays (see chapter 5). When they did leave their barracks, Tor Chor Dor officers would often pay a courtesy visit to the Or Ror Bor bunker. An additional unit of Special Forces Border Patrol Police (Pon Rom) was stationed at the intersection leading to the village,
approximately one kilometre from the village itself. These officers rarely entered the village except to participate in official events (e.g. Mothers’ Day and Fathers’ Day, which, in Thailand mark the birthdays of the Queen and King, respectively) and some Buddhist religious ceremonies. Most often, encounters between villagers and the Pon Rom occurred while the latter conducted patrols along the road leading up the hills from administrative offices of Changpa subdistrict.

The linguistic and religious diversity of Ban Lomyen was manifest in patterns of association and interaction that effectively divided the village into three distinct communities. The most readily apparent axis of social division in Ban Lomeyn was that between the Upper and Lower village. Buddhists rarely travelled to the Lower Village and would only pass through as a matter of necessity. However, the geographic separation of the upper and lower villages has to be understood within the context of broader patterns of social interaction. For example, within the Upper Village itself, relations between Muslims and Buddhists were notably cool. The majority of Muslims in the Upper Village were Malay-speakers and adult men of that group tended to spend their leisure time congregated around the surao (a prayer house), a Malay-Muslim-owned tea shop or the mosque. Younger men would often gather on sports fields in the village centre or beside the mosque to play (soccer) football or sepak takraw (a team game similar to volley-ball but played using the feet and a rattan ball). Young Malay-speaking Muslim men would also congregate in various houses to talk, smoke and, in many cases, to drink nam tom – a mild narcotic beverage made with krathom leaf tea, codeine cough-syrup and Coca-Cola. Malay-speaking Muslim women often socialized within the confines of their houses or gathered in small groups in the village centre. Buddhist men and women, meanwhile, tended to congregate around the Village Defence Volunteers’ fortification or on household stoops where afternoons were often passed playing card games for small sums of money.

Notable exceptions to this pattern of socialization were the women’s knitting group and the village football team. The women’s knitting group included Thai and Malay-speaking Muslim women from both the Upper and Lower Village as well as

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3 Krathom is an indigenous herb that has long been used locally as a stimulant, as a folk remedy for diarrhea and, more recently, as a substitute for opiate dependency (Suwanlert 1975; Boyer et al. 2008).
Buddhist women from the Upper Village. Members of this group met every day in the village centre to knit decorative items, hats and stuffed animals. The village soccer team, meanwhile, came together for various annual tournaments at the subdistrict level and included the most skilled (male) players in the village, regardless of ethnic, linguistic or religious identity. In the lead up to tournaments, young Buddhist and Muslim men could often be found playing informal matches on the village field, but I observed very few instances of inter-religious socialization away from the football pitch.

The social division between Buddhists and Muslims in Ban Lomyen was also manifest in the organization of collective work activities. In the early years of the village’s settlement, various households entered into labour-sharing (long kaek) arrangements for activities like field clearing and planting. For Thai-speaking Muslims, these collective activities often involved the mobilization of kinship networks within the village. This reliance on kinship networks was made possible by the fact that almost all of the Thai-speaking Muslims in Ban Lomyen traced their origins to one of two villages in the upper south province of Pattalung. As a result, Thai-speaking Muslims had, on average, more than twice as many households in the village to which they could claim kinship ties than did Thai-speaking Buddhists, whose origins were considerably more diverse (see Figure 1). Buddhist villagers, meanwhile, organized collective labour among their coreligionist neighbours. By the time of the research, however, virtually all agricultural labour in the village had been monetized, and collective labour was organized on the basis of daily wages, shares, or negotiated fees for services. The most activities for which collective labour was organized were the logging of unproductive rubber trees and fruit harvesting. Notwithstanding the decline of reciprocal collective labour arrangements, however, work teams in Ban Lomyen remained, in every instance, exclusively Buddhist or Muslim in character. Similarly, collective work organized by the village council under the heading “development” (ganpattana) – usually consisting of grass cutting and minor road repair – was always conducted by exclusively Muslim teams in the Lower Village and exclusively Buddhist teams in the Upper Village.
Figure 1: Kinship Relations in Ban Lomyen (average number of households to which respondents could claim direct kinship relations, by identity grouping).

Source: Household Survey, 2013-2014

A second and far less prominent axis of social division in Ban Lomyen was that between Thai-speaking and Malay-speaking Muslims. Relations between the two communities appeared unfailingly amicable and, for men, centred around the mosque and participation in collective work on a mosque-owned fruit plantation. A core group of both Thai and Malay-speaking adult men would gather at the mosque for evening prayers every day while a larger group including virtually all married adult Muslim men and most unmarried adult Muslim men would attend communal prayers at the mosque every Friday afternoon. Thai and Malay-speaking Muslim men would also socialize with one another at one of two breakfast restaurants in the Lower Village that they often visited after completing their early-morning rubber tapping or while performing their duties as members of the Village Development and Self-Defence Volunteers (Chut Raksa Kwamsangpriaprii Prajam Moo Bahn or Chor Ror Bor. Not to be confused with the Or Ro Bor. See Chapter 8). Thai and Malay-speaking male youths socialized with one another during the aforementioned games of sepak takraw and during evening

4 The term “youths” (yawachon) was typically employed in the village to describe young men and included men as old as 35 who were as yet unmarried.
hangouts often centred around the preparation and consumption of *nam tom*. Thai and Malay-speaking Muslim women, meanwhile, interacted most regularly during events centred around the mosque, where they collaborated on food preparation. There was also a second Women’s Handicraft Group (*glum satree*) in the village that was headed by the wife of the village headman and whose membership was entirely comprised of Thai and Malay-speaking Muslim women (see chapter 7).

These instances of commingling between Muslims of different ethno-linguistic backgrounds were common in the village, but they existed alongside patterns of casual socialization and friendship networks that were more or less contained in one or another ethno-linguistic group. There existed a number of sites in the village where Patani Malay (*basoh nayu*) was the predominant language of use and that were therefore largely exclusive of non-Malay speakers. While more than 90% of Malay-speaking Muslims between the ages of 6 and 53 considered themselves conversant in Thai, less than 20% of Thai-speaking Muslims considered themselves conversant in Malay (see Figure 2). Thus, the majority of Thai-speaking Muslims were unable to participate in conversations at, for example, a Malay-owned tea shop in the Upper Village. Similarly, despite having a strong command of the Thai language, several Malay-speaking Muslim respondents remarked to me that they had trouble understanding the clipped southern dialect of Pattalung Muslims, particularly when several members of that group engaged in conversation together. Like most southern Thais, Thai-speaking Muslims in Ban Lomyen had the ability to modulate their speech between the “standard” central Thai taught in state schools and the fast-paced, lilting dialect of the upper south. On any given evening, a group of Thai-speaking Muslim men – including the village headman (*poo yai ban*) and his deputy (*poo chuay*) – could be found sitting around a roadside bamboo platform conversing in the southern Thai dialect on any number of topics. This evening conversation group rarely included anyone from outside the Thai-speaking Muslim community. The same was true of several other sites in the village, where most evenings groups of men or women (seldom both) would gather at mono-linguistic hangouts. Thus, while amicable interaction between Malay and Thai-speaking Muslims was a prominent feature of social life in Ban Lomyen, so too were patterns of social interaction that differentiated between the two groups.
Patterns of group identification and the extent of social distance between various groups were also made apparent by statements made to me by villagers themselves. In the early days of my research, several Buddhist villagers offered ‘friendly warnings’ about the inherent dangers of spending time in the Lower Village and in non-Buddhist settlements in general. For example, a Buddhist villager in Ban Lomyen suggested that I avoid spending time in villages that do not have a significant Thai-speaking Buddhist population, as such places were “too dangerous” (antarai gern pai). Oftentimes, however, Buddhist villagers made a clear distinction between Thai and Malay-speaking Muslims. On my first visit to the Or Ror Bor bunker, just a day into my stay in the village, a Buddhist man warned me that I should be very careful when dealing with Muslims and should come back to the bunker immediately if I encounter any problems. This warning was followed with the qualification that Thai-speaking Muslims were less dangerous than Malay-speaking Muslims who “don’t think like us” (kid mai muan rao). This distinction was also made by some Thai-speaking Muslims, several of whom expressed discomfort with my decision to relocate to Ban Namsai some seven months into the research period. A Thai-speaking Muslim woman suggested that it would be very difficult for me to determine whom I could and could not trust in Ban Namsai, since Malay-speaking Muslims “hide their true feelings” (sorn jittai tae jing). For their own part, Malay-speaking
Muslims sometimes expressed resentment toward other ethnic communities in the village. With respect to Thai-speaking Muslims, this was limited to some expressions of minor resentment that their co-religionists had not made greater efforts to speak baso nayu, which was often referred to in Thai as “passa Islam” (the Islamic language). Feelings of resentment toward Thai–speaking Buddhists on the part of Malay-speaking Muslims were rather stronger and were predicated on the perception that they were looked down upon by their Buddhist neighbours, some of whom – according to one man – referred to Malay Muslims as “goats” (pae). On numerous occasions, villagers belonging to all of three of these ethno-linguistic groupings remarked to me that there were no conflicts in the village between Muslims and Buddhists or between Thai-speakers and Malay-speakers, but relations were not as amicable as they had been in the past.

Economic activity in Ban Lomyen, as with most villages in Changpa Subdistrict, was centred on the cultivation and marketing of natural latex. Of the 144 houses surveyed in a comprehensive census survey of the village, only one reported no direct involvement in rubber cultivation or marketing. This was the household of a Malay-speaking Muslim widow who ran a breakfast restaurant in the Lower Village. Every other household was involved in the rubber economy as either a smallholder, a share-cropper, a hired-hand in a rubber field, a trader or, as was often the case, some combination thereof. There were two rubber buying businesses in the village, one in the Upper Village owned by a Malay-speaking Muslim and one in the Lower Village owned by a Thai-speaking Muslim. In Thailand, rubber is typically purchased from farmers in one of three forms: semi-processed smoked sheets, liquid rubber resin and coagulated “cup rubber” (kee yang). Rubber buyers in Ban Lomyen purchased “cup rubber,” which fetches the lowest price by weight of any of the three types, but requires few inputs and no extra labour to prepare. One hundred per cent of Thai-speaking Muslim households and 85 per cent of Malay-speaking households engaged in the sale of latex rubber reported that they sold their produce to middlemen as “cup rubber.” When asked, most respondents pointed out that the marginally better returns to producing semi-processed sheets were not worth the effort. Meanwhile, approximately half (48 per cent) of Buddhist

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5 This same implicit connection between the Malay language and Islamic identity is often made by Malay Muslims, who sometimes refer to their own language as “bahasa Islam.”
households reported that they preferred to process their rubber into smoked sheets that could be stored under their houses and taken to market in either the district or provincial capital when prices were good. This allowed them to get the best prices for their produce and to avoid the costs associated with selling to middlemen. Moreover, more than half (63 per cent) of those Buddhist households that sold their rubber as unprocessed “cup rubber” and 28 per cent of Malay-speaking Muslims doing the same transported their crop to buyers outside of the village, including to one of two major buyers in Ban Namsai. All Thai-speaking Muslims (100 per cent) sold their rubber to buyers in the village of Ban Lomyen itself.

The most commonly given reason given for transporting rubber for sale outside of the village was price. Respondents indicated that they could gain as much as 3 baht per kilo more by transporting their rubber to the major buyers in Ban Namsai and even more if they transported it to the district town. Again, the most common reason given for not doing so was that the extra income garnered was not worth the effort. What only a few respondents mentioned, however, was that many households in the village had debtor relationships with one or both of the local rubber buyers and were thus obliged to sell their rubber in the village. There were six dry goods shops in the village, the largest two being associated with rubber buying businesses. Given that rubber can only be harvested when the weather is dry and that Ban Lomyen experienced a prolonged annual rainy season from October to April, store credit was an essential income smoothing mechanism for many village households. Nearly half of the village’s Buddhist population, however, opted for an income smoothing strategy predicated on storing wealth in the form of semi-processed rubber sheets. Conversations with several such farmers in Ban Lomyen revealed that the declining price of rubber had all but eliminated the marginal returns to producing these rubber sheets, but that doing so still allowed them to avoid reliance on local buyers. Meanwhile, more than two dozen Buddhist households participated in informal rotating credit schemes (len chae) which operated

6 “Cup rubber” cannot be stored for more than a few days and must therefore be sold on shortly after being harvested.
exclusively within the Buddhist community and often with very high effective rates of interest.\textsuperscript{7}

In addition to the ownership of a rubber buying business or store, the most important dimension of economic differentiation in Ban Lomyen was the extent of land ownership. Despite the relatively recent and egalitarian origins of the village – all of the households who joined the village as members of the \textit{nikhom} were given rubber plots of roughly 18 rai – there existed significant variation in landholdings between households (see Figure 3). Almost half (45.5 per cent) of households in the village had landholdings of between 11 and 20 rai, with the majority of these being 18 rai plots distributed by the \textit{nikhom} project. However, nearly a third (32 per cent) of households were landless while a smaller number (6 per cent) had in excess of 31 rai, with three households claiming ownership of over 100 rai. In addition, a significant portion of the land surrounding the village was owned by absentee landowners, some of whom were former village residents. Most landless households earned a living as sharecroppers, splitting the proceeds of their rubber tapping activities with landowners on a 50/50 basis.\textsuperscript{8} Only one large landowner in the village employed agricultural labourers at a fixed salary. Notably, the three largest landowners in the village were the two owners of rubber buying businesses and the village headman.

\textsuperscript{7} These schemes were often highly predatory in nature, offering high rates of interest to those who were in most immediate need of the rotating fund and significant profits to those who could afford to wait. Similar “share groups” existed among some Thai-speaking Muslim households, but with much less onerous rates of interest (although, in contrast to the claims of the participants themselves, the loans were not interest-free).

\textsuperscript{8} The terms of sharecropping in Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai were better – from the perspective of the sharecropper – than those predominating in the rest of southern Thailand, where the landowner typically retains 60% of the proceeds. This difference can be explained by the relative lack of labour supply in these villages and by the extra work required to harvest rubber on the area’s steep and difficult terrain.
The second village examined in this dissertation, here referred to as “Ban Namsai,” differs from Ban Lomyen in several respects, the most notable being that it is populated entirely by Malay Muslims. This village’s mono-ethnic character is of analytical interest given that it was, until recently, home to a substantial Thai Buddhist population. As is discussed in greater detail in chapter 4, the entirety of the village’s Buddhist population evacuated the village following a spike in violent incidents apparently related to the upsurge in insurgent violence in the Deep South beginning in 2004. At the time of research, Ban Namsai was comprised of 109 households and a population of 581 persons. The village is located 5 kilometres by road west of Ban Lomyen at the intersection of a sealed road winding up the hills from the subdistrict’s central village. Most of the houses in Ban Namsai are constructed on one of two opposing slopes that fall steeply toward the middle of the village. The geographic and social centre of the village is marked by a green-domed mosque and adjacent *tadika* (prayer school). A state-run primary school occupies a large plot at the “rear” of the village (i.e. the area furthest from the main road access to the village. See Map 2 in the appendix). Unlike Ban Lomyen, Ban Namsai is also home to a primary health care facility (*anamai*) located

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9 The official administrative definition of the village includes a settlement on an island in a nearby reservoir. The Island settlement was not included in this research.
on a hilltop overlooking the village. Finally, an additional unit of Border Patrol Police Special Forces (Pon Rom) was stationed alongside the road leading up to the village. As discussed further in chapter 4, the Pon Rom in Ban Namsai occupied a number of houses that had been previously occupied and were still owned by members of the village’s now-relocated Buddhist population. Unlike the Pon Rom and Tor Chor Dor officers stationed in and around Ban Lomyen, the Pon Rom in Ban Namsai conducted regular patrols in the village that usually included relationship-building visits with the men who gathered each evening to pray at the village mosque (see chapter 4).

Another important point of difference between Ban Namsai and Ban Lomyen concerns the villages’ origins. Like Ban Lomyen, Ban Namsai falls under the administrative responsibility of the Self Help Land Settlement Program for Developing the South: Yala Province. Unlike, Ban Lomyen, however, Ban Namsai was not established as a nikhom village. Instead, the village owes its origins directly to a major infrastructure project that displaced several villages in the mid-1970s. All of the original inhabitants of Ban Namsai were residents of one of those villages. Ban Namsai was established in 1978 as one of several relocation sites for those affected by the project’s construction. As was the case in Ban Lomyen, those resettled in Ban Namsai were given a homestead and roughly 18 rai of land to cultivate rubber. These arrangements diverged from those in Ban Lomyen, however, in that the land was provided in compensation for the results of the infrastructure project and villagers were therefore not required to repay any loans in order to gain full legal title over it. In addition, the Thai government provided resettled villagers with plots that were already planted with rubber saplings (EGAT 1981).

As in Ban Lomyen, the most significant determinants of economic differentiation in Ban Namsai were the extent of land ownership and ownership of a rubber buying business. The distribution of land ownership in the village was somewhat more equal than that in Ban Lomyen, with 70 per cent of households in Ban Namsai owning between one and 20 rai of farming land and a 17 per cent rate of household landlessness (compared with figures of 59 per cent and 32 per cent, respectively, for Ban Lomyen.

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10 Recipients of rubber farming plots in Ban Namsai were granted a transferable form of land title, the boundaries of which were determined by aerial photographs, not cadastral survey. This type of title is known as “nor sor 3”
See Figure 4). Every household in Ban Namsai reported one or another form of direct involvement in the rubber economy. Agricultural labour arrangements, include sharecropping rates, were identical with those found in Ban Lomyen. With respect to ownership of rubber buying business, Ban Namsai was home to two relatively large operations, both of which had satellite operations in several neighbouring villages, including Ban Lomyen. These businesses dealt exclusively in “cup rubber,” buying, cleaning and drying the product before taking it for resale, usually at the rubber market in the provincial capital. All of the small-holding rubber farmers and sharecroppers interviewed in Ban Namsai reported that they sold their produce to local buyers in the form of cup rubber. Another factor distinguishing Ban Namsai from Ban Lomyen was the greater availability of supplementary income generating activates in the former village. For example, owing in part to its location at a relatively busy road junction, the village was able to support an all-day restaurant that had been in operation for several years. In addition, the village was situated only one kilometre from the shore of large lake and many residents supplemented their incomes by catching fish for both consumption and commercial sale. The village’s primary healthcare clinic also provided employment for a handful of village residents and, as discussed in some detail in chapter 8, several young men in the village were employed as labourers in a construction firm owned by the subdistrict mayor.
Another of the ways in which Ban Namsai differed from Ban Lomyen, quite dramatically, was with respect to patterns of social interaction and group division. None of the religious or linguistic divisions encountered in Ban Lomyen were present in ban Namsai. However, certain, less clear-cut divisions were apparent. One such division emerged during the campaign to replace the recently-deceased village headman (discussed in detail in chapter 8). It became apparent during this period that there existed two political camps in the village, each centred around a somewhat loosely defined kinship network. A second line of distinction existed between the large group of mostly married adult men who gathered at the mosque every evening to observe the final two of the day’s five obligatory prayers and a cohort of younger, mostly unmarried men who did not regularly attend the mosque. Several members of the younger cohort expressed to me their resentment of the judgmental gaze of the mosque-going set. One of the activities for which many of these young men feared judgement was the consumption of nam tom. Notably, the two contenders for the position of village
headman came to represent these two groups in the eyes of at least some villagers, who branded members of the younger candidate’s team “the narcotics group” (glum yaa sepdit). On the whole, however, Ban Namsai functioned socially much more as a single community that was the case in Ban Lomyen. That is true, however, only if one puts to the side the fact that the entire Buddhist population of the village had, several years before the period of research for this study, found it impossible to continue living as part of the Ban Namsai community.

2.6. Conclusion

It is worthwhile to review several characteristics that make the villages of Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai valuable sources of data for this study. The first concerns the ethno-religious makeup of the villages. The relative ethnic diversity of Ban Lomyen and the mono-ethnic character of Ban Namsai offer a valuable point of comparison when analyzing state-society relations in each village, but so too do the very different outcomes of what residents of both villages described as worsening inter-group relations, in the context of escalating violence and a concomitant increase in the state security presence. It is Ban Lomyen, however, that offers the most unique and valuable analytical leverage with respect to questions of ethnic boundary making and boundary shifting. This is largely due to the presence of a significant population of Thai-speaking Muslims who, this dissertation argues, occupy an interstitial position between Thai national identity and a Muslim identity that, in the Deep South in particular, sits in tension with widespread notions of “Thainess.” For a variety of reasons including a shared language, a history of intermarriage, their minority status in most of the upper south and the evolution of a “shared cosmos” of supernatural beliefs (Horstmann 2004; Burr 1988), Thai-speaking Muslims in the upper south region are widely considered to be thoroughly integrated into the Thai national community (Bajunid 2005: 8; Anderson 2010: 133; McCargo 2012a: 113). The same cannot be said of Malay-speaking Muslims, whose place in the Thai national community has been a matter of contention since the Deep South’s formal integration into the Thai state in the early 20th century. Thus, the
experiences of Thai Muslims in the Deep South offers unique insights into the limits of the inclusivity of "Thainess" and the ways in which the nature of state-society relations in the Deep South region in particular influence perceptions of "groupness" and belonging.

There also exist a number of characteristics shared between these two villages that, to some extent, simplify the analytical task of determining the influences of various social, economic and political factors on the reproduction of ethnic boundaries. The first is that both have relatively short and bounded histories. The fact that Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai had only existed for 30 and 35 years, respectively, at the time of research makes possible a reasonably complete account of their social, economic and political development. Second, the task of drawing valid observations from these two villages is, to a degree, simplified by their relatively uncomplicated and directly comparable economic profiles. As noted, virtually all of the inhabitants of these two villages are engaged in one way or another in the agricultural production of natural latex. The involvement of virtually every household in a single commodity production and marketing chain simplifies the task of determining the role of economic or class inequality in shaping inter-communal relations. The third factor rendering Ban Namsai and Ban Lomyen useful cases for the investigation of the role of state-society relations in the (re)production of inter-ethnic boundaries is that they are situated in close proximity to one another in the same administrative subdistrict. Thus, the residents of these villages interact with the same local government, state officials, development projects, economic support schemes and security environment. Moreover, the security situation – a central concern in any study of Thailand’s Deep South and one that varies significantly from one district to another – was, if not identical, very similar in these two villages.

Notwithstanding their suitability as sites for comparative ethnographic research, however, it must be recognized at the outset that these villages are neither typical of the region nor representative of it in any statistical sense. Among several reasons for this is that the population of the Deep South region is typically thought of as consisting of Malay Muslims who make up more than 80 per cent of the population and a mix of ethnically Thai and ethnically Chinese Buddhists who make up the remainder. The absence of an ethnically Chinese community represents something of a blind spot in this study and should be taken in consideration when assessing the degree to which these cases are representative of the Deep South region in general. However, the contention
forwarded in this chapter is that the cases under investigation offer a degree of analytical leverage in the investigation of inter-ethnic relations that more than offsets their shortcomings in terms of representativeness.
Chapter 3. Citizenship and Identity in Thailand

3.1. Introduction

This chapter traces the development of state-society relations in Thailand in order to make the argument that the essential relationship between the Thai state and the vast majority of its “citizens” retains asymmetric and contingent qualities characteristic of that between sovereign and subject. For the vast majority of Thailand’s population, full membership in the political community remains contingent on fulfilling state-defined goals of cultural, moral and educational development. In the context of a fundamentally hierarchical, Buddhist kingdom with power concentrated in what Baker and Pasuk (2009: 199) call “the most primate city on Earth”¹, the result is multiple layers of exclusion from full citizenship that correspond with a rural/urban divide, religious difference and ethno-cultural distance from the state-prescribed cultural ideal. In addition, the failure of democratic consolidation in the kingdom’s eight decades of post-absolutist history has meant that what rights Thailand’s subject/citizens do enjoy are susceptible to arbitrary revocation at the hands of a network of entrenched elites centred around the monarchy, military and civilian bureaucracy. In short, for a great many of Thailand’s nearly 70 million inhabitants, access to the benefits of membership in the political community remains contingent on the successful demonstration of loyal subjecthood and is at all times vulnerable to suspension on the grounds of ostensible threats to such indeterminate priorities as “national security” and “unity.” This condition is of particular relevance to state-society relations in the Deep South, where agents of

¹ Bangkok is roughly 40 times larger than the next largest city in the country.
the centralized state have long attempted – with decidedly mixed results – to cajole, coopt and coerce the local population into behaving a “good citizens” (phonlamuang dii).

The chapter proceeds in two major steps. The first establishes the necessary theoretical foundations for a discussion of citizenship in Thailand. Its first objective is to establish the conceptual relationship between subjecthood and citizenship. Notwithstanding what Jayal (2013: 3) calls a tendency to define this distinction in terms of a “morally loaded binar[y]” between “[t]he malodorousness of subjecthood and the fragrance of citizenship,” this chapter argues that the latter is best understood as a particular subcategory of the former. The second objective of the first section is to delve deeper in the idea of citizenship in order to identify its most important dimensions. Here it will be argued that the formally codified terms of citizenship must be understood within the sociological context of the polity in question, including the overlapping patterns of inclusion and exclusion such a context may or may not entail. The second major section applies the analytical tools specified in section one to the analysis of citizenship in Thailand along three principal dimensions: *extent, content* and *depth* (Isin and Turner 2002: 2). A concluding section revisits the central argument of the chapter: that citizenship in Thailand has retained, throughout the country’s modern history, key characteristics of premodern subjecthood. The conditions of subjecthood are fundamental to the state-society interface throughout the kingdom and they colour relations between individuals (or groups) and various branches of the state at all levels.

### 3.2. Citizenship and Subjecthood

The concepts of “citizenship” and “subjecthood” both refer to the relationship between individuals (or groups) and the polity, specifically as it pertains to the status of the claims that each makes on the other. In relations of subjecthood, the sovereign is in a position to make authoritative claims on the subject, while the subject is, at best, able to call upon the benevolence of the sovereign in requesting privileges. Conversely, in the case of citizenship, an implicitly contractual relationship exists between the citizen and
the sovereign in which both parties can make legitimate and enforceable claims on the other. The key concepts are those of rights and corresponding duties and the most important characteristic of these is that they are formalized in enforceable legal codes. Thus, as Charles Tilly explains, “[c]itizenship designates a set of mutually enforceable claims relating categories of persons to agents of governments” (Tilly 1997: 600). Such codified rights and duties can be considered the formal “content” of citizenship (Yashar 2005: 45-47; 2007: 68-69; Isin and Turner 2002: 2). Citizenship can thus be understood as a specific form of political subjecthood in which the inherent asymmetry in the relationship between subject and sovereign is offset, to a degree, by the existence of enforceable citizenship rights. Absent of these rights, the edifice of citizenship crumbles, laying bare the foundations of subjecthood on which it was built.

In perhaps the most influential 20th century elucidation of the concept, T.H. Marshall argued that citizenship comprises three distinct kinds of rights: civil, political and social (Marshall 2009 [1950]). Notwithstanding general agreement regarding the centrality of codified rights and duties to citizenship, however, several scholars have argued that Marshall’s definition fails to capture the full complexity of the idea (e.g. Mann 1987; Young 1989; Turner 1990). In attempting to remedy this, Bryan Turner (1993b: 2) offers an expanded definition of citizenship as “[a] set of practices (juridical, political, economic and cultural) which define a person as a component member of society, and which as a consequence shape the flow of resources to social groups.” According to Turner, the centrality of “practices” to this definition draws attention to the social construction of citizenship as a category of belonging. This definition is illustrative of the sociological orientation of much work in the field of citizenship studies that, while not denying the importance of codified rights to the notion of citizenship, characterizes “various political and social struggles for recognition and redistribution as instances of claim making, and hence, by extension, citizenship” (Isin and Turner 2002: 2). Thus, it is through making claims to recognition and redistribution that individuals and groups define themselves as members of the political community. The core arguments of this study are rooted in an understanding of citizenship that relates those claim-making practices to the formal-legal definition of citizenship in terms of membership, rights and obligations. Thus, the chapter proceeds with a framework for analyzing citizenship proposed by Isin and Turner (2002: 2-5) and that identifies three core dimensions of the concept: *extent*, *content* and *depth*. *Extent* refers to the criteria for inclusion in the
category “citizen.” Content, refers to the bundle of rights and obligations that the status of citizenship confers. Finally, depth refers to the status of citizenship as an identity category in relation to other identity categories that can (or cannot) be understood and accommodated within it (ibid.). Taken together, these three components present a more satisfactory conception of citizenship as a formalized, quasi-contractual relationship between the state and a clearly defined membership that both informs and is informed by the nested identities of its constituent members. In the empirical chapters that follow, these three dimensions of citizenship will be analysed in term of the day-to-day practices through which citizens confirm their membership in the category “citizen,” access the rights and entitlements that accompany membership in that category and negotiate their identities within it.

These three dimensions of citizenship (extent, content, and depth) facilitate a focused assessment of the development of citizenship in Thailand over the kingdom’s modern history. Before embarking on that path, however, it is important to specify one additional component that is rather particular to the Thai case: the frequent abrogation and redefinition of the codified relationship between the state and its subjects. As will be discussed in more detail below, the development of modern citizenship in Thailand began during the period of absolute monarchical rule in the late 19th century and emerged as a substantive reality with the introduction of constitutionalism following a 1932 coup d’état. Thereafter, an as-yet unbroken cycle of military coups became a permanent feature of the Thai political system, rendering the state-citizen relationship codified in the country’s 20 successive constitutions perpetually subject to arbitrary revocation. This cycle and the ever-present threat of “extra-constitutional” interventions into the kingdom’s politics has resulted in what David Streckfuss, borrowing from Giorgio Agamben, calls “the permanent state of exception”: the near-perpetual suspension of the rule of law in response to open-ended threats to the prevailing regime (Streckfuss 2011: 304). What remains constant and what these periodic, military-led “restarts” of the state-citizen relationship consistently reinforce are the core duties of subjecthood, most prominently unity and loyalty to the nation, religion and king. These duties are typically framed in terms of “Thainess” (kwanpenthai): a hegemonic identity discourse that serves as the principle disciplinary technology in the state-led effort to construct a national whole through the elimination of sub-national identities and the obfuscation of class cleavages.
Thailand’s oscillations between periods of authoritarian rule and interims of ostensible democratization are of central importance to understanding the nature of state-subject/citizen relations in the kingdom. The shifts in those relations that such oscillations bring about can be understood with reference to the three dimensions of citizenship outlined above. With regard to the dimension of extent, the shift between authoritarianism under the state of exception and democratization under a civilian government is of little direct consequence; these shifts do not entail any change in the ranks of national membership. Regarding the content of citizenship, however, the consequences are clear: the abrogation or suspension of constitutions undermines the very foundation of citizenship rights. While Thailand’s post-coup governments have, in most cases, adopted interim constitutions that may be seen to represent the continuation of a circumscribed form of rights-based citizenship, those constitutions (including that put in place following the coup of May 2014) typically contain clauses that confer superseding power to the generals who control the state. Under such conditions, whatever rights citizens enjoy take on the character of privileges conferred and potentially revoked by those exercising sovereign authority. This hollowing out of the content of citizenship under Thailand’s frequent episodes of authoritarian constitutional recalibration stands in contrast to the latter’s effect on the dimension of citizenship relating to identity and culture. Military usurpations of state power in Thailand are typically justified in terms of threats to the core pillars of the state-constructed Thai national identity (Nation, Religion and King). In both rhetoric and action, post-coup regimes demand strict conformity to the tenets of this identity discourse, while behaviours that are at odds with the regime’s priorities are labeled “un-Thai.” Possessing the requisite cultural competencies to perform the role of ‘loyal subject’ thus becomes essential to avoiding suspicion as a potential threat to ‘national security.’ While issues of identity are important to a full conception of citizenship, they are absolutely central to understanding the condition of subjecthood upon which the unstable facade of Thai citizenship is constructed.
3.3. Citizenship in Thailand: Extent, Content and Depth

3.3.1. Extent: Who has the right to have rights?

The question of the extent of citizenship concerns the exclusivity of citizenship as a meta-right: the right to have rights (Bellamy 2010: xviii). As it pertains to modern citizenship (as opposed to classical and post-national forms of citizenship with which the present chapter is not centrally concerned) the boundaries of citizenship are, in the majority of cases, coterminous with the boundaries of membership in the nation-state. The nation is, of course, a thoroughly modern phenomenon and its emergence both temporally coincided with and was conceptually intertwined with the development of modern citizenship. Nevertheless, there exists significant variation in the criteria employed by various nation-states to delineate their membership. By and large these variations can be analysed with reference to the juridical concepts of *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis* (the “right of the soil” and the “right of blood”). The nation-state refers to a political unit whose boundaries are coterminous with those of a defined nation, or an “imagined” community bound together by a shared history and, typically, a common language (see: Anderson 1983). The boundaries of the state are territorial, but the boundaries of the nation are genealogical. The principle of *jus sanguinis* confers citizenship status on the basis of ancestry: only those born to members of the nation are entitled to citizenship. The concept of *jus soli*, in the other hand, confers citizenship on the basis of birthplace: citizenship is the birthright of those born within the geographic territory of the state.

In practice, there are very few cases in which a given nation-state confers citizenship solely on the basis of one of these two juridical principles (Jayal 2013: 13). Even Germany, which was once held as the quintessential case of *jus sanguinis*-based citizenship, has, since 1998, addressed the ambiguous status of its immigrant population through the limited application of *jus soli* (ibid.; Habermas 1992: 4). Moreover, there exist in most countries alternative paths to citizenship, including the naturalization of resident aliens, which is typically contingent on learning an official language, adopting certain
behavioural norms and demonstrating some knowledge of the adopting country’s history and culture. Since the early 20th century, the criteria for formal inclusion in Thailand’s political community have been characterized by a similar combination of *jus sanguinis*, *jus soli* and cultural competency-dependant naturalization. Prior to the 20th century, however, the very nature of political sovereignty in mainland southeast Asia was such that citizenship in the modern sense was scarcely conceivable. Understanding the transformation of the relationship between geography and sovereignty that took place over the latter half of the 19th century is essential to appreciating the obstacles to full membership for millions of people who occupy the peripheries of citizenship in Thailand\(^2\) today.

The transformation of Siamese subjects into modern citizens can be traced to the kingdom’s encounter with European colonialism in the mid-19th century. Hitherto, the organization of political authority in the geographical region that comprises present-day Thailand was characterized by multiple, overlapping, hierarchically-related nodes of outwardly radiating power. These nodes of power (*muang* in Thai) were centred in towns and had no defined territorial boundaries; their influence simply dissipated as distance from the town increased. By the turn of the 19th century, the first kings of the Chakri dynasty had established Bangkok as the preeminent *muang* in the region. Its relations with outlying *muang* ranged from indirect control through quasi-independent state ministries to looser vassal relations grounded in the annual presentation of symbolic tribute. This arrangement came under stress, however, when first the British and later the French began establishing colonial protectorates in neighbouring regions. Following the conclusion of the Anglo-Burmese war of 1824-6, the British impressed upon the Siamese crown the need to clarify and demarcate the boundaries between the Siamese kingdom and Britain’s new colonial acquisitions (Wyatt 2003: 169). This demand led to concerted efforts on the part of the Siamese to press their claims to sovereignty over outlying *muang* to the north, east and south.

The imperative to define the territorial boundaries of the Siamese kingdom demanded a thoroughgoing overhaul of the system of relations between the centre and

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\(^2\) The name Thailand was officially adopted in 1939. Prior to that the kingdom was known to outsiders as Siam and its people as Siamese. In this dissertation, the name Siam is used in reference to the pre-constitutional regime that ended in 1932.
periphery. The resultant reforms culminated in the advent of absolute royal authority over a territorially defined kingdom. The events of this period amounted to a scramble for colonial territory in which the Siamese were active participants (Thongchai 1994: 107). Siamese officials adopted European technologies and techniques – surveying, mapping, and historical research – to substantiate territorial claims. The crown entered into treaties with British and French colonial authorities, on some occasions under implied or imminent military threat. These various treaties established, for the first time in history, a finite spatial definition of the Siamese kingdom. The introduction of modern mapping and the process of defining territorial boundaries introduced an entirely new conception of the physical and political entity of Siam. At the same time, it demanded a new conception of sovereignty within that territory. Hitherto, the king had occupied a position of preeminence among a number of powerful noble families, many of which controlled largely autonomous state ministries or hereditary provincial governorships (Vickery 1970: 868). Under king Chulalongkorn (Rama V r.1868-1910), this highly decentralized system of provincial and tributary administration was replaced with an administrative apparatus fashioned after those of colonial territories elsewhere in the region, most notably British India. Employing a shrewd and patient strategy of progressive centralization, Chulalongkorn subsumed multiple nodes of overlapping sovereignty into a mode of kingship that resembled European absolutism. This dramatic reformulation of the relationship between geography and political authority precipitated an equally dramatic redefinition of political subjecthood in Siam, which was henceforth to be understood as unmediated, undivided and unambiguous.

Chulalongkorn’s system of centralized administration of a clearly defined territory transformed the Siamese kingdom into a modern state in the European mould. The people who occupied its boundaries were now, in theory, enmeshed in a direct relationship with the Siamese crown as its subjects. The process of treaty-making through which Siam had established its political boundaries, however, had rendered Siamese leaders sensitive to their military inferiority vis-a-vis European colonialists. One incident in particular – the French naval blockade of the Chao Praya River in 1893 that forced Siam to cede claims to present-day Laos and Cambodia – impressed upon Chulalongkorn and his advisors the need to further solidify their hold over outlying regions (Wyatt 2003: 204). The king was convinced that staving off future colonial aggression could only be achieved by establishing Siam’s place among the "civilized
nations” of the world (Baker and Pasuk 2009: 69). Nation building thus became a central objective of the late 19th century absolutist regime. Prince Damrong Rajanuphab (1862-1943), the king’s half-brother and the key architect of his system of centralized administration, began to espouse the view that the numerous ethnic groups that spoke various Tai dialects were in fact members of a single “Thai” nation (ibid.: 64). Some of the first textbooks produced for use in state schools emphasized commonality of language and religion as indicative of the natural affection members of the Thai nation should have for one another (Kesboonchoo-Mead 2004: 89). Thai-language copies of treaties with colonial powers began to feature the name Prathet Thai (Thailand) in place of Siam and to refer to the population of the kingdom as Sanchart Thai or ‘[people] of Thai nationality’ (Baker and Pasuk 2009: 64).

These early references to the Thai nation were clearly imitative of the waves of nationalism that had swept across Europe in the 19th century. It was only after Chulalongkorn’s death in 1910, however, that his son and successor Vajiravuth (Rama VI r.1910-25) put the full machinery of state-led nation building into operation. Vajiravuth’s nation-building project took on the characteristics of an “anticipatory strategy” employed by several European dynasts in order to pre-empt the emergence of popular nationalist movements and thereby retain their positions atop expansive and ethnically-diverse empires (Anderson 1983: 82). Benedict Anderson – borrowing from Seton-Watson (1977) – termed this strategy “official nationalism.” It involved the use of state-controlled primary education, official propaganda, the rewriting of history and “endless affirmations of the identity of dynasty and nation” to inculcate a conception of the naturalness of political community and the king’s place at its head (Anderson 1983: 101). In the case of Siam under Vajiravuth, this included references to the purported historic continuity of the Thai ethnic community or “race” and the central importance to that continuity of the institutions of the monarchy and the Buddhist religion (Barmé 1993: 27-31). Vajiravuth became a prodigious writer of essays, speeches and dramatic plays through which he disseminated his conception of a racially homogenous Thai nation with the king as both its foremost member and its physical embodiment. His nationalist doctrine was summed up by the shibboleth “Nation, Religion, King” (Chat, Sasana, Pramahakasart), in which the component parts were to be understood to be fundamentally indivisible.
Vajiravuth’s nationalism was at least in part motivated by the threat of growing nationalism amongst a sizeable Chinese diaspora that was concentrated in Bangkok and held an increasingly dominant place in its commercial sector (Baker and Pasuk 2009: 114-116). The perceived problem of divided loyalties among the Chinese population also prompted the promulgation of Siam’s first nationality law (Nationality Act 1913), which granted citizenship to anyone born on Thai soil as well as those born to a Thai father (ibid.114). This law, which combined elements of *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli*, was intended to foster the assimilation of Chinese residents into the Thai mainstream. At around the same time, a naturalization law was introduced (Naturalization Act 1911) that allowed for Chinese residents “of good character and in possession of sufficient means of support” and who had resided in the kingdom for a minimum of 5 years to be naturalized as citizens (Skinner 1957: 250). Notwithstanding the subsequent introduction of laws limiting the rights of those born to Chinese parents (later revoked), these nationality and naturalization laws established a more or less enduring framework of the formal criteria for membership in the Thai polity. Naturalization laws have been adjusted and reformed at several points in Thailand’s post-absolutist history, primarily in response to the perceived threat of communist infiltration of Thai society and to address the naturalization (or not) of many of the millions of foreign nationals and stateless people who reside within the kingdom. Under some circumstances, Thailand’s naturalization laws allow for discretion on the part of officials to determine whether applicants have sufficiently assimilated themselves into Thai society (Phunthip 2006: 41). However, the fundamental criteria for obtaining citizenship in the kingdom were by and large established within the first decades of the 20th century (ibid.).

3.3.2. Content: Rights, Duties and the Formalized Social Contract

The content of citizenship, refers to the bundle of rights and responsibilities that accrue to members of the political community (i.e. citizens). The codified and legally enforceable content of citizenship is fundamentally what differentiates citizenship as a distinct form of political subjecthood. Historically, the extension of citizenship rights
typically coincides with the introduction of duties beyond those associated with non-rights-bearing political subjecthood. For example, the extension of political rights to (male) citizens of the first French Republic coincided with expanded duties to perform military service under universal conscription (Hanagan 1997: 397). In Thailand, on the other hand, universal conscription was instituted in 1905, but it was not until 1932 and the coup d’état that brought an end to royal absolutism that codified rights became a feature of the Thai political system. Over the ensuing decades, however, the serial abrogation of constitutions became an engrained feature of the Thai political system. As a result, citizenship in Thailand has been rendered a precarious and transient condition, while a notion of subjecthood centred around the performance of duty has remained constant.

Prior to the 1932 coup, notions of public law in Thailand were rooted in two distinct monarchical traditions: the Brahmanical concept of the Devaraja or ‘god-king’ and the Buddhist concept of the Dhammaraja or ‘righteous king’ (Harding 2011: 6). Drawing on the assertion of the latter tradition that a legitimate king acts in accordance with and is subject to religious law, some Thai commentators have argued that this form of kingship is essentially constitutional. Prominent royalist politician Seni Parmoj, for example, characterized an apparently ancient stone inscription listing the freedoms enjoyed by subjects of the Sukhothai kingdom under King Ramkamhaeng (r.1279?-1298) as the Thai equivalent of the Magna-Carta (Connors 2008: 145). Throughout its pre-1932 history, however, Siam remained an explicitly hierarchical society in which elites exercised arbitrary authority over their social inferiors and the application of law hinged on the relative social stature of the parties in question (Wyatt 2003: 255). For these reasons it cannot be cogently argued that the codified laws of pre-constitutional Siam conferred rights upon the political subjects of the kingdom. Thus, while the language of citizenship began to appear in school textbooks and state rhetoric in the latter part of the fifth reign (Baker and Pasuk 2009: 111; Kesbookchoo-Mead 2004: 89), it was not until the introduction of constitutionalism in 1932 that this language began to reflect an effective reality.

The end of absolutism in Thailand came about, at least in part, as a result of growing discontent with Vajiravuth’s elitist official nationalism. In particular, an increasingly independently-minded stratum of educated and upwardly mobile commoner
bureaucrats had developed a sense of their own merit and were unwilling to submit to the constraints of hierarchies dictated by birth (Baker and Pasuk 2009: 112; Wyatt 2003: 240-241). Having encountered a range of alternative political ideas while studying in Europe, a core group of these commoner bureaucrats began to challenge the view of sovereignty as the sole property of the king and of the king as the personification of the nation. Upon his death in 1925, Vajiravuth was succeeded by his younger brother (Prajadhipok r.1925-35) whose efforts to balance state budgets led to inter-ministerial conflict and became a subject of grievance among the largely state-employed urban population (Wyatt 2003: 244). His reign was further destabilized when the onset of the Great Depression severely damaged both the rice export economy and the state’s finances (ibid.: 245). In June of 1932, with the king vacationing at his seaside palace south of the capital, a group of military officers commanding only a small number of troops carried out a coup d’etat and “invited” the king to submit to a constitution. Thus ended the era of Siamese absolutism.

The years immediately following the coup were characterized by a struggle between the “coup promoters” in the People’s Party (kanna ratsadon) and royalists who attempted to retain and institutionalize elite privilege. After much backroom negotiation, the kingdom adopted a “permanent” constitution containing the assertion that “the supreme power in the country belongs to the people” (quoted in Baker and Pasuk 2009: 119). The 1932 constitution also contained the first clear expression of civic rights, including rights to free speech, freedom of religion, freedom of movement and equality before the law, limited only by the imperative to maintain order and the good morality of the people (Connors 2007: 41). Notably, these rights were to be the province of all people, and not the exclusive preserve of citizens per se (Harding 2011: 13). The extension of political rights, however, was more limited, being constrained by a provision limiting democratic elections for representatives to the National Assembly to one half of the total seats, with the other half to be included once half of the population had completed primary education or after a period of ten years, whichever came first (Connors 2007: 1). In preparation for this eventuality, the government began producing ‘citizenship manuals’, which have since become a regular feature of Thai citizenship pedagogy. These manuals (and the many others that have followed them) are designed to address what Michael Connors (2007: 9) refers to as the “people-problem”: the purported need to delay the introduction of full democratic participation as a
consequence of “the people” (prachachon) lacking the education, discipline or moral qualities necessary to discharge their democratic duties responsibly.

The scheduled introduction of more extensive political rights was thereafter disrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War. Fearing full-blown invasion, Thailand’s military-dominated government aligned itself with the Japanese and declared war on the Allied Forces. The key figure in Thailand’s war-time government was Plaek Phibulsongkarm (Phibul), a self-promoted Field Marshal and original member of the 1932 promoters group. Following the war’s conclusion, however, Phibul’s alignment with the Japanese made his continuation as Prime Minister politically impossible. He was succeeded by leading members of an underground resistance movement (Seri Thai or the “Free Thais”) led by Dr. Pridi Banomyong, a co-member of the original “Promoters” group who had been its most strident critic of royal powers and prerogatives (Baker and Pasuk 2009: 149). Pridi oversaw the introduction of a new and more liberal constitution in 1946 and headed a government consisting of an uneasy alliance between liberals and royalists (Connors 2007: 43). Within months, however, this alliance was upended by the mysterious death of the young King Ananda Mahidol by a single gunshot wound to the head. A coup in 1947 returned Phibul to power, this time heading a government comprising militarists and royalists united by a common opposition to Pridi’s liberal agenda. The following five years were marked by a low-key civil war between the military government and the remnants of the Seri Thai, backed by sympathizers in the Royal Thai Navy. New constitutions were introduced in 1947 and 1949, both of which instilled greatly expanded powers in the king and his privy council (Harding 2011: 15). This military-royalist alliance came apart, however, when, in 1951, Phibul staged yet another coup and reinstated the 1932 charter. The military had once again asserted its dominance in Thailand’s political hierarchy. It would not relinquish that position for the next two decades.

The conflicts leading up to the 1951 coup (and the coup itself) helped propel Police General Phao Siyanon and Army General Sarit Thanarat to levels of power that rivalled that of Phibul (Thak 2007: 56-62). A tripartite power-sharing arrangement held between them for half a decade, but in 1957, amidst a series of political crises, Sarit pushed both Phibul and Phao aside and assumed sole leadership of the kingdom. Sarit established a distinctly paternalistic authoritarian regime in which anti-communism was
presented as a core component of Thai national identity (ibid.: 78-80). He suspended the constitution and instituted a heavy-handed authoritarian regime in service of what he described as a total “revolution” (patthiwat) of Thai society. A major component of his “revolution” was the rejection of Phibul’s westernizing reforms in favour of “indigenous” political principles subsumed under the ambiguous concept of “Thai-style democracy” (prachatipatai baep Thai). Whereas the “citizenship manuals” of the 1930s and 40s had attempted to mould the Thai people in a particularly western image of citizenship, Sarit perceived western institutions and Thai culture to be fundamentally incompatible (Connors 2007: 61). Thus, the Sarit years were witness to yet another reconfiguration of the relationship between the individual and the state that clawed back the language of rights and reinforced the emphasis on the performance of duty. These duties were primarily expressed in terms of the maintenance of order and unity through obedience to the state and loyalty to the nation. This message was conveyed to great effect by King Bhumipol (Rama IX r.1946-2016), who, with Sarit’s encouragement, toured peripheral regions of the country urging support for the government’s national security agenda (Thak 2007: 205).

It was during this period that Thai politics were thrust into what David Streckfuss – following Giorgio Agamben (1998) – calls the “state of exception” (Streckfuss 2011: 304). The “state of exception” refers to the suspension the rule of law under “extraordinary circumstances” that pose an existential threat to the prevailing order. Streckfuss argues that, beginning under the Sarit regime, such extraordinary measures have been normalized as an integral part of the Thai political system. While the rhetoric of democracy, constitutions and citizenship remain intact, the sovereign (or his representatives) routinely suspended the rule of law in response to circumstances that are never fully resolved. In the Thai case, the state of exception was justified with reference to two interconnected problems: an open-ended threat to national security in the form of communism, and the imperative to establish order (kwamriaproi) in order to promote development (kanpattana). The latter imperative was consistent with a developmentalist doctrine that, drawing inspiration from American theorists like Samuel P. Huntington (1968), prioritized the establishment of order as a necessary prerequisite to the development of liberal democracy (Connors 2007: 70-71). While it is by no means self-evident that Sarit and his successors intended to develop Thailand’s political system toward such a liberal democratic outcome, it is clear it that, from the Sarit period forward,
the periodic suspension of the rule of law has become an ingrained feature of Thailand’s politics that should not be viewed as an aberration. At all times since the late 1950s, the state of exception in Thailand has been either an extant or immanent condition.

Sarit died in 1963, leaving behind a trail of corruption and embezzlement that had been well-hidden during his time as Prime Minister. His successor, General Thanom Kittikachorn, had long been one of Sarit’s closest deputies, but lacked the latter’s popular image as a charismatic and effective ‘tough guy’ (nak leng). With the support of the United States Overseas Mission (USOM), Thanom looked to a limited return to electoral democracy as a means of shoring up his legitimacy. This effort saw the revival of citizenship pedagogy intended to produce “good citizens” versed in a narrowly-defined conception of democratic culture (Connors 2007: 70). Meanwhile, the US lavished Thailand’s Border Patrol Police (Thor Chor Dor) with military equipment and funding, which they employed toward the ruthless suppression of rural unrest (Baker and Pasuk 2009: 149). In spite of (or, perhaps, because of) this heavy-handed approach, the Communist Party of Thailand grew substantially throughout the 1960s and, by the end of the decade, was engaging in regular armed clashes with Thai security forces. Waning American enthusiasm for military engagement in Vietnam, however, signaled to the Thanom regime the instability of the American support upon which it had long depended. Seeking at least the appearance of a democratic mandate, Thanom reintroduced a permanent constitution and successfully contested a general election in 1969. However, he and his allies quickly grew weary of checks on their power and staged an auto-coup in 1971. Nonetheless, by 1973 student-led protests demanding a return to constitutionalism signalled the death-throes of the regime. After a botched military operation left scores of protesters dead, King Bhumipol intervened and the Thanom clique was forced into exile.

The events of 1973 marked a revolutionary departure from more than two decades of military dominance over the Thai state. With a civilian government in place, a new constitution, and elections scheduled for 1975, the Thai political scene was suddenly animated by an unprecedentedly vibrant public sphere. Students, workers and farmers organized themselves and began articulating visions of a more just and democratic society. Intellectuals published critiques of traditional hierarchies and elite privilege. Students began travelling to the provinces, offering ‘political education’ to
hitherto politically passive villagers (Baker and Pasuk 2009: 189). At the same time, however, this new activism – much of it distinctively leftist in orientation – aroused the suspicion of conservative elites, the royal family included. With support from the military, police and monarchy, the ranks of rightist organizations like the shadowy Nawaphon ("new force"), the immensely popular Village Scouts and a violent rightist militia known as the Red Guar (krating daeng) began to swell (Bowie 1997: 11). In 1976, Thanom's return from exile sparked major student protests centred at Thammasat University. On October 5, 1976 several newspapers published photographs that purportedly showed students hanging the crown prince in effigy. Military controlled radio stations broadcast calls for Village Scouts to mass at the University, referring to students as "burdens on the land" and imploring patriots to “Kill them! Kill them!” (Bowie 1997: 25). Early the next morning, heavily armed units of Border Patrol Police and municipal police – backed by the Village Scouts, Red Guar and Nawaphon – launched an all-out assault on the university that soon degenerated into a nightmarish orgy of violence. There are no reliable figures of how many students lost their lives – the official figure of 44 is hardly plausible – but the day remains probably the deadliest incidence of state violence against the people in Thailand’s modern history. By the late evening, the National Administrative Reform Council (a coalition of Army, Navy and Air Force officers) had taken control of the government.

The years immediately following the 1976 massacre were witness to the most stridently authoritarian regime in Thailand’s history (Connors 2007: 92-3). It was during this period that Prime Minister Thanin Kraivixien set in motion a new discourse on the exceptionalism of Thai democracy, which he termed “Democracy with the King as Head of State” (prachatiphatai thi mi phramahakasat pen pramuk). While the king’s position as head of state had been a feature of Thai politics since 1932, this new label represented a more formalized version of the “royalist liberal” ideology, which embraced an extra-constitutional role for the monarch as a final arbiter in times of crisis (Connors 2007: 184-185; 2008: 145-146). By definition, this extra-constitutional role for the king is nowhere codified in law, but Thailand’s strict lèse-majesté legislation serves to protect any ‘extra-legal’ actions that meet with the king’s endorsement. Notably, the penalties associated with violating that law were significantly increased in the wake of the 1976 massacre (Streckfuss 2011: 105). Thanin’s tenure as Prime Minister was short-lived and from 1980 to 1988 the staunchly royalist General Prem Tinsulanond led a partially-
elected government under a system of "semi-democracy." Top positions in that government were reserved for military men while limited elections opened the way for a new breed of businessman-cum-politician to enter the political scene. As in previous decades, the 1980s witnessed the production and dissemination of citizenship manuals to prepare the populace for an eventual return to full democracy (Connors 2007: 143-145). By opening the political sphere to the limited participation of civilian politicians, however, the Prem regime exposed itself to challenges to the military’s dominance of the Thai state.

The 1988 election resulted in a civilian assuming the position of prime minister for the first time in over a decade. Chatichai Choonhahvan led a government dominated by businessmen who sought to establish greater civilian control over the apparatus of the Thai state. However, their attempts to seize control over military budgets and the boards of state enterprises rankled senior bureaucrats and, in February 1991, a group of army officers staged a coup. Elections were held under a military-installed constitution 1992, after which the leader of the outgoing junta, General Suchinda Kraprayun, reneged on a promise not to stay on as Prime Minister. This move sparked a major protest movement that was soon met with violent military repression. Once again King Bhumipol intervened and, in grainy footage broadcast live on television, admonished the general and protest leader Chamlong Srimuang to bring an end to the conflict. The scene of these two powerful men prostrating themselves in front of the king and accepting his fatherly commands greatly enhanced the king’s already considerable barami (innate charismatic authority) (Hewison 1997: 2). It also cemented Bhumipol’s position as the final arbiter in Thailand’s “Democracy with the King as Head of State.”

The protests against the Suchinda government that began in May, 1992 involved hundreds of thousands of participants representing the salaried middle class, students, rural migrants and workers. The role of popular protest in overthrowing an unwanted military-dominated government lent new weight to the segment of the population who aimed to influence politics from “outside the system” (nok rabob) (Pasuk and Baker 1997: 33). Civil society groups including the Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD) and labour groups organized under the Confederation for Democracy (CFD) then channelled this momentum into a campaign for constitutional reform (Connors 2007: 162). In 1996, the parliament established a Constitutional Drafting Committee that
produced what is widely held to be the most liberal constitution in the country’s history. It contained a more thoroughgoing elaboration of the rights and freedoms accorded to Thai citizens and mandated the decentralization of government to facilitate democratic participation at the local level (see chapter 6). It also stipulated the creation of a number of independent oversight bodies including an Election Commission, a National Counter Corruption Commission, a National Human Rights Commission, an ombudsman’s office and a Constitutional Court.

As Michael Connors (2012) argues, the 1997 constitution represented a compromise between statist conservatives and royalist liberals, wherein an elaborate system of checks and balances left intact the corporate interests of the military, monarchy and bureaucracy. The strength of this alliance was put to the ultimate test, however, by an unprecedentedly popular political movement centred around telecoms billionaire Thaksin Shinawatra. Thaksin rose to power on the strength of an unparalleled mastery of the political landscape brought into being by the 1997 constitution. In the wake of the 1997 financial crisis, he cobbled together an alliance between domestic capitalists threatened by IMF-mandated economic liberalization and presented a policy platform to voters centred on debt relief, access to credit and universal health care (Hewison 2004: 514-518). In the 2001 national elections, Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai (“Thais love Thai”) party won the largest share of seats in the House of Representatives and subsequently expanded that share into an absolute majority by merging with Chavalit Yongchaivudh’s Kwam Wang Mai (“New Aspiration”) party. On the economic front, his policies met with immediate success. In 2002 economic growth began to accelerate and real GDP/capita exceeded the pre-crisis high (Pasuk and Baker 2012: 216). However, Thaksin’s efforts to consolidate power throughout the country posed a direct threat to entrenched networks of power centred around the bureaucracy, military and monarchy (i.e. the aforementioned “network monarchy”). Meanwhile, his concerted efforts to undermine the independent watchdog organizations established by the 1997 constitution and the blatant disregard for human rights evidenced by his 2003 “war on drugs” rankled liberals and international human rights organizations alike.

Beginning in 2005, an anti-Thaksin protest movement emerged under the leadership of former Thaksin ally and media mogul Sondhi Limthongkul. That movement
– informally dubbed the “Yellow Shirts” ³– ballooned in the wake of Thaksin’s tax-free sale of Shin Corp to a Singaporean conglomerate for 73 Billion Baht (approximately US$1.88 billion) (Baker and Pasuk 2009: 269-270). The Yellow Shirt movement (officially named the People’s Alliance for Democracy or PAD) comprised a relatively narrow membership dominated by the urban middle class. Nonetheless, it was instrumental in lending the appearance of popular legitimacy to Thaksin’s ouster by way of a 2006 military coup (Glassman 2010: 1307). The PAD thereafter dissolved itself, but it sprang to life again in 2008 when, under a constitution specifically designed to prevent such an outcome, the pro-Thaksin People’s Power Party (PPP) won the first post-coup elections. The following year, the Constitutional Court dissolved the PPP, paving the way for the Democrat Party to negotiate a coalition government with former Thaksin stalwart and power broker Newin Chidchob (Askew 2010b: 42-43). This prompted the emergence of another protest movement – the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) or “Red Shirts” – that begin staging its own protests against what it saw as elite manipulation of the state. In mid-March 2010, the UDD began holding mass rallies in Bangkok, which almost immediately prompted counter rallies on the part of government supporters, most importantly the PAD. These rallies and counter-rallies set the stage for a violent crackdown by the army that left scores of red-shirt protesters dead (Human Rights Watch 2010).

To some extent, the street protest politics that gripped Thailand from 2005-2010 reflected the manipulation of popular sentiments by competing elites (McCargo 2012b: 190; Crispin 2012: 116-118). However, while there is undoubtedly some truth to the assertion that Thailand’s rally politics have become just another “way of doing political business” (McCargo 2012b: 192), anthropological and survey-based research (e.g. Prapart 2011; Walker 2013) suggests that structural changes in the rural economy of Thailand have engendered a new sense of political efficacy among many of the rural people who joined the Red Shirt movement. In the most simplistic telling, these feelings of efficacy are the result of Thaksin’s programmatic political platform that appealed directly to the interests of the subaltern classes. As Andrew Walker (2013: 224) points out, however, Thaksin’s pro-poor policies were emblematic of a structural shift in the

³ Movement members wore yellow shirts to symbolize their commitment to “protecting the monarchy.” In Thai tradition, yellow is associated with Monday, the day of the king’s birth.
Thai economy that has origins in the 1970s and that changed the state’s relationship to the rural economy from one of surplus extraction to one of subsidization. This subsidization has facilitated the substantial diversification of the rural economy, which – alongside the increased prevalence of urban migration to gain access to salaried employment – has been key to achieving massive reductions in absolute poverty (between 1988 and 2010, the two-dollar-a-day poverty headcount ratio (PPP) fell from 41 per cent to 3.5 per cent (World Bank Database 2015)). At the same time, however, inequality remains very high, particularly as measured in terms of wealth (in 2007 the top 10 per cent of families controlled 51 per cent of the country’s wealth and owned approximately 90 per cent of privately-owned land (Hewison 2015: 1)). Increasing rural incomes have engendered increasing awareness – through such means as television ownership, improved access to education or having a relative working and living in the city – of the lavish lifestyles of the urban elite. Rural people have grown more aware of the inequality that permeates Thai society and less willing to accept it a natural or inevitable condition. This outcome illustrates the fundamental contradiction of decades of manual-based citizenship pedagogy within a system of government that constantly withholds or withdrawals the extension of substantive citizenship rights. As Pasuk and Baker (2012: 273) argue, notwithstanding the role of political elites in mobilizing the masses, Thailand’s protest politics have been motivated to a significant extent by genuine grievance.

The bloodshed and arson on the streets of Bangkok in May 2010 did not mark an end to Thailand’s political crisis. Elections in 2011 once again brought a pro-Thaksin party to power, this time headed by his younger sister, Yingluck Shinawatra. Despite managing to achieve a relatively stable grip on power for over two years, the Yingluck government miscalculated badly in the latter half of 2013 when it tried to push through an amnesty bill that would have facilitated Thaksin’s return to the country. In early November 2013, demonstrators began staging sit-ins in Bangkok to protest the amnesty bill. Despite the government’s guarded efforts to appease their demands, the movement’s charismatic leader (former Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban) gradually expanded the movement’s reason d’être to include forcing the government’s resignation to make way for an unelected “People’s Council.” He styled his movement
the People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC)\(^4\) and labeled its supporters the “Great Mass of the People” (\textit{Muan Maha Prachachon}). Supporters of the Yingluck government, meanwhile, were repeatedly portrayed as “red buffalos”\(^5\) or “uneducated people” who only supported the “Thaksin regime” because he gave them money. The movement’s rallies paralyzed the capital for months and succeeded in preventing the conduct of a snap election in early February. After standing on the side lines far longer than had historically been the norm, the military finally charged into the fray on May 20, 2014, declaring martial law and commanding that the leaders of the two factions meet to negotiate a solution under military supervision. After only one day of such negotiations, Army Commander-in-chief Prayuth Chan-ocha had all of the attendees arrested and suspended the constitution. Four days later, King Bhumipol gave the coup his royal endorsement. Thus, the state of exception was reinstated and the notion – however tenuous – that Thailand’s populace might be on a path to a more substantive civic, political and social citizenship rights was put to rest.

\subsection*{3.3.3. Depth: Citizenship, Cultural and National Identity}

The third component of citizenship, which – following Isin and Turner (2002) – is referred to here as “\textit{depth},” concerns questions of citizenship’s connections to national identity and the extent to which other categories of belonging are accommodated by or lie in tension with the category of “citizen.” For much of the post-war period of the 20th century, theoretical discussions of citizenship were dominated by formal-legal conceptions based on Marshall’s highly influential formulation. A boom in sociological inquiry into the nature of citizenship beginning in the 1980s, however, served to highlight the shortcomings of the formalist perspective when faced with feminist, critical-racial and post-modernist critique. One of the most influential such critiques came from Iris Marion

\(^4\) A more faithful translation of the movement’s Thai name would read “People’s Committee for Changing Thailand into a Complete Democracy with the King as Head of State”

\(^5\) \textit{Kwai} or “buffalo” is an insulting term in Thai that implies rural lack of sophistication or outright stupidity.
Young, who argued that citizenship’s promise of status equality was undermined by persistent patterns of social exclusion and oppression (Young 1989, 1990). Young contended that “universal citizenship” would only serve to mask and perpetuate such social inequality and therefore proposed the development of special rights and representations for a wide range of oppressed groups. Picking up on this theme, a number of liberal thinkers – most prominently Will Kymlicka (1995) – began formulating theories of “multicultural citizenship” centred around ideas of group-level rights for minorities in multicultural societies. Meanwhile, a third prominent theme in this literature draws upon Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1977) in arguing that the lack of necessary cultural resources inhibits the “capacity to participate effectively, creatively and successfully within a national culture” and thus represents an additional barrier to the exercise of full citizenship (Turner 2001: 12). Thus, the politics of difference, liberal multiculturalism and cultural capital emerge as three distinct themes in a body of literature concerned with the myriad factors that impede the full and equitable exercise of citizenship, even under conditions wherein its formal components are firmly established.

In addressing the question of the depth of citizenship in Thailand – and vis-a-vis its Malay Muslim minority in particular – Duncan McCargo (2012a: Chapter 6) recapitulates, to a considerable extent, the core argument found in Young (1989)’s critique of “universal citizenship.” He notes that a formal-legal conception of citizenship rooted in T.H. Marshall’s tripartite theory captures only part of the lived experience of citizenship in Thailand. For McCargo, citizenship in Thailand is a matter of degree and it is only fully realized through the unmitigated embrace and performance of “Thai-ness.” The imperative to embrace this ethno-national identity category is fundamentally what differentiates full citizens in the kingdom from “paper citizens” who hold the formal status of Thai nationals, but are barred from full participation in Thai society (McCargo 2012a: 123). In characterizing the ‘unwritten rules’ of full membership in the Thai polity, McCargo refers to Saskia Sassen’s (2006) concept of “informal citizenship,” which he finds more useful that the somewhat amorphous concept of “cultural citizenship” preferred by a range of scholars in the citizenship studies literature (see: Miller 2002; Vega and Hensbroek 2010). Indeed, McCargo is correct in arguing that much of the “cultural citizenship” literature is concerned with issues of multiculturalism in western societies and is, thus, of limited applicability to countries like Thailand. Within that
literature, however, there exists a current that approaches the connection between culture and citizenship “as an object of governmental or/and disciplinary politics” (Vega and Hensbroek 2010: 251). Numerous episodes in Thailand’s post-absolutist history (discussed below) exemplify the use of cultural policy as a disciplining mechanism in the production of “good citizens.” However, contra McCargo, the requirement to embrace of “Thainess” should not be understood as a path to full citizenship, but rather as evidence of the contingent nature of the state/subject relationship in Thailand. Those who successfully perform informal requirements of membership in the Thai polity nonetheless remain subjects, rather than citizens in the formal-legal sense. What they acquire, however, is the presumption of loyalty. Those who fail to submit to the disciplinary demands of the Thainess discourse, meanwhile, exist under a cloud of suspicion.

As Pavin Chachavalpongpun (2005: 11-12) argues, the specific content of the hegemonic discourse of “Thainess” has shifted dramatically over the course of the 20th century (and into the 21st). What has remained constant, however, has been the preoccupation of those exercising state power with dictating the terms of Thai cultural identity and the equation of that identity with the characteristics of “good citizens.” The most prominent early examples of the manipulation of Thai identity to serve the interests of governing elites are to be found in the official nationalism proffered by King Vajiravuth. Recognizing the threats to his reign posed by disgruntled nobles, bureaucratic elites and Chinese nationalists, Vajiravuth established the paramilitary organization known as the Kanna Sua Pa (Wild Tiger Corps) as a vehicle for shoring up loyalty to the crown. His many speeches to the Sua Pa emphasized the historical continuity of the Thai people as a distinct race and the central importance of royal authority and the Buddhist religion to its survival (Barmé 1993: 26). He was the first to popularize the phrase “nation, religion, king” (chart, satsana, phramahakasat), which – having been adapted from the British “God, King and Country” – was presented as describing the three distinct but fundamentally inseparable pillars of the Thai/Siamese polity (Wyatt 2003: 143). The inseparability of these three pillars reflected Vajiravuth’s contention that the king was the living embodiment of the nation and that religion was indispensable to maintaining the moral integrity of both (Barmé 1993: 27-31). Finally, Vajiravuth’s official nationalist discourse emphasized the importance of duty (natee), understood in terms of a two-part division of society between “big people” (poo yai) and “little people” (poo noi) (ibid.). The king presented this two-part conception of society as a natural order inherent to the Thai
nation. In order to help Thailand become a “civilized” nation, Thais would have to understand their station and perform the duties appropriate to it.

Perhaps the most important figure in the history of the Thai state’s mobilization of culture as an instrument of discipline was Luang Wichit Wathagan (1898-1962). A commoner by birth, Wichit was a promising young student who earned a law degree and was posted to France as a secretary to the Thai legation (Barmé 1993: Chapter 3). He later became a prolific playwright, author and instructor at Chulalongkorn University, where he lectured on topics including nationalism, civilization, history and progress (ibid.). In the initial years of the constitutional regime, Wichit adopted an ambivalent stance toward the government, occupying his time writing biographies of “great men” who moved history, including a hagiographic biography of Benito Mussolini. He also produced treatises on Thai nationalism emphasizing unquestioned loyalty to the nation, adherence to Buddhism, respect for the constitution and king, and total opposition to communism (ibid.). In 1933, he began taking up a series of government posts (including heading the Department of Fine Arts), through which he became an influential author of state policies on nation-building, educational reform and culture.

His explicitly ethnic nationalism formed the core of nation-building policies under the first government of Plaek Phibulsongkram (1938-44), who urged Thais to demonstrate their loyalty to the nation through adherence to a number of “state edicts” (ratthaniyom). These edicts covered a range of “flaws” in Thai society, including “uncivilized” practices like chewing betel nut or wearing sarongs. Some were explicitly westernizing in their tenor, including the requirement that Thais wear hats when entering government buildings, that women wear gloves or that men kiss their wives before heading off to work (Wyatt 2003: 255). Several others were explicitly nationalist in orientation, including the first edict (issued in 1939) renaming the country Thailand (Phratthet Thai) better to reflect its “racial” character, and forbidding the use of ethnic markers by stipulating that all Thai citizens would henceforth be known as Chao Thai (Thais). Another stipulated that it was every Thai citizen’s duty to study the central Thai dialect and “not to give undue consideration to their particular place of residence or birthplace, or to the difference in accent of the language as indicative of separation” (quoted in Barmé 1993: 155). Later, during the Second World War, Phibul founded a National Cultural Institute, the purpose of which was to formulate an official definition of
Thai culture and promote it through cultural fairs around the country (Baker and Pasuk 2009: 133). This institute was the precursor to the Ministry of Culture, Office of the Cultural Commission and National Identity Board, all of which played central roles in promoting a state-constructed vision of Thai culture throughout the latter half of the 20th century.

The next major phase in the state’s use of culture as a disciplinary mechanism developed under the leadership of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1958-1963). In the lead up to his second coup in 1958, Sarit wrote to Wichit on several occasions asking for advice and cooperation (Thak 2007: 115-116). Later, he appointed Wichit Deputy Director of the Revolutionary Headquarters and chair of the Committee on Educational Planning. Sarit’s characterization of his coup d’état as a “revolution” (pattiwat) was inspired by Wichit’s publications on the subject and he shared with the aging ideologue a near-obsessive hatred of communism. Leaving aside the question of Sarit’s ideological orientation, however, his government’s promotion of anti-communism served two distinct purposes during this period. First, it aligned Thailand ever more closely with the United States as the superpower’s foremost ally in the region. This allegiance translated into huge sums of development assistance and military aid, which reached a combined US$135.6 million in 1962 (Wyatt 2003: 284). Second, anti-communism served as an important unifying theme in Sarit’s drive to create order (kwamriaproi) in the kingdom. To this end, communism was portrayed as being antithetical to Thai cultural and national identity. Through the Anti-communist Activities Act (1952), “communism” came to be defined in such broad terms as to encompass virtually any criticism of the state and its agents (ibid.).

One of the most important figures in Sarit’s anti-communist drive was King Bhumipol. As Thak Chaloemtiarana (2007) argues in his seminal analysis of this period of “Despotic Paternalism,” the Sarit government engaged in a concerted and sustained effort to elevate the monarchy as the core symbol of Thai national identity. Central to this campaign was the portrayal of the king as a staunch opponent of communism in his own right. King Bhumipol (Rama IX) was legitimately concerned by the apparent rise of communism in the region and the accompanying anti-royal sentiment that had reared its head most emphatically in the neighbouring kingdom of Laos (Ibid.). With Sarit’s support, the king began making regular visits to the peripheral regions of the country, which
served to forge a powerful link between the image of the King and the military government’s anti-communist security agenda. During these upcountry visits, Bhumipol warned villagers of the dangers communist propaganda posed to Thai unity and emphasized anti-communism as a trait that ‘all Thais share’ (Thak 2007: 210). Meanwhile, a Buddhist clergy newly centralized under the Sangha Administration Act (1962) instituted the Thammathut Program through which groups of monks were dispatched to outlying areas to spread the government’s anti-communist doctrine (Keyes 1971: 560). Thus, two of the central pillars of state-sanctioned “Thai-ness” (religion and the monarchy) were mobilized to the effect of reformulating Thai national identity in a manner that served the interests of an authoritarian state. All of these efforts were framed in terms of staving off an existential threat (communism) to the third pillar of what has been called Thailand’s “civic religion”: the nation (Reynolds 1977).

Throughout the 1960s and 70s, the threat of communism continued to preoccupy the Thai state. The ranks of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) continued to swell throughout this period, particularly following the massacre at Thammasat University in 1976, when thousands of students fled to the jungle to join the CPT. This threat was eventually brought to heel through a combination of anti-insurgent warfare and an amnesty program that successfully coaxed thousands back into the Thai mainstream. Notwithstanding this rapprochement, however, state elites were faced with a highly polarized society and began looking for a new means of forging unity. Research conducted by the cold war-era National Security Council suggested that a significant majority of rural Thais were deeply loyal to the monarchy and religion, but disinterested in politics (Baker and Pasuk 2009: 234). This finding was taken to suggest the need for a new national ideology that accorded greater emphasis to the place of the king atop Thai society. The old triumvirate of “Nation, Religion and King” was revised to include “Democracy with the King as Head of State.” A National Cultural Commission and National Identity Office were established to promote a new, more invigorating vision of Thai culture and national identity. Concurrently, the Interior Ministry launched a new ‘political education program’ based on research suggesting that the Thai people’s ill-preparedness for democratic participation stemmed from widespread problems in the Thai household, an innate lack of seriousness and ethical integrity, and a general disposition that favoured subservience and obedience (Connors 2007: 201-202). Seen as lacking discipline, the Thai people were thought prone to ‘taking their rights too far’,
necessitating a ‘citizenship’ pedagogy that, once again, emphasized the performance of duty and sacrifice for the greater good (ibid.). Under the auspices of a “semi-democratic” government dominated by military generals, this assessment of the Thai people served as the justification for political arrangements that downplayed the importance of representative institutions in favour of a government stewarded by “good people” (Baker and Pasuk 2009: 235-238).

The political education program that was designed and implemented to heal the rifts of the mid 1970s was consistent with an established practice of citizenship pedagogy in Thailand beginning in the early years of post-absolutism (Connors 2007: 75-81). This practice centred around the production of citizenship manuals, the earliest of which were produced in 1936 and distributed across the country primarily for consumption by local officials. They contained an explanation of Thailand’s transition from an absolute monarchy to a democratic system of government “of the citizens and by the citizens” (quoted in Connors 2007: 47). They went on to describe the citizen (phonlamuang) as one being endowed with full rights (sitthī) and duties (nathee). Subsequent manuals produced in 1948 shared much of the same content, but with an expanded list of duties that including the responsibility to report births, deaths, marriages etc. (ibid.: 46-51). These early citizenship manuals lacked direct reference to national identity and culture and were principally concerned with describing the formal content of citizenship. In the 1960s, however, this formalist approach gave way to a focus on changing the political culture of Thai society through participation in mass organizations at the local level. State officials in the Local Administration Department were tasked with “accessing” (khaotung) rural people and guiding them toward democratic practices (ibid.:). The Project to Develop Democratic Citizens (PDDC) was introduced in 1965 to develop democratic capacity, primarily through the delegation of minor administrative tasks at the local level such that people would begin to identify with the state. In the early 1970s, another series of citizenship manuals was published in which a distinctly liberal characterization of democracy was juxtaposed with a description of the persistent shortcomings of Thai political culture. These shortcomings were said to have resulted from the failure of the 1932 political “revolution” to precipitate a concomitant “revolution of the mind” (ibid.: 77). Once again, the Thai love of freedom (and corresponding lack of discipline) was identified as a fundamental problem, to be rectified by an emphasis on the performance of duty as the core element of good citizenship (ibid.: 80).
As a project for redressing the inadequacies of the people vis-a-vis liberal democracy, “manual democracy” operated in Thailand from the mid-1960s to the early 1990s (Connors 2007: 75-81). Thereafter, with the overthrow of the Suchinda government in 1992, a new phase in “people politics” emerged in which civil society groups operating outside of the formal state apparatus took on a prominent role in the country’s democratic and decentralizing reforms. Quite apart from the Interior Ministry’s efforts to develop a citizenship pedagogy, the energy of the civil society-driven reform movement animated yet another campaign of citizenship education focused on the rural masses. Unlike previous iterations of this tutelary project, however, the drive to develop the cultural and moral qualities of ‘the people’ was implemented primarily by middle-class and elite dominated civil society organizations (ibid.201-202). Once again, the focus of the campaign was on inculcating in Thai citizens the necessary discipline to discharge their democratic duties without “abusing” their liberties. One NGO campaign, for example, warned rural voters that “selling your vote is like selling your nation” (quoted in ibid.: 182). Such campaigns were indicative of the degree to which a members of the urban middle class internalized the message of democratic deficiency conveyed through various iterations of the state’s program of citizenship pedagogy. Having identified with the state elite, members of this class began to label the rural masses as the culprits holding Thai democracy back from its full potential. Such attitudes have emerged as a recurring theme in Thailand’s increasingly divisive politics, most notably during the PAD and PDRC rallies of 2005, 2010 and 2013/14, wherein Thaksin Shinawatra’s “Red Shirt” supporters were portrayed as ignorant farmers who lacked the sophistication to recognize that they were being manipulated or, worse still, that they were not “real Thais.”

Notwithstanding the expanded role of non-governmental organizations in the project of disciplining Thai people to cultural norms supportive of “Thai-style democracy,” the state continues take a leading role in inculcating a particular vision of democratic culture. In a 2013 manual entitled “Strengthening Democratic Culture in Thailand” (Ministry of Culture 2013), for example, a list of nine important democratic principles (including using rights and liberties “in an appropriate manner”) contains numerous references to unity, discipline, and using the democratic franchise to select “good people.” Even more recently, following the coup of 2014, the disciplinary tenor of state pronouncements on appropriate conduct for Thai citizens has become more
pronounced. In a speech on July 11, 2014, General Prayuth Chan-Ocha outlined a list of 12 “social values for a strong Thailand” that were to serve as the guiding principles for taking Thailand forward into a future free of debilitating political conflict. They are worth listing in full:

- Upholding the nation, religion and monarchy, which is the key institution
- Honesty, sacrifice and patience with a positive attitude toward the common good
- Gratitude to teachers, parents and guardians
- Seeking knowledge and education both directly and indirectly
- Treasuring precious Thai traditions
- Maintaining morality, integrity and well-wishes toward others as well as being generous and sharing
- Understanding and learning the true essence of democratic ideals with His Majesty the King as the Head of State
- Maintaining discipline, respectful of laws, the elderly and seniority
- Being conscious and mindful of action in line with his Majesty the King’s statements
- Practicing His Majesty’s philosophy of Sufficiency Economy: saving money for times of need, being moderate with surplus used for sharing or expanding business while having good immunity (from unexpected hardships)
- Maintaining both physical and mental health and being unyielding to the dark force of desire; having a sense of shame over guilt and sins in accordance with religious principles
- Putting the public and national interest before personal interest.

(Source: Bangkok Pundit 2014)
Prayuth ordered that these 12 values should form the core of civic education in Thailand’s public and private schools. He mandated that children from the first through ninth forms should be made to repeat them daily as part of their morning flag-raising ceremony (Bangkok Pundit 2014). Notably, the list reproduces all of the core themes of the doctrine of “Democracy with the King as Head of State” and is deeply infused with a disciplinary Buddhist morality. Moreover, virtually all of the “social values” refer in one way or another to duties.

The content of the Thai state’s citizenship pedagogy, while shifting in important dimensions over the course of the country’s post-absolutist history, has consistently framed the question of “good citizenship” in terms of the fundamental shortcomings of the Thai populace. In so doing, it has constructed an inherent justification for the delayed extension of full political rights. Perhaps more importantly, however, it has served to communicate a highly constructed notion of Thai cultural and national identity that serves the interests of the state elite. By emphasizing the importance of unity and the centrality of duty to citizenship, this official citizenship discourse seeks to discipline the Thai populace and (re)produce a social structure that facilitates the maintenance of established power relations. At the same time, it suppresses and subordinates non-Thai identities, including regional, ethnic and religious identities. Thus, while, Thailand has officially embraced its ethnic diversity since the 1990s, the opening of a space for cultural diversity is severely constrained by the imperative to conform to a narrow, if shifting, conception of “Thai-ness.” McCargo (2012a: Chapter 6) is correct when he argues that Malay Muslims in Thailand’s southernmost region remain alienated from full membership in the Thai polity by their refusal to adopt a posture of “deficiency” in relation to their distance from the prescribed cultural norm. This refusal, he notes, is particularly threatening to the regime because it challenges the “paternalistic nature of the state’s relations to its subject/citizens” (ibid.: 94). Thus, in the hands of the state, culture becomes a powerful disciplinary mechanism for the production of compliant subjects.
3.4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the development of citizenship in Thailand along three principle axes: *extent, content* and *depth*. It has done so following a line of argument developed in the “citizenship studies” literature that expands on the legal-formal definition of citizenship typified by the highly influential work of T.H. Marshall to better account for many informal barriers to the exercise of citizenship. It has presented the argument that citizenship in Thailand retains the core characteristics of subjecthood, owing primarily to the tenuousness of the formal content of citizenship and the exclusive nature of its cultural and identity dimensions. Briefly, Thai citizens are perpetually at risk of having their citizenship rights dissolved by extra-constitutional powers, principally a politically active military that draws authorizing legitimacy from the monarchy. The abrogation of citizenship rights through military coups d’état is consistently justified in terms of open-ended threats to “the nation” and their piecemeal reinstatement in terms of the fundamental cultural and moral flaws of the Thai people. While the Thai governments have, since the mid-1960, professed a commitment to establishing a liberal democratic system in the kingdom, the purported ill-preparedness of the Thai people to handle the responsibilities such a system entails serves as justification for the recurring delay of that project.

The fragility of the formal content of Thai citizenship and the narrow and disciplinary nature of its cultural content undermine the Thai state’s claims – even during the brief interims between military usurpations of power – to being democratic. Perhaps more importantly, however, they also introduce important variations between different groups vis-a-vis their relationships to the state. This variation is most clearly evident with respect to the rural/urban divide, with rural people having been consistently portrayed as unsophisticated, uneducated and unready for democratic citizenship. An even more troubling form of unequal citizenship emerges, however, with regard to ethnic minorities in the country. The cultural prescriptions that permeate Thai citizenship pedagogy – even while explicitly recognizing ethnic and religious diversity – are steeped in Buddhist morality, including demands of loyalty to and even public worship of an unambiguously Buddhist king. Owing to the tenuousness of the formal content of citizenship, failure to
meet these demands amounts to an expression of disloyalty and is grounds for exclusion from the benefits of membership in the political community. This is particularly true during the frequent bouts of military dictatorship that follow the kingdom’s regular military coups d’état, and it is a near-permanent conditions in those parts of the country that are governed under emergency legislation. For the past decade, the latter has described the country’s southernmost region, where a Malay-speaking Muslim majority has been living under martial law. As the following chapters will show, citizenship in this peripheral region has little substantive meaning. Instead, Muslim denizens of the Deep South are better described as subjects whose loyalty is perpetually in question.
Chapter 4. Security and Ethnicity at the Periphery

4.1. I. Introduction

The argument presented in this chapter follows from the central claim of this dissertation, which is that the nature of state-society interface in Thailand’s conflict-affected southernmost region produces practices that exacerbate inter-ethnic estrangement at the local level. In support of that argument, this chapter analyses relations between residents of two villages in the southern border province of Yala and the security apparatus of the Thai state. The state-organized provision of security in Thailand’s “Deep South” involves a variety of organizations including the military, police, paramilitaries and state-sponsored civilian militias (ICG 2007: 2). All of those have been active in the two villages of focus in this study at some point following the eruption of violence in the region beginning in 2004. The present chapter, however, focuses exclusively on state security agencies, with a particular emphasis on the Border Patrol Police (Thor Chor Dor) and The Border Patrol Police Arial Resupply Unit (Pon Rom). The Border Patrol Police are the principle agency charged with maintaining security in Thailand’s border areas, which includes the area containing the two villages of empirical focus in this study.

In analyzing the role of state security agencies in shaping ethnic relations in the Deep South region, much of the following discussion steers close to what has been one of the most thoroughly investigated aspects of the ongoing crisis in Thailand’s Deep South: the degree to which the policies and activities of the Thai state alienate Malay-Speaking Muslims from full inclusion in the Thai national community. For the most part, studies of the Thai state’s efforts to assimilate and/or to accommodate Malay-speaking
Muslims emphasize the heavy-handedness of such efforts as engendering popular antipathy toward Thai rule (see: Thomas 1966; Surin 1985; Che Man 1990; Aphornsuvan 2008; McCargo 2009). In keeping with the core theme of this dissertation, the present chapter shifts attention to relations between the distinct ethnic communities in the two Deep South villages that serve as the empirical focus of this study. In so doing, it argues that the state’s provision of security has been an important contributor to the shifting and hardening of ethnic boundaries.

4.2. Ethnic Groups and Ethnic Boundaries

The present chapter makes heavy usage of the term “ethnic group” and it is thus worth-while to spend some time addressing what that concept entails. The term is often used in both popular and academic literature to refer to categorizations of people on the basis of culture, language, religion, nationality or “race.” As numerous scholars of ethnicity point out, however, the specific characteristics that differentiate one ethnic group from another often depend on context: an ethnic group might be defined in terms of religion in relation to another group whose members speak the same language and in terms of language in relation to linguistically disparate group of coreligionists (Horowitz 1985: 41-42; Wimmer 2013: 21-25; Brubaker 2009: 31). With this observation in mind, what is particularly salient to the study of ethnic groups is not the specific characteristics they encompass, but the processes of boundary making and boundary shifting that sustain ethnic groups and pattern interactions between them. This was the core insight of a highly influential essay by Frederik Barth (Barth 1969), who argued that the critical feature of ethnic groups – from the point of view of social scientists – is their ascriptive nature, both in terms of self-ascription and ascription by others. Ascription to one or another group implies being subject to judgement on the basis of that group’s moral and ethical standards. Meanwhile, the boundaries that define ethnic groups by no means imply a lack of inter-ethnic contact. According to Barth’s argument, the maintenance of distinct ethnic groups demands that interactions between groups be governed by “a systematic set of rules” that demarcate the permissible domains and modes of activity.
He notes, however, that conditions of insecurity can undermine the potential for ethnic interactions to develop and can generate heightened demands for intra-group conformity. Such conditions lead to the fortification of ethnic boundaries in a manner that may preclude future interactions between ethnic groups. The central argument of this dissertation is that group-differentiated relations with various aspects of the state can exacerbate precisely the kind of boundary making that precludes inter-ethnic contact and collaboration.

This emphasis on boundaries as the most salient feature of ethnic groups does not, however, address the question of why ethnic groups exist. In response to this question, prominent theorists like Donald Horowitz (1985) and Benedict Anderson (1983) highlight the kinship-like character of ethnic groups. For example, according to Horowitz (1985: Chapter 2), ethnic groups require strong kinship ties as a basis for their continuity and also serve to mimic kinship ties among co-ethnics outside of actual familial relations. This characteristic renders ethnic group membership valuable in myriad contexts, but it also means that ethnic affinities are often deeply felt and can potentially motivate extreme actions. As has been observed in numerous contexts, the deeply held, kinship-like nature of ethnic identity make it a powerful tool for political manipulation (e.g. Varshney 2003; Brass 2003; Laitin 2007). However, scholars must guard against uncritically assuming ethnicity to be inherent component of individual identities. This has been the warning issued by constructivist scholars, who alert us to the contingent, contested and, ultimately, constructed nature of ethnic identity (Wimmer 2014: 26-32; Brubaker 2009: 32-34). Constructivists point out that individuals possess multiple, nested identities, each associated with certain discursive practices and relevant to different situations (Hopf 2002: 4-7). The influence of this constructivist perspective is such that “primordialist” accounts of ethnicity as a given characteristic of the social world have largely been consigned to history (Brubaker 2009: 28). At the same time, however, radical constructivist accounts risk obscuring the ways in which ethnicity continues to matter, irrespective of the degree to which it is constructed and potentially mutable (Wimmer 2013: 25-26).

In an important recent work on “Ethnic Boundary Making” (Wimmer 2013), Andreas Wimmer sets out to develop a fully specified theory of ethnic boundary making in order to facilitate comparative study. He presents his theory in opposition to, on one
hand, what he calls a Herderian (after the 20th century philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder) view of ethnicity as the essential unit of cultural variation among the world’s population and, on the other hand, a radical-constructivist view that treats ethnicity “as a cognitive scheme with little consequence to the life chances of individuals, or as an individual ‘identity choice’ among many others” (ibid.: 26). Wimmer’s theory builds on Barth’s boundary metaphor while infusing it with Pierre Bourdieu’s conception of a social world comprised of distinct fields in which individuals act strategically to shape both representations of themselves and the world in ways that benefit them as individuals and as members of groups. With respect to ethnicity, this means a struggle over which categorical boundaries will be considered relevant and what the social consequences of membership in one or another group should be.

Wimmer’s primary interest is in understanding how and by what means a given classificatory scheme of ethnic groupings becomes dominant, accepted and relevant to every day forms of social closure. To this end, he develops what he considers to be a comprehensive classification of the mechanisms through which ethnic boundaries are “made” and “moved.” Boundary making, according this schema, can be achieved through the use of discourse and symbols, various forms of official and informal discrimination, political mobilization and the use of coercion and violence. Boundary shifting, meanwhile, can involve the expansion or contraction of boundaries, the transvaluation of ethnic hierarchies, positional moves within those hierarchies or blurring ethnic boundaries by emphasizing other lines of division (ibid. 73-75). Attention to these modes and means of ethnic boundary making facilitates what Brubaker (2009: 29) calls “a shift from attempts to specify what an ethnic or race group or nation is to attempts to specify how ethnicity, race and nation work.” They will serve as useful points of reference in the pages that follow.
4.3. The Security Apparatus in Two Deep South Villages

As noted in Chapter 2, the villages of Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai are located in the district of Bannagsata in the province of Yala province. Ever since the conflict in the Deep South escalated in 2004, Bannagsata has consistently ranked as one of the most violence-affected districts in the region. In 2014, the district recoded the highest number of violent incidents (54) of any of the 37 districts that comprise the Deep South (DSID 2015). The history of violent conflict in Bannagsata, however, extends much further back than this most recent escalation. Much of the district consists of steep, jungle clad mountains that present an ideal operational base for guerrilla movements. In the 1970s and early 80s, fighters affiliated with the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO) were engaged in a classic guerrilla campaign against the Thai state and found the mountains of Bannagsata (along with those in the neighbouring districts of Than To,Yaha, Sisakon and Rusoe) ideal staging grounds for their operations. So too did the Malayan Communist Party, which operated out of Southern Thailand from 1955 to 1989 and established several camps in the mountains of Bannangsata and surrounding districts (see: Metzger 2012: 28). In fact, one of the explicit objectives of the “Self Help Land Settlement Program” to which Ban Lomyen owes its origins was to reclaim territory that had been utilized by the MCP (Nikhom 2013). The Thai military engaged the MCP militarily up until the mid 1980s and was instrumental in brokering the final peace accord between the MCP and the Malaysia government (Metzger 2012: 30-31). Following the negotiated settlement between the MCP and the Malaysian government, more than 1,000 former MCP members were settled in villages in the Thai provinces of Yala and Narathiwat (Ibid: 32).

The decade following the negotiated settlement between the MCP and the Malaysian government coincided with the apparent demobilization of the militant movements that had emerged in Thailand’s Deep South in the 1960s and 70s. From the late 1980s through the early 2000s, the security presence in the upland area of Bannangsata district was typical of border areas throughout the kingdom: a battalion of Border Patrol Police (Tamruad Trawaen Chai Daen hereafter BPP) were barracked in the district town and made regular patrols in outlying areas. This situation changed,
however, following a spate of shootings, arson attacks and the scattering of threatening leaflets in the latter part of 2006. In a village closely abutting Ban Namsai (referred to here as “Ban Borhaeng”), a subdistrict council-woman was shot to death while riding home on her motorcycle and a Buddhist household was murdered and their house set ablaze. Leaflets were left scattered around the village threatening Buddhist settlers, a group that included members of the nikhom projects as well as others who had arrived subsequently in search of a secure livelihood. These incidents prompted the entire Buddhist population of the village to flee their homes and take up refuge in Nirotsangkana temple in the provincial capital. Shortly thereafter, a Buddhist village council member\(^1\) in Ban Namsai was murdered, prompting Buddhist villagers from Ban Namsai to join their coreligionists in refuge at the Yala town temple. After receiving significant national attention to their plight and a visit from the Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn, many of the 227 exiled villagers began returning to their homes, this time accompanied by a platoon of Special Forces (“red beret”) soldiers supported by approximately 100 paramilitary Rangers (\textit{Thahan Prahn}) (ICG 2007b: 9).

The Crown Prince’s concern for the situation of these Buddhist villagers led directly to initiation of a royal sponsored support program entitled “The Program for a Strong Community and a Cool Shade” (\textit{Kronggan Pua Chumchon Kemkaeng Lae Rom Yen}). This project supported the villagers returning to their homes by sponsoring the construction of new houses, livelihood enhancement programs and by training and arming many of them as Village Defence Volunteers (ICJ 2007b: 9; Interviews with villagers). The resettlement program amalgamated the Buddhist populations of the two villages in one neighbourhood in Ban Borhaeng and resulted in the total removal of the Buddhist population from Ban Namsai. Meanwhile, the Special Forces soldiers who had established a camp on a small plateau overlooking Ban Namsai were replaced by a platoon of Border Patrol Police from the Ariel Resupply Unit (known locally as \textit{Pon Rom}, hereafter BPP Paratroopers) who relocated their base to the abandoned homes of Buddhist former residents. Those residents retained ownership of their homes and of the rubber plantations that had been allocated to their families upon the village’s establishment. Thus, the manner in which the Special Forces soldiers arrived in the

\(^1\) An International Crisis Group report indicates that this man was the village headman, but interviews with villagers and with the man’s family confirm that he was in fact a deputy village headman (\textit{Poo Chuay})
villages (accompanying the returning Buddhist villagers) and the way in which the BPP Paratroopers established their base (complete with razor wire, sandbagged bunkers and security cameras) around the Buddhist-owned property contributed to a pervasive perception that the security forces in the village were there specifically and exclusively to protect Buddhists and their property. A Malay Muslim villager recounted to me that, for the first year that they occupied their new barracks, the BPP Paratroopers seldom entered the village or engaged with Muslim villagers. As he surmised, “they were afraid of us and we were afraid of them.”

This mutual fear and the lack of interaction between Muslim villagers and the BPP Paratroopers proved a fertile breeding ground for rumours and distrust. In November of 2009 the village headman of Ban Namsai was shot down in a hail of gunfire from both M-16 and AK47 assault rifles. He was killed and two other young men – one a member of the Volunteer Defence Corps (Or Sor) and the other a member of the Village Development and Self-Defence Volunteers (Chor Ror Bor) – were badly wounded. The official investigation of the incident concluded that a group of “insurgents” (poo rai) had approached through the jungle and committed the murder (Manager 2009).

As one prominent villager (a member of the subdistrict council) explained to me, however, there was never any clear evidence in support of this conclusion. He also noted that the gunfire came from the direction of the Border Patrol Police encampment. While he was careful to avoid saying so directly, he strongly implied that the perpetrators of the attack may well have been security officials themselves.

The shooting incident in Ban Namsai closely resembled one that had taken place two years earlier, on June 24, 2007 in Ban Lomyen. In that case, a group of Or Sor and Chor Ror Bor volunteers and other villagers were gathered at a tea shop near the entrance to the village when automatic gunfire began to rain down on them from the adjacent hills. In one of the victims’ telling, the assault continued for as long as 15 minutes and four people were injured, two seriously. Once again the official investigation of the incident concluded that a group of insurgents had approached the village through

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2 The Village Defence Corps (Or Sor) is a paid volunteer force organized by the Interior Ministry at the district level and functions primarily as a bodyguard unit for district officers and other bureaucrats. The Village Development and Defence Volunteers (Chor Ror Bor) is a rotating night watch organized at the village level and funded by the interior ministry (ICJ 2007a: 15-17; McCargo 2012a: 36).
the jungle and attacked the villagers. However, foregoing the guardedness of the villager in Ban Namsai who merely implied the culpability of security officials, this victim of the attack (a Thai-speaking Muslim) was adamant that the Border Patrol Police had been behind it. According to his account, the intended target of the attack was a Malay-speaking Muslim man who police suspected was a member of an insurgent group. The three other victims – all Thai-speaking Muslims – had been unintentional targets. When he first related this story to me, the victim claimed to have been told of the BPP’s responsibility for the attack by a police officer who had been drinking heavily. Later, however, he recanted that claim, saying that this was merely what he and many others believed to be the case. Indeed, several other Muslim villagers (both Thai and Malay-speakers) expressed to me their belief in this version of events.

The attack in in Ban Lomyen came during a period of intense fear and tension in the village. Beginning in March 2007, the district of Bannagsata and the neighbouring district of Yaha were put under mandatory curfew from 8pm until 4am. During these hours, some households sought the security of larger numbers, passing the night with several families in a single house. In the days leading up to the imposition of the curfew, two Buddhist villagers had been murdered in their rubber plantation and a Malay-speaking Muslim villager was shot and injured in front of his home. During the curfew period, threatening leaflets were founds scattered in the village and on several occasions villagers heard gunshots ringing into the night. Fearing that leaving their homes would result in their being shot by either insurgents or police, villagers strictly adhered to the curfew, to the extent that one woman – a Thai-speaking Muslim and teacher at the local prayer school (Tadika) – gave birth in her home one night with no medical assistance.

With tension building in the village, the June 24th shooting proved to be the tipping point. In the days that followed, many of the villagers evacuated the village to seek refuge with friends and relatives in their ancestral homes. In a notable inversion of the situation in Ban Namsai, however, it was the Muslim population which proved most eager to evacuate the village. Virtually all of the Thai-speaking Muslim population fled to one of the two ancestral villages in Pattalung province, while many Malay-speaking Muslims returned to their home villages in Pattani, Narathiwat and elsewhere in Yala. The bulk of the Thai-speaking Buddhist population in the village, on the other hand,
opted to stay put. According to several members of that community, that decision was motivated by a mix of factors. For some, the option of evacuating was cut off by the feeling that they simply had “nowhere else to go.” Others, meanwhile, cited the fear that if they left, they would never be able to return and could not sell their properties for anything more than a pittance. At the same time, the geography of the village was such that there was only one way in (see Map 1), making it relatively easy to defend against intruders. Given the large number of Buddhist households – more than 50, as opposed to only 14 in Ban Namsai – Buddhist villagers felt relatively secure in their ability to defend themselves. Moreover, some found motivation in the words of the Thai queen, who three years earlier had explicitly entreated Thai Buddhists in the region not to migrate out of the region and to take responsibility for their own self-defence (McCargo 2012a: 37).³

In response to the exodus of villagers from Ban Lomyen and the continuing security concerns of the (primarily Buddhist) villagers who remained, the Thai Army Special Forces and Border Patrol Police significantly enhanced their presence and activities in the area. This effort included the establishment of a permanent camp within the village itself. The camp was established by the Army Special Forces (muak daeng or “red berets”) in the upper part of the village, adjacent to a small, nondescript building that serves as the village’s Buddhist temple (see Map 1). Significantly, the camp was established more than two kilometres from the only entrance to the village and in the midst of the overwhelmingly Buddhist “upper side” of the village. The enhanced presence of state security personnel and a sharp reduction in violent incidents in Banangsata district in general (there were no violent incidents recorded in Bannagsata between July and September 2007, after an average of 17 per month in the first six months of that year⁴) led many villagers to believe it was now safe to return to the village. When they returned, however, they found a markedly changed community environment.

³ The seriousness with which some Thai Buddhists regarded the Queen’s admonitions and their duty to defend “the realm” (paen din) was evident in many conversations throughout the course of my stay in the village.
⁴ All statistics on violent incidents were obtained from the Deep South Incidents Database. http://www.deepsouthwatch.org/dsid?page=1
Several Thai-speaking Muslim villagers related to me that prior to their evacuation of the village, relations between them and their Buddhist neighbours had been good. A term often used to describe this condition was that they had lived as “brothers and sisters” (pen pii nong gan), helping with preparations for each other’s festivals and frequently visiting with one another socially. When they returned to the village, however, they found that such familial relations had eroded almost completely. Buddhists who had, in the past, made social visits to the “lower-side” of the village no longer did so and Muslims from the lower side of the village felt afraid to travel to the upper side, owing in large part to worries about the reaction of the security forces to their presence. One Thai-speaking Muslim villager related to me that a Buddhist shop owner would no longer sell to Muslims, adding (perhaps speculatively) that she had been instructed not to by the BPP Paratroopers, who took over the camp from the Army Special Forces in 2008. Another such villager said that the BPP Paratroopers had enforced the physical separation of Muslims and Buddhists as part of a broader strategy to identify trouble-makers by “separating the fish from the water” (yaek plaa ork nam). As several Thai-speaking Muslims related to me, this was a time when people who had had been close friends for years – in many cases since early childhood – stopped speaking to one another altogether.

In both Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai, the period from early 2007 through late 2009 was characterized by an atmosphere of heightened insecurity and fear. The curfew across Bannangsata and Yaha districts remained in effect until August 2009 and was an inconvenience for rubber farmers who typically work in the very early morning hours. It also contributed greatly to the general atmosphere of insecurity and uncertainty. Relations between Muslim villagers and the security forces, meanwhile, remained distinctly negative. In Ban Lomyen, for example, one Thai-speaking Muslim recalled having a knife held against his throat by a BPP Paratrooper who warned him that he ‘was being watched’. This was reminiscent of an account given by a Malay-speaking Muslim in Ban Namsai, who told me that when the BPP Paratroopers had first established their camp in that village they very rarely interacted with local residents, and that when they did it was only to convey aggressive warnings. In addition to such overtly threatening behavior, Muslim villagers in both villages recalled that security officers would often simply watch them from afar as if to convey the message that they were under surveillance. While sitting in a house-front tea shop frequented by Malay-speaking
Muslim men in the Upper Village of Ban Lomyen, one long-time resident told me that the BPP Paratroopers in particular never conversed with Muslims; “they only watch us and then return to their base.” He added that the jao natee (a term meaning “officer” that is used colloquially to refer to all bureaucrats and security officials) only maintain close relations with Buddhists (yoo sanit gup kon Thai put). All of the men in the tea shop agreed heartily. The bitter feelings accompanying the perception that security officials were primarily interested in Muslims as potential suspects was underscored by the knowledge that, of the 15 people who had been killed or injured in violent incidents in the two villages since 2004, 12 were Muslims.


In 2012 the BPP Paratroopers in Ban Lomyen moved from the camp in the Upper Village to a camp on the main road approximately 1km outside of the village. They were replaced in the Upper Village camp by a battalion of regular Border Patrol Police who serve six month tours in the village before being relieved by another battalion. Since the curfew in the two districts had been lifted in August 2009, there had been only two violent incidents in the upland area of Changpa sub-district. These incidents included the aforementioned murder of the village headman in Ban Namsai and the murder of a healthcare worker from Ban Lomyen who was a convert to Islam. Without downplaying the seriousness of these incidents, it is evident that, by the time that the regular BPP battalion replaced the BPP Paratroopers in Ban Lomyen, the level of violence in the area had been reduced substantially. As a result, the tension between BPP and Muslim villagers had also eased considerably, leading to shifting perception of the security presence in the village.

While some Ban Lomyen Muslims continued to hold the opinion that the security officials were there primarily for the benefit of Thai Buddhists, others felt that the BPP had no concrete reason for being there at all. For example, when I was beginning to
conduct a household survey early in my stay in the village, a Thai-speaking Muslim man asked me if I intended to survey the BPP as well. He suggested that my first question to be them should be “why did you come here?” (*Ma ni tam mai*). He then suggested the answer: “they’re on holiday” (*kao ma tiaow*). This comment summed up a widely shared opinion that there was no longer any substantial threat of violence in the village and certainly no reason for a full battalion of BPP to be stationed there. It also hinted at a criticism that several Thai-speaking Muslims voiced about the BPP that they spent all of their time relaxing in their base and did very little else besides. As an example, the aforementioned teacher at the *tadika* prayer school noted that when the “red beret” soldiers first come to the village, they would visit the school frequently and bring sports equipment and other gifts for the children. By contrast, the most recent deployment of BPP had, after five months in the village, visited only once, and even then had only taken pictures of themselves “performing outreach duty” before returning to their base.

This perception of the Border Patrol Police amongst Thai Buddhists was markedly different. Owing in part to the close proximity of the BPP camp to Buddhist houses, Buddhists had many more interactions with the officers and were witness to their day-to-day duties. Moreover, all of the BPP officers were Buddhists, and they joined with villagers in various religious ceremonies and activities. One example was the “ork phansa” festival that marks the end of the Buddhist lent. On the day of the festival, Buddhist villagers gathered at the temple in their finest clothes, bringing with them offerings of food for the temple abbot (*jao awat*) and his novice (*nen*). I entered the small temple to find the villagers tightly packed on the floor and was ushered to a vacant area near an elevated platform from which the abbot and his novice faced the congregation. I was soon followed by the commanding officers of the BPP and the two BPP Paratroopers battalions stationed in the area. The ceremonies began with each of the three commanding officers taking it in turn to offer words of welcome. Following several rounds of Pali chanting and prayers, the villagers began spooning food into the abbot’s alms bowl before exiting the temple. Outside, BPP offices distributed gift bags to the children and a table was set out for the officers to take a meal. It was clearly evident throughout these proceedings that the BPP and BPP Paratroopers were the guests of honour. By contrast, no BPP or BPP Paratroopers were present at any Muslim festivities.
held in the village, including *Wan Hari Rayoh* (*Eid al-Fitr*) or *Mawlid* (the celebration of the prophet Muhammad’s birthday).\(^5\)

The relationships between security officials and villagers in Ban Lomyen are further contrasted by that between the BPP Paratroopers and villagers in Ban Namsai. In that village, the BPP Paratroopers make a more concerted effort to engage with the community. This stands in contrast with what was described to me regarding the early years of the BPP Paratroopers’ occupation of Buddhist-owned houses in the village and is in keeping with the Thai king’s advice for officials in the Deep South region to “Access, Understand and Develop” (*Kaotung, Kaojai, Pattana*) local communities. A typical example of the Paratroopers’ efforts to “access” the community – and one I witnessed on several occasions – took place during the roughly half hour period between the fourth and fifth of the Islamic faith’s five compulsory daily prayers. On a typical day, between 20 and 30 village men would congregate at the mosque for these prayers and, in the short time between them, would gather around outside the mosque to smoke cigarettes and talk. On several such evenings, the commander of the BPP Paratroopers arrived at about this time with four or five of his officers (fully armed) and invited some of the senior members of the community (usually including the village headman, his assistants and sub-district council members) to have tea in the shop adjacent the mosque. Without fail, the village men would oblige and the next 10-to-20 minutes would be filled with often strained small-talk and questions from the officers about simple phrases in the local Malay dialect.\(^6\) On each occasion, one of the officers was assigned the job of taking photographs and the commanding officer would often quietly direct him to use different angles and ensure that everyone at the table was in the picture. Given that the meetings never lasted for more than 20 minutes and that nothing of substance was ever discussed, it was hard to escape the impression that the photographs were the main purpose of the encounters.

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\(^5\) A second point of connection between Buddhist villagers and the BPP was observed twice a week – on Mondays and Fridays – when members of the Village Defence Volunteers group assisted the BPP in their duty of escorting teachers in and out of the village. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

\(^6\) None of the BPP Paratroopers or BPP officers I encountered were able to speak more than a few words of the local Malay dialect
During the period of research for this study, the differences in the behaviour of the BPP Paratroopers toward the Malay Muslims in Ban Namsai and of the BPP toward residents of Ban Lomyen were considerable. In the case of the former village, they could be characterized in terms of deliberate if somewhat perfunctory engagement, while in the second village they ranged from friendliness to a near total lack of interaction. There are a variety of factors that could account for these difference – from differences in leadership style of the commanding officers to differences in the geography of the villages – but from the perspective of many of the villagers surveyed and interviewed for the purposes of this research, the differences are to a significant extent explainable in terms of ethnic affinity. In Ban Namsai, there was no ambiguity regarding the ethnic differences between the BPP Paratroopers and the villagers. The former group were, to a person, Thai Buddhists, while the latter group were categorized under a variety of labels including *Thai Isalam, Kaek, Chao Malayu or Nayu* (i.e. Malay Muslim). In keeping with the counter-insurgency program of the Thai state, the objectives of the BPP Paratroopers in interacting with these villagers was to “access” and “understand” them in order to build friendly relations and, ultimately, to develop loyalty to Thailand. These efforts had largely succeeded in alleviating the villagers’ fear that the BPP Paratroopers represented a potentially hostile group, but had done little if anything to dispel the sense that they were a foreign presence. Thus, the presence of the BPP Paratroopers was accepted as immutable fact and the officers were treated with politeness, but seldom with any sort of friendliness or familiarity. Mutual fear had given way to resignation that cohabitation was inevitable, but in no sense were BPP Paratroopers integrated into the community.

The situation in Ban Lomyen was markedly different. There, relations between the BPP and the Malay Muslim community were virtually non-existent. The BPP did not conduct the same kind of “access” activities witnessed in Ban Namsai; they had never visited the tea shop in the Upper Side of the village where Malay Muslims men gathered every evening. The Malay Muslims I spoke with regarding the BPP all conveyed the same opinion – often expressed as a matter of fact – that the BPP were there to look after the Buddhists and their property. Toward the Buddhist community, the BPP were

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7 In fact, over more than two dozen evening visits to this tea shop, I never encountered anyone who was not a Malay-speaking Muslim and the only woman there was the wife of the owner.
more engaging. Although the officers spent the vast majority of their time inside the camp itself, a few individuals would come out in the evenings for exercise, and would take their walks and jogs exclusively in the Buddhist neighbourhood. This provided an opportunity for interaction that was not replicated in other parts of the village. In addition, the officers would stop by the Or Ror Bor bunker on their way in and out of the village on patrols (see chapter 5). Through such visits, they had developed distinctly familiar and friendly relations with many Buddhist villagers. By contrast, it was the case that BPP officers – with one notable exception – almost never visited the Lower Side of the village. The only time they would do so would be if the commanding officer had matters to discuss with the village headman, a former paramilitary Ranger who had converted to Islam in order to marry a local Thai Muslim woman (see Chapter 7). The only exception was a BPP officer who befriended a group of young Thai Muslim men who were frequent consumers of nam tom. This officer could be found in the Lower Village virtually any time he was off duty.

The experience of the Villagers in Ban Lomyen with the both the BPP Paratroopers and regular BPP had a strong impact of their impressions of security officials and of the conflict in the Deep South. In the context of shadowy military violence and over a decade of failure on the part of the state to identify and suppress the organizations behind it, many villagers in the Deep South have constructed sometimes sophisticated “conspiracy” theories to gain some sense of understanding their circumstances. In Ban Lomyen, this was particularly true of both Thai and Malay-speaking Muslims. While Thai Buddhists would typically emphasize the role of poo rai (terrorists) and political rivalries in the unrest, both Malay and Thai-speaking Muslim villagers frequently raised the issue of official complicity in or responsibility for much of the violence both in this village and across the region in general. In the main, Malay-speaking Muslims tended to express these views in guarded and indirect terms, often framing their doubts about the sincerity of state officials in the form of rhetorical questions.\(^8\) This was not always the case, however, and some Malay Muslims were

\(^8\) While discussing the role of separatist organization in the violence, one Malay Muslims man repeatedly asked “where is PULO?”, implying that the existence of insurgent operatives might be exaggerated. Another man, while implying that the military is centrally involved in the drugs trade in the region, asked (of the drugs) “Where do they come from? How do they get here?” Conversation in a tea shop, May 5, 2014.
more willing to express their belief that a major underlying cause of the violence was that “if the violence stops, there will be no more budgets” (mai mee kwam roon raeng laow ja mai mee ngop praman). This type of direct expression, meanwhile, was typical of my conversations with many Thai-speaking Muslims. These villagers contended that state officials organized or committed a substantial share of the violence as a means of maintaining a level of insecurity that would perpetuate the flow of large and poorly monitored budgets to the region. They would often characterize the root causes of the ongoing violence in terms of the pon prayod (benefits) accruing to officials. Such villagers were prone to see themselves as the victims of rapacious, scrupulous and murderous state officials.

The stark contrast between Thai Muslims and Thai Buddhists as it regards understandings of the sources of violent conflict in the region is indicative of how differing experiences of the state security apparatus colours the interpretation of violence. In particular, relatively cordial relations, mutual participation in religious and other cultural ceremonies, and collaboration in civilian defence activities (see chapter 5) help sustain a widely-shared perception among Thai Buddhists that security officials are engaged in a righteous mission to protect “the land” (paendin) from separatist terrorists who pose a grave threat to themselves and to the kingdom. On the other hand, the widely-held perception amongst Thai Muslims that they are, as Muslims, subject to indiscriminate suspicion on the part of security officials, coupled with first and second-hand experiences of abuse on the part of some security officials, feeds into widely-shared suspicions of official culpability in many of the violent incidents (hedgan kwammaisangop) that take place in the region. The fact that this perception echoes that shared by many Malay-speaking Muslims is indicative of the manner in which the security apparatus of the Thai state in the Deep South aggregates adherents of Islam into a single, undifferentiated category, distinguished by its distance from a Thai-speaking, Buddhist national norm and inherently threatening precisely on account of that difference.

9 Numerous conversations with villagers 2013-2014.
4.5. Analysis

The observation that the security actions of the security apparatus of the Thai state have engendered the (further) alienation of Malay Muslims from Thai national identity is by no means a novel one. Complaints about the abuses of Thai state officials in regard to the local Malay-speaking population are as old as Thailand’s shift toward direct administration of the region in the late 19th century (Surin 1985: Chapter 2; Nik Mahmud 2008: 6-7). The fact that Thai-speaking Muslims with origins in the “upper south” should experience similar treatment and develop similar views regarding the disingenuousness of the Thai state’s provision of security in the region, on the other hand, is indicative that the problems of Thai administration in the Deep South have an important bearing on ethnic relations in the region. In Ban Lomyen, this alienation resulted from an approach to security on the part of the BPP Paratroopers and BPP that bifurcated the village population along religious lines. In effect, the actions of security officials in the village served to constrict the boundaries of Thai national identity in such a manner that pushed Thai Muslims toward the margins.

Since the late 19th century and the administrative reforms enacted by King Chulalongkorn, the Thai state has been at pains to instill in its subjects the notion that they are members of a mono-ethnic national community (see: Wyatt 2003: 182; Baker and Pasuk 2009: 63-64). With respect to the kingdom’s Muslim population, this effort has included, among other things, measures to incorporate Islamic education and institutions into a state-controlled bureaucratic structure (Surin 1985: Chapter 4). It has also included the official classification of all Muslims in the kingdom as “Thai-Islam” (Bajunid 2005: 8). The incorporation of the Muslim population into the Thai ethno-national community has been remarkably unsuccessful with respect to the Malay-speaking population in the Deep South region. At the same time, it is often observed that the inverse is true with respect to Muslims in other parts of the country (ibid.: 8-9; Anderson 2010: 133). However, when the BPP Paratroopers and, later, the BPP established their presence in Ban Lomyen in response to escalating levels of violence, a group of Thai-speaking Muslims with origins outside of the Deep South found that the “Thai” component of their identity no longer entitled them to protection. Instead, the “Islamic”
component of their identity became predominant as a marker of their being a potential threat to the security and property of the Thai Buddhist population.

From the moment of their arrival in Ban Lomyen, Thai-speaking Muslims found themselves in a precarious position. As Muslims, they were bound by religious stricture from participating in many of the bonding activities of their Buddhist neighbours, which typically included bouts of drinking *ya dong* (powerful homemade spirits) and feasting on wild pig hunted in the jungle abutting the village. As Thais, they faced language barriers as well as prejudices widely shared among Malay Muslims regarding the relative impiousness of their Thai-speaking coreligionists. The escalation of violence early in the 21st century and the actions of the Thai state’s security apparatus in response only served to reinforce the barriers between the Thai-speaking Muslims and their Buddhist neighbours. As the threat of violence grew in the village, so did the perceived benefits of closer identification with the Malay Muslim community. Several Thai Muslims expressed to me the feeling that in the early years of the conflict (and even now) they felt under threat from both Thai state officials and militants. They noted that a neighbouring village had become a something of a way station (*tee pak*) for insurgent operatives from other areas. Facing a situation in which “Thai” settlers appeared to be a target for militant intimidation and violence, closer affiliation with Muslim identity became a prudent strategy for personal security. Feeling powerless to remedy the BPP Paratroopers and regular BPP’s perception of them as potentially threatening “Muslims,” Thai-speaking Muslims sought to minimize perceptions of them as “Thai” settlers through the overt expression of the Muslim identity. This included near universal adoption of wearing the hijab among women (a practice already widely adopted among Malay Muslim women) and men donning the traditional Malay sarong and taqiyah cap\textsuperscript{10}. In these and other ways, Thai Muslims sought to blur the ethnic boundary between themselves and Malay Muslims.

\textsuperscript{10} That these practices were of recent adoption became apparent when perusing family photo albums in the village. Numerous photos showed Thai Muslims in the early years of the settlement wearing the fashions of the 1980s. Almost none of the women in older photographs wore the hijab. The situated nature of the practices became apparent during several trips to Thai Muslim ancestral homes in Pattalung province, when most of the women would remove their hijab and men would change into more fashionable clothing.
Relations between Thai Buddhists and the security apparatus of the Thai state contrasted dramatically with those of both Thai and Malay-speaking Muslims. In Ban Namsai, the exodus of Thai Buddhists marked the nadir of inter-communal relations in the village. Having left the village, however, Buddhists faced the problem of their property and livelihoods being situated in a geographical region in which they no longer felt safe. By taking up refuge in a Buddhist temple, these villagers mobilized the symbolic capital of mainstream Thai identity to elicit the sympathy and support of the Thai state. Moreover, by making an appeal directly to the royal family, these villagers evoked what is without a doubt the most powerful symbol of Thai identity in the kingdom. As a result, Buddhist villagers from two small villages in a remote and peripheral part of the kingdom were able to elicit national attention to their plight and the mobilization of substantial security resources on their behalf. It is worth reiterating that a retinue of 20 Special Forces soldiers and one-hundred paramilitary Rangers were mobilized to accompany their return to the village and that a battalion of Border Patrol Police Paratroopers were assigned to occupy their abandoned homes. Meanwhile, in Ban Lomyen, most Thai Buddhist stayed in their homes when the Thai and Malay Muslim population was evacuating the village. Whether consciously or not, their decision to stay fulfilled the expressed desire of the Thai queen to see Buddhist villagers stay in the region and personally guard their homes against those who would drive them out. It is thus clear in the case of Ban Namsai – though somewhat less so in the case of Ban Lomyen – that Buddhist villagers mobilized symbolic resources in the re-making of ethnic boundaries that unambiguously identified them as loyal members of the Thai ethno-national community. By doing so, they were able to benefit from the mobilization of substantial resources toward the maintenance and enhancement of their security.

Finally, the case of Malay-speaking Muslims represents something of an inverse of the situation of Thai Buddhists. For Malay-speaking Muslims, perhaps even more so than for Thai-speaking Muslims, the security officers’ posture of suspicion and (perceived) hostility appeared an immutable fact of life. The threat posed by military and Border Patrol Police officers was and is, in the perception of many Malay-speaking Muslims, a consequence of the former’s inability or unwillingness to treat Muslims as
anything other than an undifferentiated and threatening whole. On the other hand, Malay-speaking Muslims in the region face a substantial threat from militants if they are perceived to be cooperating too closely with the Thai state. Numerous leaflets have been found scattered throughout the region warning of the dire consequences for munafik (traitors to the religion) who cooperate with Thai officials (McCargo 2009: 157). It is worth reiterating that, of the 6,317 people killed in the region between January 2004 and May 2015 in incidents classified by Deep South Watch as insurgency-related, 59 per cent have been Muslims (DSW 2015). Thus, while adopting a welcoming attitude toward the BPP Paratroopers may appear to be a good strategy for minimizing the threat of being misidentified as an insurgent sympathizer (and the perceived deadly consequences of being so identified), doing so introduces an equally if not more serious threat of being labeled a state collaborator. In light of these realities, it makes eminently good sense for Malay-speaking Muslims to adopt a polite yet distant relationship with Thai security officials and to maintain, in a public and visible manner, their unadulterated Malay identity. This should not be taken to suggest, however, that Malay Muslims are simply “performing” their Malay identity as a means of navigating an insecure environment. What is does suggest, however, is that the perceived biases of the Thai security apparatus reinforce ethnic boundaries characterized by a high degree of social closure.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has presented the argument that the actions of the Thai security forces and the perception of those actions on the part of villagers has been an important factor in the making and shifting of ethnic boundaries in those villages. In the case of

11 As one young Malay Muslim man in Ban Namsai expressed it to me, “they think we are all terrorists!” (kao kit wa rao pen poo rai took kon)
Ban Namsai, Buddhists were capable of mobilizing symbolic resources to reemphasize their Thai ethnic identity and thereby gain preferential access to state-provided security. Meanwhile, the perception on the part of many Muslim villagers (both Thai and Malay-speaking) that the security forces pose a threat to their personal safety and are exclusively interested in protecting the lives and property of Buddhists (to the exclusion of Muslims) has contributed to the shifting of ethnic boundaries in such a manner as to distance Thai Muslims from their Buddhist neighbours and place greater emphasis on the religious dimension of their identity. This finding offers a particularly noteworthy insight into the manner in which perceptions of ethnic bias in the provision of state services (in this case, security) contribute to the “making” and “moving” of ethnic boundaries. As the following chapters will show, this dynamic is observable in several other dimensions of state-society relations. Taken as a whole, these chapters will show that differentiations in relations between various branches of the Thai state and members of different ethno/linguistic/religious communities in these two villages have contributed to development and maintenance of increasingly impermeable and polarizing ethnic boundaries.
Chapter 5. Bootstrapping Security

A note on acronyms: This chapter makes reference to an array of civilian militias and paramilitary organizations, many of which are commonly referred to by Thai-language acronyms. See Appendix C for a list of their names and the associated acronyms.

5.1. Introduction

Early on the morning of September 22, 2013, I awoke to the sound of a gunshot just outside of the wooden “teacher’s house” (ban kru) in which I had been billeted for my stay in Ban Lomyen. Having only been in the village for two weeks and still quite on edge about my decision to conduct research in an area generally considered to be a “red zone”\(^1\), I was nervous. Already in my short time in the village I had heard early-morning gunshots on several occasions, but was reassured by villagers who informed me that they were merely warning shots and “ping-pong bombs” used to scare off the wild elephants that periodically raided rubber fields and fruit orchards. On this particular morning, however, the gunshot had been very close by. I took my time leaving the house

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\(^1\) In 2005 then-Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra introduced a colour-coded schema for the southernmost region, labeling areas deemed hotbeds of insurgent activity “red zones” and, for a time, excluding villages categorized in this manner from various development funds and projects. The term “red zone” soon found its way into the popular imagination and is widely used to describe areas particularly prone to violent incidents (McCargo 2007а: 83).
that morning, only venturing outside after another 20 minutes of quiet assured me that no further shooting was taking place.

When I finally came outside, I walked across the grass to the Or Ro Bor bunker. The Or Ror Bor (or Village Protection Volunteers) is an all-Buddhist civilian militia inspired by Queen Sirikit’s various calls to active self-defence on the part of Thai-Buddhists (McCargo 2012a: 37; ICG 2007a: 18-19). From my first day in the village, members of the Or Ror Bor had gone out of their way to ensure my comfort and safety, offering me meals at their bunker and detailing for me the proper protocol should any type of violent incident take place. I wandered over to their bunker in the hopes of learning what had taken place that morning and found one man watching the television news while another two slept, rifles by their side. I asked the man watching television if a gun had been discharged in the area a while earlier, and his response betrayed a degree of frustration. Indeed, he said, one of the Or Ro Bor members – a man from Maha Sarakham in the country’s Northeast – had shot a monkey that wandered into the village from the surrounding jungle. The man, I later learned, had been very drunk after an all-night shift at the Or Ror Bor bunker spent drinking home-made, herb-infused rice liquor (yaa dong). His condition notwithstanding, his shot had been true and he brought the animal back home for the pot.

The early morning shot outside the Or Ror Bor bunker was a matter of some annoyance for several of the organization’s members and was by no means a regular occurrence in the village. The heavy drinking that preceded it, however, turned out to be something of a norm. By no means all, but certainly several of the men who took it in turn to spend the night in the Or Ro Bor bunker often passed their shifts in some stage of inebriation. The very night before this ill-advised early morning monkey hunting, the shooter’s friend and shift partner had informed me – glass of ‘yaa dong’ in hand – of the Or Ror Bo’s primary purpose: “we stay awake,” he said “so that the rest of the village can sleep soundly.” After the morning’s events, I found these words cold comfort and soon relocated my lodging to a house a safer distance from the Or Ror Bor’s security operations.

2 Officially, the Or Ror Bor is open to membership from all Thai citizens aged 20 or above, but in practice there are vanishingly few non-Buddhist members and none in Ban Lomyen.
5.2. Militias and Paramilitaries in the Southernmost Region

The Or Ror Bor was one of two state-sponsored citizen defence militias in existence in Ban Lomyen during the course of my research. The other, known as the Village Development and Self-Defence Volunteers or Chor Ror Bor, was part of a much larger program organized by the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) and active in most communities in the conflict-affected south (ICG 2007a:15-16). These two organizations, though significant, represent only part of what is a varied array of paramilitary organizations, state sponsored militias and vigilante groups that operate in parallel and often in cooperation with state security officials in the region. Their origins can be traced to a long history of paramilitary organization in Thailand that is most clearly rooted in the organization of the Wild Tiger Crops under King Vajiravuth in 1911 (see chapter 3). Since the most recent intensification of insurgent violence in the southernmost region starting in about 2001, paramilitaries and militias have come to play an ever-greater role in the Thai state’s counter insurgency strategy. As this chapter details, there exists a wealth of evidence suggesting that such an approach to security has been at best ineffective and at worst counterproductive to the goal of reducing violence in Thailand’s ‘Deep South.’ The present chapter marshals ethnographic data gathered from Ban Lomyen and, to a lesser extent, Ban Namsai in support of the argument that citizen militias, as they are currently constructed in southernmost Thailand, also contribute significantly to the reproduction of exclusive categories of identity and the fortification of the barriers that define them.

The present chapter is organized in three substantive sections. The first addresses the role of paramilitary organization in the two villages at the heart of this study. The two principal paramilitary organization operation in southernmost Thailand are the Rangers (thahan prahn) and the Volunteer Defence Force (Or Sor). As will be shown, neither of these organizations was a significant presence in the villages during the period of research, but both had played a role in the villages’ histories and, through the membership of a small number of village residents, in their present as well. The
second section addresses the Village Development and Self-Defence Volunteers (*Chor Ror Bor*). Both villages were home to organized *Chor Ror Bor* groups. However, in neither village were those groups regularly active throughout the research period. Nor, as will be shown, were they inclusive of villagers of all ethno-religious identities. The third section is concerned with the Village Protection Volunteers (*Or Ror Bor*) referred to in the chapter's introductory vignette. The *Or Ror Bor* was only active in Ban Lomyen, which is to be expected given the lack of a Buddhist population in Ban Namsai. The chapter argues that the *Or Ror Bor* plays an important role in fostering a shared sense of collective identity and duty amongst Thai Buddhists in Ban Lomyen, but does so in a manner that erects both physical and symbolic barriers between Buddhists and Muslims. A final section concludes.

5.3. **Paramilitaries: Thahan Prahn and the Or Sor**

Several of the paramilitary and militia organizations in existence in Thailand today trace their origins directly to US-sponsored counter-insurgency operations targeting Communist Party of Thailand operatives between the 1960s and 1980s (ICG 2007a: 2-4). This includes the paramilitary “Rangers” (*thahan prahn* lit. hunter soldiers), which were established in 1978 to assist in counter-insurgency operations in the country’s northeast and quickly came to play a predominant role in such operations, particularly in border areas (ibid.: 4). The advantages of this irregular force over regular, professional soldiers were held to include better knowledge of local areas (and languages), a flexible command structure, lower costs, longer periods of deployment (in comparison with military conscripts) and a greater willingness to engage in combat (ibid.: 7; McCargo 2009: 102). The Rangers, however, soon gained a reputation for indiscipline and brutality. In the early 1980s, units of paramilitary Rangers were disbanded in the upper south provinces of Surat Thani and Pattalung following the revelation of systemic abuses of villagers. This reputation notwithstanding, Thailand’s Internal Security Operations Centre (ISOC) opted to make paramilitary Rangers a key component of its counterinsurgency program in the Deep South. This approach began with the
deployment of three regiments of Rangers to Cho Airong district in Narathiwat province in 2004 and intensified following junta leader General Sonthi Boonyaratglin's decision in 2006 to establish an additional 30 companies of locally-recruited Rangers in the south (ICG 2007a: 5-8; McCargo 2009: 102). By early 2010 there were nearly 11,000 Rangers stationed in the Deep South region (Askew 2010c: 241).

The move to increase the role of paramilitary Rangers in quelling the violence met with criticism from several quarters. Most noteworthy is the International Crisis Group, whose 2007 report “The Problem with Paramilitaries” (ICG 2007a) remains the most thoroughly-researched critique of this strategy. According to the ICG, several of the purported advantages of paramilitary Rangers are overblown, while others are in fact detrimental to the goal of ending violent conflict. For example, the advantage of local recruitment and its presumed benefits with regard to knowledge of local languages, customs and terrain is undermined by the fact that some 60% of new recruits are local Thai Buddhists with low rates of Malay Language capability, while a further 10-25% are Muslims from the upper south with similar linguistic disadvantages (ibid.: 7). Moreover, local connections represent a liability for many recruits, who are particularly vulnerable to attack when on leave in their home towns or villages and who fear that insurgents will target their families (ibid.; Liow and Pathan 2010: 59-60). In addition, the advantage of lower costs results, at least in part, from the truncated 45-day training period for Rangers, which does little to resolve the longstanding problem of indiscipline within the organization. Similarly, the loose command structure of the Rangers and their apparent willingness to engage in combat, while apparently beneficial in some instances, has occasionally resulted in renegade operations that deepen popular antipathy toward the state and further entrench a widely-shared view of the Rangers as dangerous, possibly even criminal thugs.

By far the most widely documented case in which paramilitary Rangers were implicated in abuses against civilians was the mass arrest of protesters at Tak Bai,

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3 According to the ICG (2007a: 5), in 1995 the Thai military announced a policy of extending training for Rangers to 6 months, but the policy was never put into force.

4 The ICG report recounts an incident in Saiburi in Pattani province in which Rangers were able to repel an attack on a police station after hearing gunshots and rushing to the scene. The implication is that the command structure of the regular military would have precluded such a rapid response.
Narathiwat province on October 25, 2004. The incident has become a lasting source of intense grievance toward the Thai state and the military on the part of many Malay Muslims, but is perhaps less directly associated with the Rangers in popular memory. On the other hand, there have occurred a significant number of violent incidents for which the Rangers are popularly (if not legally) held responsible. Examples including a violent raid on an Islamic school in Tasae, Yala in 2007 that left one young man dead, the alleged rape and murder of a young woman and the murder of three of her relatives in Patae, Yala in 2007, and, more recently, a “raid” on suspected insurgents in Tung Yang Dang district, Pattani, that left four young men dead and in which Rangers were accused of planting weapons on the deceased to justify their violent engagement (ICG 2007a: 9-12; Pathan 2015a). Incidents such as these have served to solidify a perception of paramilitary Rangers, widely shared amongst Malay Muslims in particular, as a major threat to their safety and security.

5.3.1. Paramilitaries in Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai

During the period of research for this study, the paramilitary Rangers played no role in the provision of security in the two villages. This was not the case, however, throughout Changpa Subdistrict. A company of Rangers did maintain a base alongside the major road running through the lowland section of the subdistrict. In the upland section, however, the professional security presence was exclusively made up of regular Border Patrol Police and Border Patrol Police Paratroopers. The Rangers, however, had played a role in the recent history of Ban Namsai and were connected to Ban Lomyen through the membership of one of that village’s residents.

5 While Border Patrol Police and Marines also played prominent roles in that day’s tragic events, the 45th Ranger Regiment played the primary role in the arrest and transportation of protesters to Inkayuthborinhan military base in Pattani, some 4 hours’ drive away. Protesters had their hands bound and were stacked, one on top of the other, in military transport vehicles. 78 died from asphyxiation and other injuries during the journey, while another 7 were shot dead at the protest site itself (McCargo 2009: 112).
The only current member of the paramilitary Rangers residing in either of these two villages during the period of research was the son of a Buddhist school teacher in Pattani who had married a Thai-speaking Muslim woman in Ban Lomyen and was a convert to Islam. When I first met the young man (we will call him “Rusadee”), he was on extended leave from a Ranger unit based in another district of Yala province. He told me that he intended to quit the Rangers and focus on helping his wife, her mother and brother earn a living through tending their own small rubber plantation and working a number of small share-cropping contracts. He preferred, he said, to stay in the village where he could go on overnight trips into the jungle to hunt porcupine (a favorite local delicacy) and catch fish. Without admitting that he might be afraid, he also told me that working as a Ranger was very dangerous. However, as the months passed and the price of rubber continued to fall (see chapter 7), economic imperatives began to alter Rusadee’s thinking. If such everyday concerns were not enough, in May of 2014, Rasadee’s young wife announced to him that she was pregnant. With the added expenses of child rearing suddenly entering the picture, he took the decision to return to work as a Ranger, at least for a “few months.”

Three weeks later it came time for him to return to the camp and I offered to drive him there. First, however, we had to go to his parent’s home in Pattani to pick up his uniform. In a certain respect, his exit from the village also entailed leaving another uniform behind. A convert to Islam, Rusadee observed several of the most visible practices of membership in the identity group “Muslim.” Immediately after returning from work in the rubber field each morning, he would bathe, dress in a customary Malay sarong and pray. Always while out and about in the village, he would be dressed in a sarong, which is the most visible identity marker of the Muslim male in the southernmost region. On Fridays, he would don one of his finer sarongs, a clean white shirt and a sungok cap to attend Mosque for the obligatory communal prayer. Likewise, he participated in cooperative work on the mosque-owned land, helping to build a dam to irrigate fruit trees and cutting the grass around the mosque. On the morning we left the village, however, Rusadee was dressed in blue jeans and a t-shirt (a change typical of young men visiting town). When we reached his family home, his family, though
accepting of his religious conversion, still referred him by his Thai nickname “Lek.” Noting my surprise at the change of name, his mother feigned ignorance of his Islamic name. When we entered the family house, Lek immediately went to the refrigerator to get a bottle of beer, which he enjoyed with relish. He explained to me that it was important that he behave in the manner of a good Muslim when in the village, but that he really loved beer and would drink it when he was at home or at the Ranger camp. This was one small example of how Rusadee was able to negotiate his identity while travelling through different contexts. When I took him to the Ranger camp the next day and met several of his brothers-in-arms, it became quite clear that Rusadee’s flexible identity was key to his ability to move between Muslim village life and the life of a Ranger.

Rusadee was the only currently serving member of the Rangers in either of the two villages (the headman of Ban Lomyen was a former ranger), but several villagers in Ban Lomyen (all Muslims) had been at one time members of the other major paramilitary organization in the region, the Volunteer Defence Corps (Kong Asa Raksa Dindaen or Or Sor). The Or Sor is the largest paramilitary organization in Thailand and is organized under the supervision of the MoI. The organization was founded in 1954 with assistance and covert funding from the CIA and is primarily responsible for the personal security of Interior Ministry officials. Or Sor volunteers receive 45 days of military training and a base salary of 10,500 baht, plus per diem (McCargo 2009: 122; ICG 2007a: 14). They are widely regarded as being fiercely loyal to their bureaucratic superiors and have, in some cases, been accused of carrying out extra-judicial assassinations and other illegal activities at their behest (ICG 2007a: 14). According prominent security expert Desmond Ball and his coauthor David Scott Mathieson, however, the Or Sor is “much less involved in criminally-motivated killings than the police or Thahan Prahn and much less involved in human rights abuses than the police or army units” (quoted in ICG 2007a: 14). During the period of research for this study, the Or Sor did not maintain a presence in either of the two study villages, although had done so in the past. For instance, Or Sor members were only encountered in Ban Lomyen during the Governor’s visit (see Chapter 8).

6 Most Thai speakers have a short nickname that their friends, family and associates use in place of sometimes long and formal given names.
For most of the men in Ban Lomyen who had been members of the Or Sor, their membership in the organization ended in a terrifying manner on June 24, 2007 (an incident that is described in some detail in Chapter 4). Congregating at a tea shop that had served as the Village Development and Defence Volunteers outpost in the village, these men had come under a hail of gunfire that left one man paralyzed, another severely injured and two others less severely hurt. All of the men received some compensation from the state for their injuries, although at least two complained of delays and shortages in its delivery. The Or Sor activities in the village were subsequently suspended and, as will be discussed below, the Village Development and Self-Defence Volunteers program (Chor Ror Bor) also entered into an unofficial hiatus. A similar incident also took place in Ban Namsai in November of 2009, when an Or Sor volunteer and a member of the Chor Ror Bor were wounded in an attack that killed the village headman. As described in Chapter 4, several villagers I spoke with about the incident attributed that attack to Rangers assigned to the village to accompany Buddhist villagers who had earlier taken up refuge in Nirotsangkana temple in the provincial capital. The former member of the Or Sor recovered from his injuries and was given (to his recollection) 250,000 baht in compensation. He and his wife were also given jobs at the local primary health clinic.

The experiences of villagers in Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai who served as members of the Rangers and Or Sor underscore the grave risks that such service entails. Paramilitary Rangers in particular are a much derided organization in the southernmost region and have featured prominently in insurgent propaganda highlighting abuses against Malay Muslim citizens. They have also been a core target of insurgent attacks. Similarly, as employees of the Interior Ministry closely associated with the senior bureaucratic agents of the Thai state, Or Sor members are considered by the insurgents to be legitimate targets. What must also be understood, however, is the economic imperatives that push young men into service. All of the former Or Sor members and the serving Ranger I spoke with highlighted the economic motivations for joining these paramilitary forces. As a long-serving Ranger, for example, Rusadee was paid 17,500 baht a month (approximately US$600), while former Or Sor members had been paid 15,000 baht a month. In a subdistrict with few opportunities for waged labour and in the context of volatile markets for agricultural products (rubber, in particular), employment with these paramilitary organizations represented a rare opportunity for
economic betterment. The decision to take up employment with either of these paramilitary organizations hinged primarily on a calculation of the monetary rewards against the physical risks. Notably, none of the young men I spoke with discussed their enlisting with these paramilitary organizations in terms of citizenship duties, protecting “the realm” (*paendin*) or securing the nation. This stood in stark contrast with the language employed by members of the all-Buddhist Village Protection Volunteers (*Or Ror Bor*, discussed below).

5.4. The Village Development and Self-Defence Volunteers or *Chor Ror Bor*

In the multi-layered schema of security provision in Thailand’s southernmost provinces, the broad base consists of citizen militias that are to be found in virtually every village and neighbourhood in the region. One of the volunteer militia programs – the Village Development and Self-Defence Volunteers (*Chor Ro Bor*) – has a history that predates the resurgence of violence in the deep south in the early 2000s, while another – the Village Protection Volunteers (*Or Ror Bor*) – was organized specifically in response to the plight of the Thai Buddhists living in the area. These village and neighbourhood-level militias represent an attempt on the part of the Thai state to enlist citizens in the effort to combat insurgent violence and, in so doing, to inculcate a sense of unity and commitment to the Thai nation. In practice, there is reason to doubt that such militias have played a significant role in quelling violence and a comparative wealth of evidence to suggest that the groups represent an easy source of arms for militant groups (see below). Observations in the multi-ethnic village of Ban Lomyen (and media reports from elsewhere, e.g. Pathan 2015c) also suggest that the simultaneous existence of two volunteer militia programs – one of which is implicitly connected with a specific ethno-religious community – can exacerbate patterns of inter-ethnic estrangement and engender conceptions of security that cast the ethnic other in an inherently threatening light.

In the mid 1960s, the Thai government (aided and supported by the CIA) established Village Security Teams in villages around the country (ICG 2007a: 15). These teams were charged with defending villages against communist insurgents and preventing villagers from aiding and supplying the insurgency. In the mid-1980s, when
the communist insurgency had collapsed (mostly due to an amnesty program instated under the premiership of General Prem Tinsulanond) the Village Security team program was rebranded as the Village Development and Self-Defence Volunteers (*Chut Raksa Kwamsangopriaproi Prajam Moo Bahn* lit. Village-level Peace and Order Maintenance Unit). Organized under the MoI’s Department of Provincial Administration, the *Chor Ror Bor* continues to operate in border areas throughout the kingdom. In the southernmost region, however, its organizations and operations come under the authority of the Internal Security Operations Command and it has come to play an ever more prominent role in the state’s counterinsurgency and security strategies (ibid.: 15). The activation of *Chor Ror Bor* volunteers in the Deep South began in earnest in 2002, with the recruitment of some 24,300 volunteers (ICG 2007a). The program expanded by another 23,000 recruits beginning in 2005 and again by 7,000 in 2007-9 (ibid.). By 2012 there were approximately 60,000 registered volunteers in the *Chor Ror Bor* program (Srisompob 2012).

At the village level, *Chor Ror Bor* units are headed by the village headman, who is responsible for establishing a roster of some 30 volunteers who take it in turn to maintain nightly watches. *Chor Ror Bor* volunteers are expected to establish monitoring positions along major roads and to report suspicious activities to the military and/or police (McCargo 2009: 122). Each village or neighbourhood *Chor Ro Bor* unit is supplied with a monthly budget of 20,000 baht (approximately US$650), which is intended to be used for the purchase of coffee and other refreshments (ICG 2007a: 15). No salaries or stipends are provided to *Chor Ror Bor* volunteers. Volunteers are given three days’ military training, which is overseen by the army, Rangers or Or Sor. During the course of their training, volunteers are only given five rounds of ammunition with which to practice shooting (ibid.). *Chor Ror Bor* groups are also given five round pump-action shotguns as well as other supplies, such as jackets emblazoned with the *Chor Ror Bor* acronym. Village headmen in many villages in the southernmost region were also given a budget to expand their roster of deputies from the usual two to six, the expanded membership being charged with coordinating surveillance and security operations in various sections of the village.⁷

⁷ Interview with Village Headman of Ban Lomyen, October 3, 2013.
The advantages of voluntary militias over regular professional security personnel include their deep local knowledge – including knowledge of who may be involved in insurgent activities – and their ability to provide security on a 24-hour basis (ICG 2007a: 15-16). In reality, however, Chor Ror Bor units have proven ineffective in the provision of security and are rarely committed to round-the-clock surveillance. As Duncan McCargo (2009: 123) notes (and observations in both Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai corroborate) Chor Ror Bor posts often remain unmanned or are active for only a few hours each evening. Moreover, from early on in the most recent iteration of insurgent violence in the Deep South, Chor Ror Bor have become a target for insurgents who view them as an easy source of weapons (ICG 2007a: 16-17).

In 2003, a wave of thefts and armed robberies prompted a short-lived move to store Chor Ror Bor weapons at local police stations and district offices. In some cases, volunteers whose guns were stolen were made to pay for their replacements or were accused of collaborating with the insurgents. This was the case, for example, in Tak Bai, Narathiwat in 2004. Protests against the detention of Chor Ror Bor volunteers whose weapons were stolen unravelled into the tragic events described earlier in this chapter.

Perhaps more ominously, Chor Ror Bor volunteers have on occasion been accused of engaging in vigilante violence or of lacking the discipline and training necessary to resolve tense situations without the use of excessive force. Such was the case in a village near Ban Lomyen in April of 2007, when Buddhist members of a Chor Ror Bor unit opened fire on a group of young men returning from a funeral held for a Malay Muslim official who had been killed that morning. The young men had reportedly been acting in a threatening manner toward the Chor Ror Bor and may have attacked the defence volunteers with sticks and rocks, but there is no evidence (beyond the assertions of some Chor Ror Bor members) that they were armed. Border Patrol Police stationed nearby later claimed to have fired warning shots when they saw the conflict developing (ICG 2007a: 17-18). Four young men were killed that evening and several others seriously wounded (McCargo 2009: 123, 2012a: 40; ICG 2007a: 17). Though there have not been a large number of similar events in subsequent years, the incident at the very least illustrates the potential for lightly-trained and heavily-armed citizen militias to exacerbate conditions of insecurity.
5.4.1. *Chor Ror Bor* in Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai

In late September 2013, I attended a meeting of the Village Administrative Committee (*Kanna Gammagan Borihan Moo Ban*) in Ban Lomyen. The meeting was attended by the village headman, his six deputies (three Buddhists and three Thai-speaking Muslims), a primary health volunteer (*Or Sor Mor*), a teacher, the head of the Village Defence Volunteers (*Or Ror Bor*) and the commanding officer of the Border Patrol Police company stationed in the village. All of the headman’s deputies at the meeting were wearing black jackets with the Thai letters ขรบ. (*Chor Ror Bor*) emblazoned across the shoulders. Having already been aware of the *Or Ror Bor* bunker in the village, I made it a point to speak with the village headman about the *Chor Ror Bor* and its activities after the meeting. When I brought it up with him, he told me that each of his deputies was responsible for ensuring security in their section of the village. Therefore, it was not necessary for the *Chor Ror Bor* to maintain a particular watch post or bunker.

As I later learned, this deconcentrated security arrangement had not always been in place in the village. For nearly three years between 2004 and 2007, the village had maintained two *Chor Ro Bor* outposts, one in the exclusively Muslim Lower Village and one in the majority Buddhist Upper Village. The outpost in the Upper Village had been manned exclusively by Thai-speaking Buddhists, while the outpost in the Lower Village (guarding the only road entering the village) had been manned by both Thai and Malay-speaking Muslims. The Lower Village outpost had also been converted into a tea shop, and thus served as a social hub for Thai and Malay-speaking Muslims. This arrangement, however, came to an abrupt halt following the June 24, 2007 incident detailed in Chapter 4 and referred to above. Thereafter, the *Chor Ror Bor* ceased to engage in organized patrols or surveillance in the Lower Village, while the all-Buddhist Upper Village *Chor Ror Bor* was folded into the Village Defence Volunteers group (*Or

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8 It is notable that, despite constituting more than 1/3 of the village population, there were no Malay-speaking Muslims on the Village Administration Committee. This changed several months later when the headman reshuffled his team of deputies and added one Malay-speaking Muslim man (originally from Narathiwat province) to his team.
The *Chor Ror Bor* in Ban Lomyen was not disbanded, however. Instead, the village headman continued to collect the 20,000 baht ‘tea budget’ that the MoI supplies to village heads wherever *Chor Ror Bor* groups have been organized. According to one of the headman’s deputies, this money was divided between the headman and the six core members of his “work team.”

In Ban Namsai, the organization of the *Chor Ror Bor* differed slightly from Ban Lomyen in detail if not in spirit. The *Chor Ror Bor* in Ban Namsai had been active in the early years of its existence and maintained this activity somewhat longer than had been the case in Ban Lomyen. This is evidenced, for example, by the fact that one of the young men injured in the November, 2009 assassination of the village’s headman was himself a *Chor Ror Bor* volunteer. Unlike Ban Lomyen, this incident did not lead to the abandonment of existing *Chor Ror Bor* surveillance and patrol operations. Instead, the *Chor Ror Bor* in Ban Namsai atrophied. The wood and bamboo hut that had been built for its purposes was allowed to deteriorate over time such that, at the time of research for this study, it had only two walls and half of the elevated floor was missing. The hut was located inside the gate for the village school (see Map 2) which, from a strategic standpoint, rendered it incapable of mounting a defence against attackers trying to gain entrance into the village (any such attackers would, if travelling by road, have to pass through the entire village before reaching the *Chor Ror Bor* hut). In theory, however, the hut’s location would facilitate guarding the school against arson attacks. One of the remaining walls of the hut obscured the volunteers’ view of the school, however, limiting their ability to act in this capacity.

Despite its dilapidated state and poor strategic position, in 2013 and the early part of 2014, the hut inside the village school gate remained an active *Chor Ror Bor* outpost. Most (not all) evenings, roughly between 8pm and midnight, two or three men could be found sitting in the hut watching television and smoking cigarettes. Unlike in Ban Lomyen, however, none of the men who stationed themselves in the *Chor Ror Bor* hut were members of the headman’s expanded work team (men who were, as a matter of course, formal members of the *Chor Ror Bor*). Instead, the hut was ‘guarded’ by men of a younger generation. On each of the several occasions in which I visited the *Chor Ror Bor* hut in the late evening, the two or three men on duty had only a single shotgun between them.
The prevailing arrangements for the *Chor Ror Bor* in both Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai began to change in March of 2014. That month, the Department of Local Administration office in Bannagsata districts made funds available to both villages for the construction of new *Chor Ror Bor* bunkers. Loads of cinder block and cement were delivered to both villages and teams organized by the Village Administration Committees commenced the construction of roughly nine square meter huts, both near the major road entrances into each village. In Ban Lomyen, the new bunker was built directly opposite the position of the original hut that had been attacked in 2007. In Ban Namsai it was built next to a row of houses and across the pond from Buddhist-owned houses now occupied by the Border Patrol Police (see chapter 4). Although it was more than likely a coincidence, several villagers in Ban Lomyen expressed the opinion that the construction was motivated by the impending visit to Ban Lomyen by the provincial governor (see chapter 8). That rumour notwithstanding, the reconstruction of *Chor Ror Bor* village defence facilities was consistent with a broader trend for the Thai state to invest more resources and faith in citizen militias as the first line of defence in their battle with the Deep South insurgency.

The construction of new *Chor Ror Bor* bunkers had significantly differing results in Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai. In Ban Lomyen, what had been a deconcentrated or even *de facto* deactivated *Chor Ror Bor* roared back to life, with members taking 5 man rotating shifts from 8pm to 11pm each evening. The men would arrive following the conclusion of evening prayers, each bringing with him his own weapon. For most men, this meant a pump-action shotgun. Only two men (the village headman and one of his deputies) brought different weapons, specifically, American-made .30 calibre carbine rifles. In addition to the men serving their shifts that evening, the *Chor Ror Bor* hut quickly became a social hub in the village, with (exclusively) men wandering over to join in a game of cards or share in nipa-palm leaf cigarettes and 3-in-one instant coffee. The social scene around the *Chor Ror Bor* hut grew more lively still during the 2014 football World Cup, for which early fixtures kicked off at 10pm local time. The village headman

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9 Although several reports (including ICG 2007a) suggest that *Chor Ror Bor* units were supplied by the Interior Ministry with 5 round, pump action shotguns, several villagers in Ban Lomyen and other nearby villages (not including Ban Namsai) had Vietnam War-era, semi-automatic carbine rifles that they told me were supplied to them by the district as part of the *Chor Ror Bor* program.
had purchased a small television and satellite reception box specifically for the event and Chor Ro Bor shifts were routinely extended until 2 or 3am throughout the tournament. What is notable, however, is that, even though Malay and Thai-speaking Muslims from the Upper Village joined the Chor Ror Bor as both volunteers and casual visitors, at no point did any Thai-speaking Buddhists participate. While, on paper, the Chor Ror Bor in Ban Lomyen comprised both Buddhist and Muslim members, in practice its membership was exclusively Muslim. At the same time, the truncated nature of the Chor Ror Bor's activities (covering only three hours each evening) spoke to the lack of seriousness with which its security function was regarded. It was apparent that the revitalization of the Chor Ror Bor in Ban Lomyen aimed at little more that appeasing outside officials upon whom the continued flow of its limited budget depended.

In Ban Namsai, meanwhile, the construction of a new Chor Ror Bor bunker had started at roughly the same time as that in Ban Lomyen, but by the time the period of field research for this study came to a close some 5 months later, the few Chor Ror Bor volunteers who were active in the village remained in the dilapidated hut inside the school gate. According to the deputy village headman, the reason for this was that the new bunker had not yet been completed and was awaiting the arrival of more concrete to complete the floor. This seemed a rather unconvincing reason, however, given that the existing hut was also without a finished floor. According to some of the young men who manned the original hut, the reason for not relocating was simply that it was “more comfortable” (sabai gwa) where they were. Indeed, by nightfall the schoolyard was a very quiet place, with only the sound of jungle insects and the occasional owl competing with the sound of their small television. This preference for quietude, however, seemed to fly in the face of the expressed purpose of the Chor Ror Bor. It seems that the Chor Ror Bor in Ban Namsai was not, in practice, engaged in any sort of security function. Instead, its existence was entirely perfunctory. Moreover, the secluded location of the existing hut kept volunteers a safe distance from the one place in the village that seemed most likely to be the site of violent activity: the Border Patrol Police encampment. Judging by villagers’ numerous expressions of suspicion that Border Patrol Police had been involved in extrajudicial murders in the area (see Chapter 4), it seems reasonable to conclude that the members of the Chor Ror Bor in Ban Namsai were more concerned with the potential for attacks by state security officials than with those of insurgents.
The activities (and inactivity) of Chor Ror Bor volunteers in Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai illustrate several shortcomings of the Thai state’s program to enlist civilians as the front line of defence against insurgents in the kingdom’s southernmost region. For one, they illustrate the problem of motivation. For an extended period in both villages, the Chor Ror Bor was essentially inactive. Prior to the construction of a new bunker in Ban Lomyen, its members were, at best, “on-call” in case of an emergency. In Ban Namsai, a small number of underequipped young men sat in a position from which they would be little if any help in case of an insurgent attack. In neither village, however, did the headman and his team cease accepting the modest monthly budget for the program. As McCargo (2009) reports, village headmen are given full discretion over the use of Chor Ror Bor budgets, but are subject to having those budgets reduced should a violent incident take place in the village while no Chor Ror Bor volunteers are on duty. Having travelled extensively throughout the region, McCargo also notes that, in many areas, the implementation of the Chor Ror Bor scheme “bordered on farce” (ibid.: 123). Secondly, in Ban Lomyen, it is apparent that the officially co-ethnic Chor Ror Bor immediately developed into two parallel, segregated militia. In the early years, this meant the development of two separate Chor Ror Bor groups (one Muslims, one Buddhist), each charged with the defence of a different section of the village. This pattern has been observed elsewhere in the region, including in Bahn Kok Khilek, Pattani Province, where Buddhist Chor Ror Bor were subject to a deadly bomb attack in late 2015 (Pathan 2015b). In the more recent period in Ban Lomyen, the Chor Ror Bor remerged as a single force in the village, this time without any de facto Buddhist component whatsoever. For their part, Buddhists preferred to participate in the better funded, better organized and better armed Or Ror Bor, stationed 1.5 kilometers up the village road in the Buddhist majority ‘Upper Village’.

5.5. Village Protection Volunteers (Or Ror Bor)

In October 2004, Thailand’s Queen Sirikit made her annual retreat to Taksin Rachaniwes Palace in the southern border province of Narathiwat. The Royal family had
long taken an active interest in the southernmost region and the Queen in particular had made a special project of sponsoring local handicraft projects and providing moral support to military units stationed in the region (McCargo 2007a: 57). During this particular trip, however, an incident occurred in which two soldiers, who were reportedly travelling in a palace vehicle to purchase fruit on the Queen's behalf, were ambushed and murdered by insurgent operatives (ibid.). Approximately one month later, on November 16, 2004, the Queen delivered a speech to an audience of 1,000 at Chitrlada Palace in Bangkok in which she recalled the hardships she had witnessed during her extended stay in the south. In that speech, she urged the “300,000 Thais” living in the Deep South not to be driven off of the land (ibid.: 58). Moreover, she urged the same group of people to learn how to shoot, adding that she herself, at age 72, would learn to shoot “without using [her] glasses” (ibid.). The speech is widely regarded as an major source of inspiration for the fledgling Village Protection Volunteers Program (As Samak Raksa Moo Ban or Or Ror Bor) that had been organized at the Queen’s behest two months prior.

The Or Ror Bor program was organized in response to petitions to the Queen by (primarily Buddhist) residents of the Narathiwat who were seeking assistance in protecting themselves from insurgent attacks (ICG 2007a: 18). The Queen’s deputy Royal Aid-de Camp, General Napol Boonthap, took the lead in organizing 15-day military training sessions for 1,000 recruits in Narathiwat province. Following the Queen’s speech of November 16, 2004, the program expanded rapidly, reaching over 10,000 members by 2007. By 2012 its numbers approached 25,000 (Srisompob 2012). Whereas the ICG’s 2007a report contends that the program’s initial intent was to include both Muslims and Buddhists in the provision of village-level security, in practice the Or Ror Bor is a Buddhist militia charged with protecting Buddhist residents against attacks by Muslim insurgents (ICG 2007a: 19; McCargo 2012a: 36). The program is organized with a military structure comprising ‘battalions’ and ‘companies’ as conglomerates of village and neighbourhood units, although these organizational units function primarily as training groups. Following their initial training period, members are expected to participate in two additional five-day training courses each year (ICG 2007a: 18). In

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10 The number corresponds roughly to the number of Buddhists living in the region.
practice, however, the periods of initial and subsequent training can be much shorter (see below).

The program is often reported to be “under the patronage” of Queen Sirikit, but according to the ICG’s interview with a senior military officer involved in the program (ICG 2009: pp6 n.40), the majority of the project’s funding comes from a government job creation scheme dubbed “the 4,500-baht scheme” which was, ostensibly, initiated to alleviate problems of underemployment and poverty in the region. This program was initiated under the Thaksin administration in order to address youth unemployment – then seen as a major source of unrest in the Deep South – through the creation of short-term employment contracts valued at 4,500 baht/month. From the outset, the 4,500-baht scheme has been subject to rampant corruption and nepotism and was later reformulated to address the problem of insecurity through the creation of village-level security positions (Issara News 2011). A significant portion of the program’s budget was also directed toward financing the Or Ror Bor program.

A report by Nonviolence International (Sarosi and Janjira 2009: 14) indicates that Or Ror Bor members do not receive a monthly salary, but each village unit receives a monthly budget of 300,000 baht (15 fold that of the Chor Ror Bor). However, according to a leaked cable from the United States Embassy in Bangkok, the governor of Narathiwat claimed that each member of the Or Ror Bor receives 4,500 baht as a monthly stipend (Wikileaks 2015), while McCargo (2012a: 36) encountered a group whose members were paid 100 baht per shift. In addition to illustrating the general lack of transparency surrounding the Or Ror Bor program, these apparently contradictory findings suggest significant variation within the program itself. In addition to training and a generous monthly budget, Or Ror Bor units are supplied with 10-15 Russian-made semi-automatic shotguns, to be shared among active members of the group (Sarosi and Janjira 2009: 14). The program also offers members the opportunity to buy the weapons at a 60% discount from the market price (approximately 15,000 baht from an original price of 45,000 (ibid.)). In some circumstances (including in Ban Lomyen) Or Ror Bor units have been supplied with other weapons, including carbine rifles, hand guns and other assault rifles (ibid.).
5.5.1. **Or Ror Bor in Ban Lomyen**

The *Or Ror Bor* program in Ban Lomyen was established in 2008 following a period in which most of the village’s Muslim residents (both Thai and Malay-speaking) had fled to ancestral homes (mostly in Pattalung and Pattani provinces). Their flight (described in Chapter 4) was prompted by the aforementioned attack on a *Chor Ror Bor* bunker and tea shop in which four Muslim residents were injured. Notably – and in contrast to the more widely reported evacuation of Buddhist residents from Ban Namsai – most Buddhist residents of Ban Lomyen remained in the village during this tense period. The reasons, as explained to me by one villager, were three-fold. First, as poor people who had come to Ban Lomyen as part of the Self-Help Land Settlement Program (*Nikhom Sang Ton Eng*) they had nowhere else to go. Second, as outsiders in the region, they feared that, if they left, their homes and land would be occupied and they would be unable to return. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the geography of the village was such they felt able – with the help of Border Patrol Police Paratroopers – to defend themselves. The upper section of Ban Lomyen would indeed be difficult to access from any direction other than the main road running through the village, as all sides are protected by steep, jungle-clad hills. Although such conditions would by no means pose an insurmountable barrier to insurgent attackers, these Buddhist villagers – many of whom had already been operating as an independent *Chor Ror Bor* unit – felt capable of defending their homes.

In mid-2008, several months after most Muslim residents had returned to the village, a team of regular army soldiers, Rangers, and *Or Sor* volunteers came to the village to train Buddhist villagers as a new *Or Ror Bor* group. According to my interview with Ban Lomyen’s *Or Ror Bor* captain, there were 50 members in the original cohort, with the number of members later expanding to roughly 70. Almost every Buddhist household in the village contained one or more *Or Ror Bor* volunteers. The initial training lasted 5 days and included shooting practice and a number of other emergency preparedness exercises. Notably, this was much less that the 15 days of training that was offered to the first cohort of *Or Ror Bor* members in Narathiwat in 2004. The group was then provided with materials and funds to construct a bunker, which they did opposite the village primary school. The location selected for the *Or Ro Bor* bunker had
several strategic benefits, including proximity to the school (a potential target for insurgents) and geographic features including a creek and a steep hill abutting the back of the school that together served to form a ‘bottle-neck’ at the eventual location of the bunker. Perhaps the most significant, from the perspective of this study, however, was that the bunker was located in position that left all Buddhist houses effectively behind the bunker’s rising-arm gate. The location selected for the bunker did not produce a barrier at the only point of road access into the village; it produced a barrier in the middle of the village, dividing the Buddhist majority Upper Village from the exclusively Muslim Lower Village. In a context wherein communal relations between Muslims and Buddhists had come under strain, the selected location for the Or Ror Bor bunker served as a physical reminder of the barriers between the village’s two religious identity groups (see Map 1).

The bunker itself was much larger than that of the Chro Ror Bor, with ample room to accommodate upwards of 20 people, a full kitchen and a bathroom, all behind 4-foot cinderblock walls. Its walls were sparsely decorated, save for portraits of the King, Queen, the much-revered King Chulalongkorn (r.1868-1910) and a venerated monk whose identity is strongly associated with the south, Luang Por Thuat. The bunker sat in a broad, razor-wire bound courtyard that also contained a large tank for rearing catfish (plaa duk) a number of fruit trees, a small meeting hall and several hammocks. Behind the courtyard were two ponds that were stocked with fish reared in a communal fashion by members of the Or Ror Bor. One of the ponds also contained a gazebo overlooking the water. With all of these amenities, the Or Ror Bor bunker had become a major social hub for Buddhist villagers. On the other hand, no Muslims ever visited the bunker, with the exception of the village headman who did so in an official capacity but even then only rarely. Buddhist villagers, however, would visit the bunker regardless of whether or not they were on guard duty. During the day time, people would come to chat, watch television, prepare food (usually wild boar meat) and gossip. Some members of the Or Ror Bor even brought their children to the bunker, on a few occasions having their children stay with them in the bunker overnight. The social atmosphere around the Or Ror Bor gave the impression that Buddhists in Ban Lomyen were not particularly preoccupied with the possibility of an insurgent attack.

Notwithstanding the relaxed atmosphere around the bunker, however, the armaments of the Or Ror Bor and some of the words uttered by its members indicated a
frightening potential for violent confrontation. The Or Ror Bor group in Ban Lomyen was equipped with a number of Russian-made semi-automatic shotguns, but several of its members carried their own weapons, including fully automatic assault rifles, handguns and older-model carbine rifles. In addition to these formidable weapons, many of the Or Ror Bor members in Ban Lomyen carried a deep distrust of their Muslim neighbours. For example, early in my stay in the village, an Or Ror Bor volunteer warned me very plainly that Muslims were “no good” (mai dee) and that, if they caused any problems for me, I should come straight to the Or Ror Bor bunker for help. Another warned me that I should avoid travelling to villages that have no Buddhist residents, as Muslims “don’t think like us” (kit mai muan rao) and could not be trusted. Another suggested the danger was much closer at hand, warning me against travelling to the Muslim Lower Village, which he described as “frightening” (na glua). Still another made the distinction between Thai and Malay-speaking Muslims, saying that those who spoke “Islamic” (passa Islam referring to Malay) could not be trusted while “people like your friend with long hair” were fine. The latter comment was in reference to the husband of the Thai-speaking Muslim woman I had hired to prepare evening meals for me and who often picked me up in the evening to join his family for dinner.\footnote{Notably, both the speaker and the “friend with long hair” had lived in the same small village for over 30 years, but the speaker was apparently ignorant of the Thai-speaking Muslim man’s name.} While it would be a mistake to suggest that all of the Buddhists in the village shared these sentiments, similar comments were regularly expressed to me during my visits to the Or Ror Bor bunker and were never challenged or contradicted by other volunteers.

Beyond the statements of mistrust toward Muslims in general and Malay-speaking Muslims in particular, a few members of the Or Ror Bor in Ban Lomyen expressed specific fears about the ongoing insurgency and its portents for the region, the country and, indeed, the world itself. One commonly expressed fear was that, were separatist insurgents to succeed in gaining some manner of autonomy for the southernmost region, it would be impossible for Buddhists to continue living there. Such was one of several fears expressed by the leader of the Or Ror Bor, a local shop owner who had moved to the village independently of the Self-Help Land Settlement program. While he proved a very difficult interview subject in regards to the history of the Or Ror
Bor unit in Ban Lomyen and, in particular, its budget, he was very forthcoming about the problems facing Thailand with respect to its Muslim problem.

The roots of this problem, he asserted, were to be found in King Rama V (Chulalongkorn)’s having taken a Muslim bride.\textsuperscript{12} That marriage, in his estimation, paved the way for a disastrous decision to allow Muslims to rule in areas where they formed a majority, thereby encouraging more Muslims from the “barren and desolate Middle East” to move to Thailand in order to find a living (ha tam gin). He argued that the Thai government erred again by allowing Muslims to build mosques all over the country, which served as base for Muslims to pursue their ultimate goal of taking over the country and, eventually, the world. As he explained, Islam requires Muslims to pursue the goal of total world domination and the Thai government has repeatedly played into their hands. In the Deep South, this has included allowing Muslims to serve in the bureaucracy of the Thai state, from where, he argued, they would inevitably pursue the interests of their coreligionists over those of the Thai nation. If they were allowed to select their own governors, he added, it would be impossible for Thai Buddhists to live in the area. Any move toward autonomy for the southernmost region, he said, would be akin to Thailand cutting off its own finger. The Or Ror Bor chief’s account of Thai history, while more extreme in its xenophobia and more rife with inaccuracies than I encountered in similar conversations with other Thai Buddhists, contained a number of themes that were common in such accounts. These included the suggestion that Muslims’ origins were somewhere other than present day Thai territory and that they had arrived in Thailand relatively recently. They also included the assertion that Islam demands that its adherents pursue the ultimate goal of world domination. In a conflict that is characterized by radically divergent historical narratives, such (mis)understandings represent major hurdles to inter-communal reconciliation.

\textsuperscript{12} It seems likely he was referring to Chao Chom (Royal Consort) Erb Bunnag, a descendant of a Persian family who played a prominent role in the Siamese court from the 16\textsuperscript{th} century forward (Baker and Pasuk 2009: 77).
5.5.2. *Or Ror Bor* Interactions with State Security Officials

In addition to being a place of social interaction between Thai-speaking Buddhist villagers, the *Or Ror Bor* hut (and the group in general) was a site of interaction between Buddhist villagers and state security personnel. When Border Patrol Police officers from the camp located in the Upper Village were passing by, for example, they would usually stop in to exchange greetings with *Or Ror Bor* volunteers. Likewise, any time security officials stationed outside of the village came into Ban Lomyen, they would pay a visit to the *Or Ro Bor* bunker. In the evening hours, Border Patrol Police in the village camp would often banter back and forth with *Or Ror Bor* volunteers via handheld radio transceivers, with conversations often revolving around the exchange of bawdy jokes.

Social interactions between *Or Ror Bor* volunteers and state security officials in Ban Lomyen entered a period of particular vivacity in November 2013, during which time a unit of army engineers were encamped in the village while constructing a new road to the village temple (wat). According to the elderly woman who served as the temple bookkeeper, the army engineers had been dispatched to the village in response to a petition for a new road that the temple committee had submitted to the Commander of the 4th Army (the 4th army is responsible for the southern region of the kingdom). While encamped in the village, army engineers would often visit the *Or Ror Bor* bunker to talk and drink with volunteers. One evening, while I sat chatting with some *Or Ror Bor* volunteers, two soldiers from the engineers’ unit arrived and invited me and some of the *Or Ror Bor* volunteers to join them on the gazebo behind the bunker. After several minutes of asking questions about my own origins and reasons for being in the village, the soldiers began explaining their own purposes in the southernmost region. Their explanation centred on what they explained to be the uncompromising separatist agenda of the insurgency. They went on to describe, in an exaggerated rendition of the familiar “sia dindaen” (loss of territory) narrative, that the neighbouring countries of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Malaysia had once been “kong Thai” (Thai property) and had subsequently been lost to aggressive neighbours. It was the duty of Thais, they said, to protect the south from a similar fate.
In addition to such informal interactions, senior members of the *Or Ror Bor* conducted joint operations with the Border Patrol Police every Monday and Friday, acting as advance lookouts for the convoy of teachers that the Border Patrol Police escorted between the village and the provincial capital. As in many rural villages throughout southernmost Thailand, teachers at the local school were not resident in the village and only stayed there from Monday to Friday. While several *Or Ror Bor* volunteers emphasized to me that theirs was a program sponsored by the royal family and not the government (a somewhat problematic distinction), this incorporation in operations to provide security to state officials (i.e. teachers) forged strong ties between the *Or Ror Bor* and the state. Another point of interaction came three times a year when the Ban Lomyen *Or Ror Bor*, in conjunction with an *Or Ror Bor* group from a neighbouring village would engage in a day-long training exercise supervised by regular army soldiers and/or paramilitary Rangers. During these training exercises, volunteers dressed in light blue hats and neckerchiefs marking their connection with the Thai Queen¹³ and emblazoned with an outline map of Thailand’s territory filled with the tricolours of the Thai flag.¹⁴ The exercises themselves primarily consisted of instruction in shooting technique followed by practice on a range of stationary and moving targets.

These interactions with state security officials, and the role of the *Or Ror Bor* in general, affirmed the position of Buddhist villagers in Ban Lomyen as “good citizens” of the Thai kingdom. The organization tied its members to one of the more potent symbols of Thai national identity – the monarchy – as they were both under the queen’s royal patronage and were acting upon her orders to stand their ground, learn to shoot and not be intimidated into leaving their homes (McCargo 2012a: 36). It also gave them an active role to play in the nationalist narrative of defending “the realm” (*paendin*) against “foreign”¹⁵ threats that would violate the sacred territory of the kingdom. Thus, in participating in the *Or Ror Bor*, Buddhists in Ban Lomyen engaged in a set of practices

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¹³ Light blue is the colour associated with the Queen’s birthday. The light blue hats and neckerchiefs indicate devotion to the Queen in the same way the yellow shirts of the anti-Thaksin People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD) indicates allegiance to the king (yellow being the colour associated with the king’s birthday).

¹⁴ This colour logo combination represents an almost paradigmatic case of the symbolism of royal nationalism (see Anderson 2006: Chapter 10).

¹⁵ “Foreign” because any force that would threaten the integrity of the nation and its borders could not, according to nationalist rhetoric, be “truly Thai.”
that defined them as Thai citizens. Importantly, the practices were centred around the
defence of themselves, their homes and their country against an inherently threatening
Muslim “other” that may have included their neighbours and certainly included people
who, in a formal sense at least, were also “citizens” of Thailand.

5.6. Conclusions

The various paramilitary organizations and citizen militias described in this
chapter represent major components of what is a confusing and often confused security
arrangement in Thailand’s southernmost region. The four organizations described here –
the Rangers, Or Sor, Chor Ror Bor and Or Ror Bor – are but the most prominent of a list
that includes Community Police Volunteers, Subdistrict Defence Units and informal
Buddhist militias like Ruam Thai (Thais United). However, none of these other
organizations was active in Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai during the period of field
research. Nevertheless, the involvement of residents in Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai
in various paramilitaries and militias is illustrative of the manner in which the Thai state’s
approach to security in the Deep South has emphasized the arming and mobilization of
a large number of citizens (over 100,000 in total) to take a leading role in providing their
own security. All the while, there are more than 60,000 regular army and police deployed
in a region with a population somewhere in the region of 1.4 million (ICG 2012: 12-13).

In the case of paramilitary organizations like the Rangers and Or Sor, the
accounts given by the few residents in Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai who had
experience with these organizations suggested the economic considerations were the
prime motivation behind their involvement. In all but one case, the experience of violent

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16 It is possible that some Buddhist villagers in Ban Lomyen were actively or had been involved
with Ruam Thai, but all of the villagers I asked about it indicated that the group had not been
active in their village. Moreover, a leaked cable from the US embassy (Wikileaks 2015)
suggests that, by 2007 when its leader was transferred out of the province, Ruam Thai activity
in Yala dwindled to almost nothing.
clashes with unspecified assailants was enough to deter future employment with the paramilitaries. None of the individuals I spoke with – all of whom were Muslims, some Thai-speakers, others Malay-speakers – expressed an understanding of or orientation to their involvement with the paramilitaries that was informed by notions of identity or duty. Neither had their engagement resulted in their having significantly enhanced access to the entitlements of citizenship. In fact, several of the young men who had been injured during their employment with the Or Sor complained of difficulties in gaining access to the compensation they were entitled to as persons injured in the course of carrying out their duty. All of the young men, meanwhile, remained in the lower economic strata of their respected villages. At least three of the men who had been injured while working as Or Sor – two from Ban Lomyen, one from Ban Namsai – expressed the belief that their attackers had been state security personnel and that the gravest threat they faced living in the southernmost region emanated from the security forces stationed in the area. If this perspective is compared with, for example, that of Buddhist members of the Or Ror Bor program, it would seem that participation in the Or Sor had not conferred upon these men the status of full citizenship in the Thai polity.

With respect to participation in citizen militias, the conditions of engagement were somewhat different. Rather than an opportunity for gainful employment, the active involvement of citizens in the provision of their own security resembles more the conscription of a mass army. As Hanagan (1997: 397) notes, military service has historically been one of the core duties of citizenship and has, in such cases as post-revolutionary France, reshaped that state-citizen relationship in such a manner that allowed for the significant expansion of the political, civil and social rights of citizens. However, in the case of Ban Lomyen, the particular mode of participation in the state’s provision of security entails practices that, while affirming membership in a political community, equally if not more strongly affirm membership in exclusive ethno-religious categories. This was most obviously the case with respect to the Or Ror Bor, whose membership was exclusively Buddhist. It was also the case, however, with respect to the Chor Ror Bor, which, in its first iteration in the village, developed into a 2-part force comprising a Buddhist and a Muslim wing. In its second iteration, it emerged as an exclusively Muslim organization that included both Thai and Malay-speaking Muslims. As a result, there emerged in the village parallel citizen militias organized along lines of religious identity. This is of particular significance because, in the village in question,
there existed two distinct Muslim communities with different origins, languages and histories. In engaging in the citizenship practice of participation in the Chor Ror Bor, however, Thai and Malay speaking Muslims were both subsumed into the undifferentiated category “Muslim.” The division of participation in citizen militias – a citizenship practice by definition – between the Chor Ror Bor and Or Ror Bor demanded that Muslims participation *qua* Muslims and that Buddhists participate *qua* Buddhists. In that manner the practice of participation in citizen militias contributed to a none-too-subtle shifting of “ethnic” boundaries from the more nuanced distinctions between various ethnic, religious and linguistic groups with their origins in various provinces across the country to a binary distinction between Thai Buddhists and “Muslims.”

In the case of Malay-speaking Muslims in Ban Namsai, the conditions for participation were rather different. The village maintained a full roster of Chor Ror Bor members and continued to receive full funding for the program, but participation was perfunctory and seemed intended only to ensure that the funding continued to flow. The conditions of participation in this village suggests that McDermott’s (2012) conclusion that high rates of enrollment in the Chor Ror Bor are indicative of widespread citizen support for the program is misguided. Rather, cases like Ban Namsai suggest that villagers – and, in particular, village elites who control the Village Administrative Committee – are capable of minimal engagement with state programs as a means of gaining access to state resources. In a manner of speaking, this too represents a citizenship practice, albeit one that undermines the provision of services to the broader community (i.e. effective security measures) and fails to affirm the status of its practitioners as full members of the political community. With that in mind, it would be better to understand the limited operations of the Chor Ror Bor in Ban Namsai in terms of limited, strategic engagement with a state that, all else being equal, is better kept at arm’s-length. At the same time as they fail to confer full citizenship on many of the people who participate in them, Thailand’s haphazard policies for engaging citizens in the provision of security in the southernmost region present opportunities to gain access to resources without embracing full membership in the national community.

The organization of paramilitaries and civilian militias in Thailand’s conflict-affected south has been criticized by many as an ineffective security strategy that has flooded the region with guns and risks turning a low-intensity political conflict into a
broader sectarian conflict (ICG 2007a; Sarosi and Janjira 2009). The evidence presented in this chapter is broadly in agreement with those critiques. The chapter seeks to go further, however, in showing how the provision of security by multiple, overlapping organizations not only enhances the risk of conflict between mutually antagonistic groups, but in fact contributes to the reproduction of oppositional identity categories in a manner that is in direct opposition to the objectives of peace and security. Thus, the arming of citizen militias in southern Thailand not only heightens the potential for sectarian conflict between Muslims and Buddhists, but in fact contributes to the construction of those group identities in oppositional terms. As subsequent chapters will show, this pattern is reproduced in a range of citizen-state interactions that, while couched in terms of unity and harmony, assume the binary and oppositional categories “Buddhist” and “Muslim” and thus produce, reproduce and reinforce of the barriers that define them.
Chapter 6. Decentralization in Thailand: Bringing the State Closer to the People?

6.1. Introduction

The previous two chapters examined the experiences of villagers in Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai as they encountered and were incorporated into the Thai state’s security strategies for the southernmost region. The present chapter shifts the focus from the state security apparatus to the local-level state. The argument of the chapter is that the nature of decentralization in Thailand has been such that local governments are susceptible to capture by powerful individuals and groups and lack sufficiently robust mechanisms to ensure meaningful citizen participation and accountability. As the following pages will show, the local-level state in Thailand is characterized by a dual system in which two levels of government – the province and subdistrict – have been the subject of a somewhat piecemeal project of decentralization, while two others – the district and village – remain thoroughly embedded in a long-standing system of highly centralized administration. The dual nature of this system, however, is complicated by numerous nodes of formal and informal interaction between various institutions of government and by varying degrees of involvement in all levels of government on the part of the powerful Ministry of the Interior (MoI). Moreover, in the case of the conflict-affected southernmost region of the kingdom with which this dissertation is centrally concerned, the system is further complicated by the role of a coordinating body known as the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC). This chapter provides an overview of the institutional reforms that brought the current system of local government in southernmost Thailand into being, describes the essential institutional
features of that system, and, by way of conclusion, highlights a number of shortcomings of decentralized government in Thailand, particularly as it pertains to the exercise of citizenship in the kingdom. In so doing, the chapter provides the necessary groundwork for the examination of empirical data on state-citizen relations in the two villages that are the subject of this study.

6.2. The Local Faces of Partially Decentralized Government in Thailand

For most of its 20th century history, Thailand could be described aptly as a highly centralized unitary state. The administrative reforms introduced in the late 19th century under the reign of Chulalongkorn (King Rama V, r.1868-1910) established chains of administrative control that ran from central state ministries down through various sub-national administrative bodies, most notably provinces, districts, subdistricts and villages. Under this system – explicitly modelled after British and French Colonial administration (Argiros 2001: 21) – subnational institutions of government enjoyed little if any scope for autonomous action and functioned primarily as conduits for the projection of central state power. In the wake of the “Bloody May” massacre in 1992, however, an increasingly well-organized and widely-supported democratization movement pushed the kingdom toward substantive institutional reform. In keeping with an emergent global consensus at that time, a key demand of Thailand's democratization movement in the 1990s was for political, fiscal and administrative decentralization.

By the early 1990s, decentralization had gained traction in policy discussions around the world as a potential solution to a range of problems including democratic stagnation and pressures for self-determination on the part of sub-national minorities. This ‘new wave’ of enthusiasm for decentralization took form at a historical moment of disillusionment with the state as being susceptible to corruption, inefficiency and a host of other ills (Crook and Manor 1998: 1-2). Through the 1980s and 1990s, decentralization gained an ever more prominent position in debates on development and
‘governance.’ This trend was most clearly evidenced by the World Bank’s 1997 World Development Report and, in particular, the seventh chapter of that report entitled “Bringing the State Closer to People” (World Bank 1997). The report defines decentralization as a combination of de-concentration of administrative power, decentralization of fiscal controls and devolution of resources and political control to lower levels of government (ibid.). By moving the state ‘closer to the people’, decentralization is thought to facilitate participation in the definition of problems and issues (responsiveness), while improving mechanisms for ensuring the responsible execution of state power (accountability). As Bardhan and Mookherjee (2006: 3-4) point out, the purported benefits of decentralization included a greater sense of autonomy on the part of citizens, enhanced state legitimacy, improved service delivery and the alleviation of pressures for separatism by regional or ethnic groups.

The decentralization discourse that featured so prominently in Thailand’s democratization movement was, in the early stages of that movement, primarily orientated toward the provincial level of administration. Specifically, advocates for decentralization criticized the long-standing practice of appointing career civil servants from the MoI to the post of provincial governor (Poo Wa Rachagan Changwat) in each of Thailand’s 76 provinces (Tanet 2006: 143-144). Calls for political decentralization at the provincial level quickly found their way into the mainstream political discourse as Thailand prepared to transition toward democratically elected government in the latter half of 1992. In the run up to general elections in September of that year, no less than four political parties identified decentralization – including the direct election of governors in some provinces – as a major component of their policy platform (ibid.: 70-71). Two such parties – the New Aspiration (Kwam Wang Mai) Party and Democrat (Prachatipatai) Party – formed a coalition government, but quickly distanced themselves from the commitment to democratize the selection of provincial governors and instead shifted the focus of the decentralization debate to the subdistrict and municipal level. Critics of this move pointed to the influence of the powerful MoI in shifting the focus of the decentralization debate away from the office of provincial governor, which is a key position in the Ministry’s institutional hierarchy and one of the highest appointments the Ministry can award. It has been noted that the committee that went on to draft decentralization legislation was dominated by MoI officials and that the leader of the New Aspiration Party, Chavalit Yongchaiyuth, was himself awarded that ministry’s
portfolio (ibid.; Wongpreedee and Mahakanjana 2011: 61-63). With the decentralization debate shifting away from the issue of provincial governors, the MoI retained an important source of power and reward for its top bureaucrats.

During the same period, the Thai parliament responded to continuing demands from civil society groups for a voice in institutional reform by establishing a 99-member Constitution Drafting Committee. The process of drafting Thailand’s 16th constitution was seen as unprecedentedly inclusive and resulted in a 1997 constitution that was hailed as the most democratic in the country’s history. The so-called “people’s constitution” also contained clauses that greatly strengthened the cause of decentralization, including requirements that the government establish a National Decentralization Committee (NDC) to oversee the revision of acts pertaining to local governance, institutionalize the election of local representatives (at the subdistrict and provincial levels, excluding provincial governors) and introduce laws specifying the division of powers and duties between various levels of government (Mahakanjana 2004: 86; Supasawad 2010: 11-12). This, in turn, led to the passage of the Decentralization Plan and Procedures Act (1999), which specified an ambitious timeline for the progressive increase of national budget allocations to local-level government to the tune of 35 per cent¹ of the total national budget by 2006 (Mahakanjana 2004: 86). The NDC finalized the Decentralization Action Plan in November 2001 and by June 2003 a series of eight implementing laws had been proposed in parliament. These included amendments to acts pertaining to provincial and subdistrict government organizations as well as acts specific to the administration of Bangkok and Pattaya cities and other related matters (ibid.). Taken as a whole, these laws form the core of Thailand’s program of administrative, fiscal and political decentralization.

¹ That target was never met and was subsequently revised in 2007, with 25% identified as a mandatory minimum and the 35% target retained without a specified timetable for its achievement (Supsawad 2011: 28-29)
6.3. Provinces

The fundamental characteristics of Thailand’s subnational government structure were established in the 1933 *Administrative Law*, which stipulated the multi-tier system of national, provincial, district and local administration still in existence today (Mutebi 2004: 37). In 1955, the *Provincial Administration Act* established autonomous “provincial councils” (PAOs or *Ongkan Boriharn Suan Changwat*) and accorded them limited autonomy over the administration of provincial budgets. However, PAOs remained under the supervision of provincial governors who, as bureaucrats appointed by the MoI, held the authority to dissolve provincial councils and dismiss their members (Arghiros 2001: 22). This arrangement held constant until the 1990s and Thailand’s transition toward a more democratic and moderately less centralized system of government. In 1997, the 1955 *Provincial Administration Act* was replaced by the *Provincial Administrative Organization Act*, an important element of which was the removal of provincial governors from the position of chair of the provincial councils and their replacement in that position by an elected official (Orathai 2012: 18). The 1997 Act also expanded the remit of PAOs to include policy formation, overseeing the administration of the province and approving the provincial budget (Arghiros 2001: 22). In 2003, the *Provincial Administrative Organization Act* (3) was revised again to introduce the direct election of PAO presidents, who had hitherto been “indirectly elected” through a nomination process among members of the PAO (Orathai 2012: 20). This change was introduced as part of a broader scheme to strengthen the executive branch of local-level government in the kingdom, which included the introduction of the direct election of subdistrict chief executives and municipal mayors (see below). Thus, the institutional reforms that began in the late 1990s can be seen to have devolved significant responsibilities to the democratically elected PAOs while also strengthening their position vis-a-vis the unelected provincial administration, headed by the provincial governor.

There exist a number of bases, however, from which to question the efficacy of decentralization at the provincial level, particularly with respect to the objectives of enhancing the representativeness, responsiveness and accountability of the state. The first stems from the ongoing power struggle between the parallel structures of
governance at the provincial level. With the replacement of provincial governors with elected officials as chairpersons, PAOs gained – in theory – the capacity to allocate provincial budgets without consultation or approval from the bureaucracy (Arghiros 2001: 23-24). However, the institutional culture of the Thai bureaucracy is such that many of its officers are loath to take orders from provincial politicians, who may be seen as lacking the prestige of high ranking karachagan (the term used for “public servant” in Thai, which translates as “servant of the king”). Moreover, as Michael H. Nelson (2000: 11-13) argues, the lack of any substantial reduction in the power and authority of the bureaucratic provincial administration and the concurrent strengthening of the subdistrict level of government has meant that the de facto role of the PAO has in fact been substantially reduced. PAOs have thus become primarily occupied with the allocation of limited infrastructure budgets, while their role in the preparation of development plans and budgets consists, in the main, of consolidating documents prepared by various departments in the provincial-level offices of the bureaucracy. This has been a major factor in the development of what have been called “contractors’ councils” (sapha poo rap maw): provincial councils made up primarily of the owners of construction companies that benefit directly from provincial infrastructure projects (Arghiros 2001: 24).

The possibility of an expanded role for PAOs in Thailand’s decentralized state is precluded to a substantial extent by the failure of decentralization measures to reduce the power of the bureaucracy in provincial administration. To the contrary, bureaucratic control over provincial administration was strengthened under the prime ministership of Thaksin Shinawatra. Early in his tenure, Thaksin introduced the “CEO governor” initiative, which aimed to enhance the role of provincial governors as planners and administrators presiding over expanded provincial budgets (Supasawad 2010: 12-14). The scheme greatly enhanced the governor’s role as the “chief executive” presiding over the numerous line ministries that maintain offices within the provincial administrations. Under these new arrangements, governors gained substantial authority over all departments of the provincial administration. Thaksin’s political enemies criticized these reforms as being part of a shift toward “democratic authoritarianism” (Mutebi 2004: 48; Bowornwathana in Supasawad 2010: 13). As will be discussed below, the centralization of power under the Prime Minister’s Office was retained in the wake of the 2006 coup d’état that removed Thaksin from office and was eventually enshrined in the 2007 constitution. This constitution was later abrogated in the wake of the May, 2014 coup
and local-level elections (at the provincial and subdistrict level) were suspended. Thus, despite some measures to democratize Provincial Administrative Organizations, Thailand's decentralization program has achieved limited success in devolving autonomous administrative authority to the provincial level.

6.4. Districts

Thailand’s 76 provinces (excluding the Bangkok Metropolitan region) are subdivided into 838 administrative districts (ampoe) that, unlike provinces and subdistricts, were not the subject of the kingdom’s turn-of-the-21st-century decentralization program. This is significant not least because districts represent perhaps the Thai state’s most important point of service delivery outside of the capital city. They are, in essence, the field offices of central state line ministries and the primary instrument of the extension of central state power throughout the kingdom. Their structure mirrors that of the provincial administration, wherein the de-concentrated offices of various ministries (Agriculture, Public Health, Education etc.) are coordinated under the directorship of a MoI bureaucrat (Nagai et al. 2008: 4-6). In the case of districts, this officer is known as a district officer (Nai Ampoe). The role of districts as conduits for the projection of central state power is further enhanced by their relationship to administrative villages (moo ban) via village heads (poo yai ban) and subdistrict chiefs (kamnan) (see Figure 5). These village-level officials are responsible for maintaining law and order, security, disaster and disease prevention, collecting census data, communicating central government policies and coordinating a range of activities within the village that, in Thai parlance, are grouped under the broad heading “development” (kanpattana) (Mahakanjana 2004: 72).
Each district in Thailand contains a complex of official buildings housing the offices of various central state ministries under the supervision of a ‘section chief’ (hua suan) as well as the offices of the district administration under the MoI. These offices are usually located in the town from which the administrative district derives its name and the town itself often becomes referred to colloquially as “the district” (amppoe). The
colocation of line ministry offices and the role of an MoI official as head of the district government, however, should not be taken to suggest a high level of coordination amongst these offices. Instead, as Nelson (2000: 7) argues, the administrative system at operation in Thailand’s districts is one of vertical integration amongst district, provincial and national offices of individual departments and ministries. Unlike PAOs and subdistrict governments, district officers do not function in the capacity of strong chief executives, nor do they preside over an horizontally integrated district administration (ibid.). Instead, district officers function, to a significant extent, in the role of figureheads. District officers, like provincial governors, hold statutory authority over officials from the various central ministries represented at the district level, but this authority is challenged and, ultimately, eclipsed by strong lines of authority within ministries and departments themselves (Nagai et al. 2008: 5). Thus, the day-to-day operations of government at the district level is better conceived of as the only loosely integrated functioning of numerous ministerial field offices. In only a very limited sense can the district be considered a distinct level of government and to an even lesser degree can it be considered local.

Notwithstanding the lack of close horizontal integration and substantial devolution of administrative authority, however, district governments do play a pivotal role in the extension of state power across the kingdom. One of the most important means by which they do so is through the offices of village head (poo yai ban) and subdistrict chief (kamnan). These two offices have played an important role in Thailand’s administrative structure since the period of absolute monarchy that began during the late 19th century and ended with the “revolution” of 1932. Village heads are elected by residents of an administrative village\(^2\) and hold office until they resign or reach the mandatory retirement age of 60. Subdistrict chiefs are selected by district officers from amongst the village heads for a given subdistrict (thus, a subdistrict chief is always a sitting village head). Village heads and subdistrict chiefs occupy an ambiguous middle ground between the position of an elected representative and that of a civil servant (Arghiros 2001: 28). As officials elected directly (in the case of village heads) or indirectly (in the case of subdistrict chiefs) by their communities, it might be expected that the individuals who hold these position would represent the interests of their constituents to the state. As

\(^2\) The term “administrative village” refers to the fact that Thailand’s subdistricts are divided, for administrative purposes, into villages that do not necessarily reflect existing communities \textit{per se} (Arghiros 2001: 33).
Arghiros notes (and field observations for this study corroborate) however, the mode of interaction between village heads and the district-level administration suggests a unidirectional flow of information from the central state to the village. Village heads are required to attend monthly meetings at the district headquarters, during which the district officer and a number of station chiefs relate central state directives, announce programs and confer ranks on newly elected heads (ibid.: 30-31). Rarely do district heads invite comment or input from village heads, nor does there exist any other institutionalized forum through which village heads can regularly give voice to the concerns of the citizens they ostensibly represent. This unidirectional dynamic is reproduced in various types of village meetings (discussed in Chapters 7 and 8), even when the ostensible purpose of such meetings is to facilitate voluntary public participation in decision making processes.

The importance of village heads and subdistrict chiefs to the projection of central state power in general and to the power of the MoI in particular was made clear in amendments to the Provincial Administration Act (1914) made in 2008 and 2009. Under reforms enacted in 1992, the terms in office for village heads were limited to 5 years, with the effect enhancing accountability to the local electorate. In 2007, the MoI itself submitted a draft amendment to that act that would once again extend the tenure of village heads to the mandatory retirement age while strengthening the hand of the Department of Local Administration (one of the most important and powerful departments in the MoI) in its supervisory role over village-level officials (Supsawad 2010: 27). This draft led directly to amendments in 2008 that ended the direct election of subdistrict chiefs (inaugurating the aforementioned system of selection by the district officer), reinstated the extended terms of office for village heads and instituted a system of 5-year reviews of their tenure on the basis of criteria drafted by the MoI (ibid.). An additional amendment in 2009 included only one sentence: “the positions of subdistrict chief, village head, subdistrict health officer, assistant subdistrict chief and assistant village head may not be abolished” (adapted from Supsawad 2010: 27). The move served to preserve the existence of local-level offices that form a major power base for the MoI but that have, as a result of decentralization to the subdistrict level, become somewhat redundant in the operations of the local-level state. Moreover, these amendments eroded the already limited representational function of village heads while strengthening lines of accountability to the MoI itself.
6.5. Subdistricts and Municipalities

As noted above, the primary focus of Thailand’s decentralization program has been the subdistrict level of government. The heading “subdistrict” is inclusive of rural subdistricts (tambon) and municipalities (tesabahn), of which there exist several types (see below). The history of the subdistrict as an administrative unit in the kingdom dates back to the institutional reforms of King Chulalongkorn in the latter part of the 19th century and the establishment of “sanitary districts” (sukhapibahn) in the early part of the 20th century. Immediately following the overthrow of absolute monarchy in 1932, the newly formed government of Thailand introduced the Municipal Act of 1933, which transformed sanitary districts into municipalities (thesabahn). In 1956, the government of Field Marshal Phibul Songkram introduced Subdistrict Councils (Sapha Tambon) and Subdistrict Administrative Organizations (SAOs), the latter being abolished in 1972, only to be reintroduced as part of Thailand’s decentralization program in the mid 1990s (Mahakanjana 2004). Subdistrict councils were made up of directly elected village heads and appointed officials and enjoyed only limited discretion in the administration of development plans. Throughout most of the 20th century, they remained firmly under the supervision and control of provincial and district officials the MoI (Arghiros 2001: 32).

The process of limited decentralization in Thailand can be said to have begun with efforts to enhance the autonomy of subdistrict governments. Thus, the Tambon Council and Tambon Administrative Organization Act (1994) conferred upon newly recreated Subdistrict Administration Organizations the status of autonomous juridical entities (Nagai et al. 2008: 4). In thinking about this act and its significance to the decentralization process in Thailand, it is important to bear in mind that the initial thrust of the decentralization debate hinged on the question of popular elections for the position of provincial governor. Such a reform would have seriously eroded an important source of power for the MoI and it was officials from that Ministry who played the central role in shifting the focus of the decentralization debate to the subdistrict level. To that extent, the process of decentralization in Thailand can be seen as a compromised
process aimed at assuaging popular demands for decentralization whilst retaining a powerful role for the bureaucracy – and the MoI in particular (Wongpreedee and Mahkanjana 2011: 63-64). This shift in emphasis soon found an influential supporter in the form of a national association of village heads, whose membership stood to benefit greatly from the introduction of substantially empowered subdistrict administration organizations. Village heads’ support for the introduction of SAOs was contingent, however, on their having a prominent position within them. The MoI, meanwhile, lobbied to retain a supervisory role for its officials at the subdistrict level. After much backroom dealing and parliamentary debate, a Tambon Council and Tambon Administrative Organization Act (1994) was introduced that awarded village heads and subdistrict chiefs an *ex officio* role on subdistrict councils and placed provincial governors and district officials in supervisory roles over their operation (ibid.).

The introduction of the *Tambon Council and Tambon Administrative Organization Act (1994)* preceded by only three years the introduction of Thailand’s 16th constitution: the so-called “people’s constitution” of 1997. The process leading up to the promulgation of the 1997 constitution entailed significant public debate and private negotiation, during which the association of village heads began voicing strong opposition to the proposed charter. These village-level officials recognized that stipulations requiring the direct election of subdistrict council members and the indirect or direct election of executive members would negate the concessions they had been granted in the drafting of the 1994 Act (Supsawad 2010: 27-29). However, this opposition was unsuccessful and when the 1997 constitution came into effect it launched a process that would substantially diminish the role of village heads and subdistrict chiefs. The charter itself contained several clauses demanding substantive political, administrative and fiscal decentralization, including section 285, which required that local governments must have directly elected councils and indirectly or directly elected executives (Orathai 2010: 20). This requirement rendered illegitimate the existing organization of subdistrict administrative organizations – and, in particular, the *ex officio* role of village heads and subdistrict chiefs in them – and also demanded the reorganization of municipal governments throughout the country. It led directly to the formulation of a number of organic laws that significantly reshaped the institutional structure of local government in the kingdom.
Under the system of decentralized government in Thailand that the 1997 constitution (and related legislation) brought into being, “local” governments fall into one of five categories. The first is the Provincial Administration Organization (PAO) discussed in a previous section of this chapter. The second is the Subdistrict Administrative Organization, which is the organization of local government found in most rural subdistricts. SAOs are organized around a bicameral model and consist of a subdistrict council comprising two representatives directly elected from each village in the subdistrict\(^3\) and an executive committee consisting of a committee chairperson directly elected by the subdistrict’s residents and two deputies appointed by the chair (Wongpreedee and Mahakanjana 2011: 66). A third type is the municipal government, of which there are three principal subtypes. City municipalities exist in urban areas that either contain the seats of provincial governments or that have populations in excess of 50,000 (Nagai et al. 2008: 6). Town-level municipalities exist in urban areas that contain district centres (amphoe) and subdistrict municipalities are found in some rural areas that meet minimum criteria for population density and revenue intake, or that were upgraded from sanitary districts\(^4\) in keeping with the *Upgrading of Sanitary Districts Act (1999)*. Like SAOs, municipal governments are characterized by a bicameral arrangement comprising a directly elected municipal council (*sapha thesaban*) of 24 members in the case of city municipalities, 18 in town municipalities and 12 in subdistrict municipalities, as well as an executive branch headed by a directly elected mayor (*nayok thesaban*) and several appointed advisors and secretaries (ibid.). In both SAOs and municipalities, a deputy district officer (*palat amphoe*) is assigned by the district officer to assist the subdistrict or municipal government and is the senior civil servant overseeing the day to day operations of the SAO. The deputy district officer remains answerable to the district officer and the MoI, whilst drawing salary from the subdistrict/municipality. The remaining two types of local-level government in Thailand are specific to the cities of Bangkok and Pattaya, respectively.

The direct election of subdistrict and municipal chief executives (executive committee chairs and “mayors”) was introduced via the *Municipal Act (2000)* and is in keeping with the “strong executive” initiative introduced at the provincial level three years

\(^3\) Exceptions to this rule are made in the case of subdistricts containing fewer than three villages.

\(^4\) Although sanitary districts were abolished in 1933 under the *Municipal Act*, the category was reintroduced in the 1950s.
later (see above). The direct election of subdistrict mayors reduced significantly the power of the subdistrict council vis-a-vis the executive. Under the arrangements in place prior to the revision of the *Municipal Act*, the position of mayor was held by one of the subdistrict assembly members who could be removed from that position by a vote of no confidence from the assembly. As a result, a great deal of vote buying and behind-the-scenes “horse trading” went on between assembly members as mayors tried to ensure the security of their tenures (Mahakanjana 2004: 104). Under the “Strong Mayor” system introduced in 2000, however, subdistrict chief executives cannot be removed via “no confidence votes” and only directives from the Minister of the Interior can force the mayor’s resignation (ibid.: 107). In this way, the “Strong Mayor” system enhances the stability and efficiency of subdistrict and municipal governments, but does so to the detriment of popular representation. This is because the strong mayor system undermines the role of elected council members by reducing the severity of the consequences associated with their refusal to pass an executive council’s budget proposal. Subdistrict and municipal governments remain under the supervision of the district and provincial administration, but institutional arrangements brought into being by the *Municipal Act (2000)* accord mayors a strong hand in the planning and administration of subdistrict budgets and do so at the expense of earlier reforms aimed at enhancing the representativeness of local government in the kingdom.

In addition to this weakening of the position of the municipal council vis-a-vis the executive, Pratuang (2013) identifies a number of institutional features that impede the development of accountable local government in the kingdom. District officers, he notes, have statutory authority to supervise subdistrict and municipal governments, but typically only act on the basis of complaints received (ibid.: 193). Moreover, the senior bureaucrat in charge of monitoring subdistrict and municipal governments at the district level is an officer of the provincial office of the Department of Local Administration and thus not directly under the supervision of the district officer (ibid.). More generally, while both district and subdistrict-level governments are supervised by the Mol, each falls under a different department of that ministry (the Departments of Provincial Administration and Local Administration, respectively). Such departmental divides are important, given that performance evaluations and promotions occur primarily within their boundaries. Further complicating the role of the district officer in supervising the performance of subdistrict and municipal governments is the fact that district officers frequently request (and are
usually granted) financial resources from subdistrict governments in support of a wide variety of activities and programs. The same is true at the provincial level, where the provincial governor holds even greater authority than the district officer to suspend or dissolve subdistrict and municipal councils and executives. Neither the district nor the provincial bureaucracy holds statutory authority to demand such contributions, but their administrations often rely on them for a range of activities, including the organization of cultural fairs and festivals (ibid.: 194). This system of transfers not only skews the supervisory relationship between provincial and district bureaucrats and the subdistrict and municipal executives, it also creates a channel of often poorly-monitored payments that offer a potential means of providing illicit exchanges between elected and bureaucratic officials.

There exist several mechanisms for auditing subdistrict and municipal governments, but, as Pratuang (2013) also explains, most of these fail to address questions of corruption and those that do are rarely capable of addressing the issue in a thorough manner. Internal auditors in subdistrict and municipal governments, for example, are barred from inspecting executive officers in the various administrative sectors of local government, with the result being that internal audits typically return information on weaknesses in the performance of various duties, but rarely touch on issues of corruption (ibid.: 184). The district-level office of the Department of Local Administration conducts twice-yearly audits of municipal and subdistrict governments, but the purpose of those audits is to supervise and support, not to investigate corruption (ibid.: 192-193). The Auditor General of Thailand, meanwhile, conducts annual audits of PAOs and municipalities, but will inspect SAOs only sporadically, usually acting on the basis of complaints, news reports or reports from other regional offices of the OAG (ibid.: 220-221). The OAG is not authorized to investigate and prosecute cases of corruption, however, and must instead forward any such cases to the National Anti-Corruption Commission. That commission faces its own challenges dealing with corruption cases, particularly given that there are over 7,000 municipal and subdistrict governments in the country and the bulk of the corruption allegations forwarded to the NACC concern this level of government. In 2011, the NACC was working through a backlog of over 9,000 cases (ibid.: 243). Moreover, the provincial offices of the NACC are not empowered to investigate cases independently and must, therefore, forward cases to the national office. Thus, while Thailand’s system of decentralized government includes multiple
mechanisms to hold subdistrict and municipal governments to account, the specific
design of these mechanisms and the insufficiency of the resources committed to them
result in their inefficacy and a general failure to prevent the widespread development of
corrupt practices.

6.6. Participatory Development Planning in Thailand’s Municipal and Subdistrict Governments

In addition to the democratic election of representatives, institutional checks and
balances, and various auditing procedures, there exists a number of mechanisms for
direct citizen participation that are intended to enhance the accountability of local-level
government. Citizen participation has been a stated objective of Thailand’s
decentralization program from the outset and in 1998 the Interior Ministry issued a
directive calling on local governments to take steps toward this goal (Charas 2007: 131).
However, directives at that early juncture contained no firm regulations stipulating what
kind of participation would be required, nor were any mechanisms introduced at the level
of the central government to ensure citizen participation was equitable and impactful.

Amendments to the Municipalities Act in 2003 required that municipalities include
citizens in the processes of development planning, budgeting, procurement and public
information disclosure. However, beyond empowering municipalities to hold referenda,
requiring public disclosure of budgets and other information, and establishing some
demanding criteria for citizen recall of elected representatives, these amendments failed
to specify mechanisms for citizen participation in the regular affairs of local government
(Pondej 2010: 96-97). Thus, it was not until the MoI introduced the Regulation on Local
Development Planning (2005) that clear guidelines for citizen participation were put in
place. The regulation stipulates that municipal and subdistrict governments are
responsible for producing strategic development plans and rolling three-year
development plans, both of which are to be consistent with the National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP), the National Public Administration Plan, provincial and district development strategies and Community Development Plans (ibid.: 100). It also required the inclusion of citizen representatives on Local Development Planning Committees, Working Committees on Development Planning and Budgeting, Procurement and Purchasing Committees, and Committees for Monitoring Local Government Performance, although the specific nature of that citizen participation remains ill-defined (Pondej 2010: 101; Weerasak 2014: 4-5).

Over the past decade-and-a-half, as decentralization programs progressed in numerous countries around the world, there has emerged widespread enthusiasm for the development of institutional mechanisms for direct citizen participation in local-level government. A rapidly expanding body of scholarly literature has emerged that emphasizes the development of “deeper” forms of democracy through creative alternatives to the “familiar configurations of political representation and bureaucratic administration” (Fung and Wright 2003: 15). Much of the enthusiasm for such “deepening of democracy” stems from the largely positive experiences of participatory budgeting and participatory development planning in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil and the state of Kerala in India, respectively. Gianpaolo Baiocchi produced some of the earliest and most influential studies of the Brazilian case (eg. Baiocchi 2003, 2005), in which he emphasizes the role of the Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores) in establishing and supporting genuinely empowered neighbourhood-level bodies to facilitate broad-based citizen participation. Similarly, Patrick Heller (Heller 1999; Thomas Isaac and Heller 2013) produced early and influential studies of participatory democracy in the Indian state of Kerala and, in particular, on the “People’s Campaign for Decentralized Planning,” which produced inclusive participatory processes for the planning, budgeting and implementation of local-level development policies and programs. In both cases, these studies emphasized the role of left-leaning political parties, the necessity of capacity building measures to enhance the participatory capacity of historically marginalized groups and the central importance of explicitly deliberative processes to the success of participatory democracy at the local level. The enthusiasm for participatory democracy that stems from these two cases has been stoked further by the World Bank, which, according to one estimate, invested at least
USD$280 million in participatory budgeting programs around the world between 2002 and 2012 (Goldfrank 2012: 3).

Thailand has not been the subject of any World Bank-sponsored programs to promote participatory budgeting or development planning, but the kingdom has nonetheless included public participation as a core component of its decentralization program. In practice, citizen participation is most prominent in the production of development plans at the subdistrict and municipal level. The two most important mechanisms through which citizens engage in development planning are “civic forums” (*wetee prachachon*) and Local Development Planning Committees. At the subdistrict and municipal level, the development planning process includes two separate processes set out by the Regulation on Local Development Planning (2005). In the first process, a Local Development Planning Committee (LDPC) made up of local elected representatives (SAO or municipal councillors), local and central government officials, “experts” and citizen delegates (both selected by the SAO or municipal council) establishes development priorities for the subdistrict or municipality and organizes a public meeting to communicate these priorities to and to solicit input (Pondej 2010: 102-103). The outcome of these meetings informs the production of draft “Strategic Plans” by a Working Committee on Local Development Planning and Budgeting (WCLDPB) made up of SAO/municipal councillors and a delegation of local citizens appointed by the subdistrict or municipal council. The draft report is then sent back to the LDPC for review and thereafter forwarded to the subdistrict of municipal executive for final approval. The second process concerns the production of three-year development plans and begins with the organization of “civic forums” either in individual villages or at the subdistrict or municipal headquarters. These village forums typically take the form of a “town hall” meeting that all village or subdistrict residents are encouraged to attend. Their expressed purpose is to solicit the opinions and concerns of local citizens (ibid.). These inputs are to be incorporated into a draft plan prepared by the WCLCPB and forwarded for review to the LDPC. The draft plan is then presented to the Municipal or subdistrict council for approval and, at last, to the Department of Local Administration for final endorsement. Thereafter, the subdistrict or municipal chief executive convenes an evaluation committee comprising municipal/subdistrict councillors, bureaucratic officials, local citizens and experts to assess the planning procedure.
The introduction of participatory mechanisms in local-level development planning has opened up new avenues for citizen engagement, but there are a number of problems with the current arrangement that potentially undermine the efficacy of citizen participation. The first is that the civic forums and public meetings organized as part of the development planning process do not empower citizens to play a decisive role. There exist no hard requirements that the views expressed in those meetings and forums be incorporated into the finalized plans (Pondej 2010: 106-07; Weerasak 2012: 14). Second, the meetings themselves are designed to facilitate the collection of information about citizens’ views and concerns, but in no way do they encourage deliberative processes through which competing interests or differing viewpoints might be reconciled in mutually acceptable outcomes. Third, the process does not include any means of empowering historically marginalized groups, nor of developing the capacity of citizens in general to participate meaningfully in development planning. Fourth, the inclusion of citizen representatives on Local Development Planning Councils does not guarantee that citizens’ voices will be taken into account in those forums or that the individuals who participate in them will feel empowered to criticize or oppose the viewpoints of powerful local politicians and bureaucrats. Moreover, as several studies have shown, citizen interest in participation has been hampered by insufficient knowledge, fear of being held liable for mismanagement and a tendency to view public administration as the business of officials (Prakorn 2007: 120; UNDP 2013: 43). Fifth, the requirement that local development plans be consistent with national, provincial and district development plans and strategies strictly limits the scope for genuinely autonomous local-level planning. Thus, while the significance of introducing participatory mechanisms at the local level should not be totally discounted, the practice of participatory development planning at the local level in Thailand should not be taken to indicate the development of a truly responsive and accountable form of local government.

Thailand’s system of local-level government is, in essence, a dual track system with multiple points of overlap between what Nagai et al. (2008) describe as a “deconcentrated” stream of local-level line ministry offices and MoI officials – represented by the office of the provincial governor, the district-level of administration and the village-level offices of village headman and subdistrict chief – and a “decentralized” system of local administration – represented by the Provincial...
Administrative Organization, municipalities and Subdistrict Administration Organizations. The persistence of this dual-track system betrays the fundamental character of decentralization in Thailand: efforts to “bring the state closer to the people” have been resisted and diluted by entrenched bureaucratic interest from the outset. That resistance notwithstanding, the democratic election of local officials (including members of provincial councils, subdistrict council, PAO presidents and subdistrict chief executives) did promise to augment the responsiveness and accountability of decentralized government. However, initiatives to strengthen the executive capacity of the institutions of decentralized government – most notably the “CEO Governor” initiative and the “Strong Mayor” system – substantially undermine any such democratic gains (Supsawad 2008: 41-45). Moreover, mechanisms for “upward accountability” – including supervision of subdistrict governments by MoI official at the district level and oversight institutions like the Office of the Auditor General – have proven insufficient to the task of preventing capture of the local-level state by elite interests. Finally, mechanisms for popular participation at the local level remain too vague in design to ensure effective implementation throughout the kingdom and fail to address the need to actively facilitate equitable deliberation amongst various social groups. The net result of these shortcomings is a system of local-level government that fails to ensure adequate representation and responsiveness to all sectors of society and that is highly susceptible to domination by local elites.

6.7. Special Institutional Arrangements in the Deep South: SBPAC

The organization of the state in the Deep South is differentiated from that in the rest of the country by the existence of special institutional arrangements for that region. The Southern Border Provinces Administration Centre (SBPAC) was established in 1981 as a coordination centre for civilian administration in the five southern borderer provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Songkla and Satun (Wheeler 2010: 209). The director of SBPAC is a permanent secretary (i.e. high-level civil servant) who is answerable to the commander of the 4th Region Army (ibid.: 215). The local-level administration of SBPAC activities, however, is typically carried out by provincial, district and sub-district-level
officials, often in cooperation with police and military officers. Its core function in the 1980s and 90s was to undermine support for opponents to Thai rule through improved governance and state responsiveness in consultation with (some would argue ‘cooptation of’) Malay Muslim leaders (McCargo 2009: 8-9; Askew 2007: 38-39). Among the SBPAC’s strategies for forging close links with the local population was the practice of offering generous funding to Islamic religious teachers in exchange for their agreement to include the core Thai curriculum in their lessons (McCargo 2007b: 12). Many observers credited SBPAC with establishing a more productive relationship between the state and Malay Muslim citizens and with forming the necessary intelligence-gathering capabilities to prevent the resurgence of political violence (e.g. Ormanong 2012; Liow and Pathan 2010). Alongside its security-oriented counterpart known as CPM-43, SBPAC was also credited with acting on complaints of poor performance and corruption on the part of state officials, enhancing opportunities for participation and dialogue on the part of Malay Muslims, and delivering community and economic development, particularly in the areas of education and religious activity (Askew 2007: 46).

Major changes to the relationship between the central Thai state and the three southernmost provinces accompanied Thaksin Shinawatra’s rise to the position of Prime Minister in 2001. One of Thaksin’s first acts in office as it regards the south was to disband both SBPAC and CPM-43. The justification for this action was that what remained of violence in the border region was the work of criminal gangs and not of an organized political movement (Askew 2007: 38). Thaksin set about reorganizing the civilian and security bureaucracy in the south by giving the police a more central role in coordinating security operations in the region and replacing SBPAC with an ostensibly similar but less military-dominated organization in the form of the Southern Border Provinces Peace Building Command (SBPPC). Soon thereafter, in 2005, the Thaksin government convened a National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) to study the situation in the south and make recommendations for its resolution (McCargo 2012a: Chapter 4). The NRC published a report in June 2006 that included recommendations for re-establishing the SBPAC and adopting Malay as a working language in the region. Thaksin, however, ignored the report, claiming “his eyes were too sore to read [it]” (ibid.: 78). At the same time, Thaksin’s overly aggressive and ineffective response to the resurgent violence had become one theme among many in a Democrat party-aligned
protest movement that painted Thaksin as an incomparably corrupt autocrat bent on destroying the core institutions of Thai society. This movement eventually gave impetus to the military *coup d'état* of September, 2006. Shortly following the Military's assumption of power and the subsequent appointment of General Surayud Chulanont as Prime Minister, the new government signaled its intention to revert to ‘tried-and-tested’ means of managing the southernmost provinces and to implement some of the NRC’s recommendations - notably excluding those pertaining to the use of the Malay language, but including the reestablishment of SBPAC under essentially the same arrangement that had been in place in the 1980s and 90s. Just prior to ceding control to an elected government headed by a Thaksin nominee (Samak Sundaravej), however, Surayud took the significant step of placing SBPAC under the control of a cold-war era military institution known as the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) (McCargo 2012a: 88).

In 2009, the lines of authority between the central government, military and SBPAC shifted again as then Prime Minister Abhisit Vejajiva elevated the bureaucratic rank of the head of SBPAC to that of ‘permanent secretary’, a consequence of which being that the chief of SBPAC would thereafter report directly to the Office of the Prime Minister (Ora-on 2010: 190). During the same period, the prime minister established a Special Economic Development Zone in the southernmost region, to be directed by a group of ministers and chaired by the prime minister himself. Meanwhile, the Fourth Army (the army tasked with security operations in the south) had established a “Peace Centre” staffed by 40 military officers in order to coordinate inter-agency cooperation in the region (ibid.). As Ora-on Poocharoen (2010) argues, these developments were indicative of two essential features of governance in the Deep South region. The first is an ongoing struggle between military and civilian bureaucrats over control of key agencies in the region. SBPAC is foremost among these, as it plays a major role in the disbursement of large development budgets. The second is an ongoing tension between decentralization and a push toward policy coordination. Agencies like SBPAC, CPM-43 and ISOC have repeatedly expressed the need for greater policy coordination in the region, which typically translates to greater central control over the functioning of

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5 Deep South Watch (an NGO) estimates that the Thai government has allocated 206,094,000,000 baht (USD$5.7 billion) to “solving the problem in the south” since 2004 ([www.deepsouthwatch.org](http://www.deepsouthwatch.org)).
various government agencies (ibid.: 193-195). Thus, it can be seen that the existence of special governance institutions in the southernmost region represents the extension of central state control – whether military or civilian – in opposition to the process of political and administrative decentralization.

6.8. Decentralization under Military Rule

As has become tradition in Thailand, the 2006 coup that removed Thaksin from power was swiftly followed by the abrogation of the existing constitution and, after a period of roughly one year, its replacement with a new one. This development was of great significance to the question of decentralization in the kingdom, as the 1997 “people’s constitution” contained within it the legal foundations of that project. The 2007 constitution, however, largely maintained the 1997 document’s imperative to decentralization, albeit with some notable changes. These included the first constitutional recognition of the province as a distinct level of government (up to this time, provinces, districts and subdistricts were legislative entities rather than constitutional entities) (Supsawad 2010: 25). The 2007 charter also mandated the production of provincial budgets under the supervision of the provincial governor, thereby enshrining the “CEO Governor” arrangements introduced through the 2003 Municipal Act. Also, as noted above, the period immediately following the introduction of the 2007 constitution witnessed reforms to the Provincial Administration Act that strengthened lines of accountability and control between the central state bureaucracy and village and subdistrict heads, who from that point forward would be allowed to remain in their elected position until reaching the mandated retirement age of 60 (ibid.). At the same time, the 2007 constitution reaffirmed and strengthened the rights of citizens to demand referenda, decreased the number of signatures required for citizens to initiate a recall of an elected official, and enshrined the requirement that local-level governments publicize their budgets and expenditures (Dufhues et al. 2011: 6). These moves reflected a desire to maintain decentralization as a program whilst simultaneously
strengthening central state control over important officials and institutions at the local level.

The 2006 coup and the constitution that followed it did little to solve the political problems hounding Thailand. The years between 2006 and 2014 were marked by periodic flare-ups of an always-present and highly polarized political conflict. In 2014, months of large-scale protests in Bangkok precipitated yet another military intervention into national politics. On May 22, 2014, the military, led by General Prayuth Chan-Ocha, once again seized control of the state and abrogated the constitution. The military junta that took control of the state – the self-styled National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) – immediately began issuing directives which were aired across the country every evening on television stations that were required to broadcast the junta’s content. Among the first of these directives, issued on May 24, 2014, was one that placed SBPAC under the direct supervision of the NCPO chairman, General Prayuth. More generally, the coup d’état threw the administration of the Thai state into limbo. Provincial, district, municipal and subdistrict governments continue to function, but provincial and subdistrict elections were put on hold and, at the national level, the process of drafting a new constitution stalled as the time table for a return to democratic politics has been repeatedly extended. That the military government has taken pains to bar national-level politicians from participation in the process of drafting a new political blueprint for the kingdom while allowing local-level politicians to continue operating more-or-less as before is indicative of the limited autonomy of local government in general.

6.9. Conclusion

Decentralization in Thailand was born of popular demands for more accountable and democratic government. It emerged as core component of the kingdom’s democratization movement at a moment in history when decentralization was being touted by international organizations like the World Bank and the UNDP as a potential solution for numerous problems that plague developing country governments. In the Thai
case, however, the democratization and decentralization processes took place in the context of a highly centralized state dominated by a powerful military and civilian bureaucracy, what Fredrick Riggs (1966) famously labelled the “bureaucratic polity.” The civilian bureaucracy – and the MoI, in particular – stood to lose significant power and influence and it was officials from that ministry who played a prominent role in steering the decentralization debate away from popular demands for the direct election of provincial governors and, in subsequent years, in strengthening and entrenching the role of central-state bureaucrats at every level of local government. Although Thailand has enacted substantial institutional reforms over the past two decades and has, in so doing, opened up a number of new avenues for citizen participation in local government, the extent to which local government in the kingdom can accurately be described as autonomous remains limited. While Anek Laothamatras (1988) and others are likely quite right in arguing that the rise of provincial politicians and money politics at the national level has changed the nature of the Thai state quite fundamentally, Arghiros (2001: 227) is equally correct in pointing out that bureaucratic polity still functions at the local level.

The continued dominance of the bureaucracy in local level government, however, should not be taken to mean the absence of an expanded operating space for local politicians in Thailand. Decentralization has meant the allocation of significantly larger shares of national revenue – around 25% of total spending – to subnational levels of government (Orathai 2010: 16). It has also awarded subdistrict, municipal and provincial councils a degree of discretion in the allocation of increased budgets. One of the effects of this has been to make elected office in various local-level institutions much more valuable. This in turn has resulted in the emergence of “contractors’ councils” populated by politicians with direct interests in the construction companies that bid for government contracts, and in the widespread practice of vote buying at the local level (Arghiros 2001: 24). Both of these problems point to the necessity of effective mechanisms for ensuring accountability in local government and the relative failure of Thailand’s decentralization process to institutionalize them. This failure is evident in the shortcomings of various systems for auditing local governments, where limited mandates to investigate corruption mean that such investigations are forwarded toward an overwhelmed National Anti-Corruption Commission that struggles to manage a massive backlog of cases. The problem of underdeveloped “upward accountability” speaks to the importance of the central state in the development of responsive and accountable decentralized
government (for an important study on this subject, see: Tendler 1997). The central government can play an important role in promoting effective, accountable and responsive local government by providing the necessary resources, creating the necessary incentive structure to dissuade corrupt practices and, in some cases, working to sidestep local interests that might otherwise dominate the decentralized state (Brinkerhoff and Azfar 2010: 112). In the case of the subdistrict under analysis in this dissertation, the mechanisms for upward accountability appear woefully underdeveloped and the central government, while retaining significant power over local level government, fails to execute this important supervisory role.

At the same time, local government in Thailand suffers from shortcomings in “downward accountability,” or accountability to the citizens that local government is meant to serve. The most obvious means through which decentralized government is expected to foster downward accountability is through the election of local representatives. On this score, Thailand’s decentralization has fared quite well. A range of local level political office-holders – including provincial councillors, provincial council presidents, municipal and subdistrict councillors, and municipal and subdistrict chief executives are now selected through direct elections in which all adult citizens (excluding monks, those serving criminal sentences and those deemed mentally ill) are required by law to participate. However, the widespread practice of vote-buying may undermine the accountability-enhancing effect of direct election at the local level (see: Arghiros 2001: 195; Ockey 2000: 83-89). Direct citizen participation, meanwhile, offers another means through which local-level officials can be held to account. As has been described in this chapter, however, the mechanisms for citizen participation at the municipal and subdistrict level – the level of government that offers such opportunities to the largest swath of the Thai population – are subject to a number of shortcomings. These include one-way communication, the lack of decision making authority, the absence of genuine deliberation, and the failure to empower historically marginalized groups, including religious and ethnic minorities and women. Moreover, where there exist regulations requiring citizen participation in decision-making bodies – Local Development Planning Councils, for example – there are no regulations in place for ensuring that citizens’ voices will be given equal weight on those councils, nor are there clear criteria for determining exactly which citizens will be invited to participate. As a consequence, some
studies of participatory government at the local level in Thailand have shown a lack of enthusiasm and interest on the part of citizens (Prakorn 2007: 46; Chaiyan 2012: 55).

Given the shortcomings of decentralized government in Thailand, it can be asked whether the project as a whole has succeeded in “bringing the state closer to the people” and, to the extent that it has, whether this has resulted in more accountable and responsive government. The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that, to a large extent, it has not. Indeed, if the caseloads of the National Anti-Corruption Commission are any indicator, decentralization has done little if anything to address the problem of corruption. Nor is it clear that decentralization has contributed to economic growth – which proceeded at less than half the average annual rate since the introduction of decentralization legislation than it did in the 15 years that preceded the promulgation of the 1997 constitution – or addressing the grievances of subnational groups, as evidence by the ongoing conflict in the Deep South. At the same time, however, some studies have illustrated isolated cases of successful decentralized government in the kingdom. Ballassiano (2011), for example, presents the case of a mid-sized northeastern city that overcame capacity shortcomings through an effective partnership with an NGO and, in the process, developed a highly functional “civic space” that promoted the development of local democracy. Suwanmala (2007) describes effective participatory development planning and budgeting in the northeastern city of Khon Kaen, which was an early and effective adopter of the “town hall meeting” as a participatory forum. Both of these examples illustrate the possibility of effective decentralized government where and when local official embrace and support its development. As Brinkerhoff and Azfar (2010: 116) argue, this kind of local level support – in addition to discipline imposed by higher levels of government – is essential to the development of accountable decentralized government. As the following chapters will show, the absence of such support and discipline can have substantially deleterious consequences for the practice of citizenship at the local level.
Chapter 7. Representation and Participation in Subdistrict Government

7.1. Introduction

The last chapter explained the institutional characteristics of decentralized government in Thailand, with a particular emphasis on the subdistrict (tambon) or municipal (tesabahn) level. The present chapter shifts to an empirical examination of the relationship between people in the villages of Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai and the local-level state in the form of the Changpa Rural Municipality. It presents evidence that these relations play a significant role in perpetuating patterns of inter-ethnic estrangement in those villages and in the subdistrict more generally. More specifically, the chapter shows that particular institutional characteristics of Thailand’s system of limited decentralization engender patterns of interaction with the local-level state that are conditioned by the ethnic and religious identities of the subjects in question.

The institutional qualities at issue are those identified in the previous chapter under the heading of the “Strong Mayor” system, which facilitate the emergence of dominant chief executives and thus nullify the efficacy of local-level participatory and representative mechanisms. It is under these conditions that the municipal government of Changpa Subdistrict has come under the control of an informal network of power centred around the chief executive. This network has developed in such a manner as to close off apparent opportunities for beneficial engagement for non-Muslims, thereby alienating Thai Buddhists from the local-level state. At the same time, however, a comparison between Ban Lomyen and the mono-ethnic Ban Namsai indicates that common religious and ethnic identity are by no means sufficient criteria for inclusion.
Thus, the chapter shows how stocks of various economic, social, cultural and symbolic resources (what Pierre Bourdieu referred to as 'capital') determine both the opportunities to engage with local government and the potential to benefit from such engagement. Such conditions undermine the universalizing promise of democratic citizenship and, within the context of the ethnically differentiated relations to the centralized state described in preceding chapters, further politicize ethnic and religious identity.

### 7.2. Citizenship and Identity as Fields of Struggle

Notwithstanding its inherently exclusionary character, the category of “citizen” implies a universal standard in terms of the relationship between those who qualify for inclusion and the state. Such an egalitarian ideal can be contrasted with the myriad categories of identity that subdivide the members of any given polity along numerous axes. From this perspective, the universalistic ideals of citizenship and the particularism of ethnic identity stand in apparent tension (Isin and Wood 1999: 19-20). However, an understanding of citizenship that emphasizes both its formal-legal character and the practices that “define a person as a competent member of society, and which as a consequence shape the flow of resources to social groups” (Turner 1993: 2) helps illuminate the fact that the universalistic aspirations of citizenship are rarely if ever reproduced in practice. From this perspective, it becomes possible to see the formation of identity categories itself as a citizenship practice through which individuals and groups make “claims to recognition of citizenship rights” (Isin and Wood 1999: 20). Ethnic identity can thus be viewed in terms of its instrumental value in the struggle to gain full access to the benefits of membership in the category “citizen.” Simultaneously, however, the boundaries that define ethnic groups are themselves the sites of strategic struggle on the part of agents who seek to define the social world in terms that are beneficial to their own interests (Wimmer 2013: 4; Bourdieu and Waquant 1992: 97-98). Thus, both citizenship and ethnic identity can fruitfully be understood, following the conceptual language developed by Pierre Bourdieu, as “fields” of social struggle.
In detailing empirical observations from the villages of Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai, the following pages seek to elaborate the relationship between the field of citizenship at the local level and the field of ethnic boundary-making. They show that – under the conditions of a weakly accountable local-level government dominated by a chief executive imbued with significant extra-judicial “influence” – access to flows of power and resources is conditioned, at least in part, by membership in certain categories of identity. They also show that interactions between “citizens” and the local state are tightly bound up in struggles that shape the boundaries of politically relevant categories of identity. To that extent, the analysis presented in this chapter is in broad agreement with much of the decentralization literature and, in particular, with studies highlighting the importance of strong mechanisms for accountability and meaningful, empowered citizen participation. In the absence of such mechanisms, decentralization can produce ethnically differentiated patterns of alienation from the local state that, in combination with the patterns of alienation from the centralized state described in chapters 4 and 5, can exacerbate and entrench conditions of interethnic estrangement that stand as a significant barrier to lasting peace.

7.3. What Should Be Expected of Decentralization?

As discussed in Chapter 6 of this dissertation, Thailand’s decentralization process took root during a period of marked enthusiasm for decentralization amongst scholars, international organizations and governments the world over. Since that time, scholars have begun poring over the evidence of the impact of decentralization on a range of outcomes, including – but not limited to – enhanced state legitimacy, transparency, responsiveness, accountability and political stability. This research has returned a wide range of findings, with one common thread being that the outcomes of decentralization programs hinge on a number of conditioning factors. These include factors related to the education and political awareness of the population; inequality; the rule of law; the presence or absence of strong, policy-oriented political parties; the presence or absence of an active and independent media; the presence or absence of
independent civil society organizations; and the existence of formal oversight mechanisms, particularly those linking local-level government to the central government (Bardhan and Mookerjee 2005: Chapter 1. See also: Crook and Manor 1998; and Tendler 1997). In Thailand in general and rural Thailand in particular, it can be argued that none of these factors have developed in a manner that would support successful decentralization. Thus, it should come as no surprise that, as the preceding chapter argues, decentralization in Thailand has failed in most respects to engender more responsive and accountable government and to redress the problem of corruption with which reformers in the mid-1990s (and political discourse in the kingdom today) were centrally concerned.

In addition, there exist numerous studies within the broader decentralization literature concerned specifically with the impact of decentralization on intrastate or subnational conflict. Proponents of decentralization as a means of addressing subnational conflict argue that many of the purported benefits of decentralization are directly relevant to that objective (Siegle and O’Mahony 2006: 50-54). On the other hand, critics point out that loosening central control over peripheral regions prone to political strife can lead to ever-increasing demands for autonomy and potentially enhances the political salience of subnational identities (ibid.: 1). As is the case with the subject of decentralization in general, however, this literature identifies a range of intervening factors that condition the effects of decentralization vis-a-vis subnational conflict. For example, in a study combining large-n statistical analysis with case study research, Branchiati (2009: 10-14) argues that the effects of decentralization on intrastate conflict are shaped in large part by the presence or absence of strong regional political parties. In a similarly designed study, Siegle and O’Mahony (2006: 54-58) find that decentralization was more likely to reduce conflict where subnational governments were legitimated by democratic mechanisms, had independent control over expenditures and were sufficiently capable and well-financed to carry out their responsibilities. Meanwhile, in a meta-study on decentralization and subnational conflict, Schou and Houg (2005: 16-18) find that there exists no single, straightforward relationship between the two. Instead, they find that decentralization can engender new dynamics of conflict by creating competition between subnational and national elites, conflict between resource-rich and resource-poor regions, and local level disputes exacerbated by undemocratic processes in local-level government. At the same time, however, they find
that decentralization can help alleviate subnational conflict by broadening political participation (particularly for minority groups), bringing subnational groups into bargaining with the central state, enhancing state legitimacy, improving state outreach into remote areas and strengthening inter-group trust through mutual participation in institutions of local governance. This last mechanism is of particular relevance to the chapter at hand.

In southernmost Thailand, the question of decentralization is inextricably tied up with the region’s history of territorial integration into the Thai nation-state and the various forms of resistance to it. The question of autonomy, for example, dates at least to a famous seven-point proposal submitted to the Thai government by Haji Sulong in March, 1947 (McCargo 2009: 60-61). Among its proposals were calls for fiscal autonomy from the central Thai state and for a regional government headed by a locally-born governor. However, these demands met with an unsympathetic response, particularly following the military coup of 1948, which removed Pridi Banomyong as Prime Minister and eventually returned Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkram to power (Baker and Phongpaichit 2009: 142). Since that time, the military and civilian bureaucratic establishment has maintained a distinctly unfavourable stance on autonomy. This, even as a host of prominent politicians and academics have continued to propose various such arrangements as a political solution to the ongoing crisis in the region. In recent times, such prominent advocates for regional autonomy have included former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad, former Thai Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyuth and Dr. Prawase Wasi, the former vice-chair of a National Reconciliation Commission that was directly charged with addressing the problems in the “Deep South” (McCargo 2012a: 131). In 2008, meanwhile, a leading Thai academic focusing on the ongoing conflict lead a team of researchers in producing a proposal for a “new ministry for the south” that would achieve special administrative arrangements for the region without upsetting the fundamental unitary nature of the Thai state (Srisompob and McCargo 2008). Notwithstanding such high-profile advocacy, there exist a host of obstacles to such proposals being put into action, including a glaring lack of political will and vocal support from contemporary (i.e. not retired) political elites both within and outside of the region. This lack of vocal support can be understood at least in part by reference to the close association of the kingdom’s territorial integrity with the exalted place of the Chakri dynasty in Thailand national mythology. The intertwining narratives of avoiding colonial
subjugation and the gradual loss of territory (*sia dindaen*) are central to Thailand’s understanding of its own history and place Chakri kings at the centre of the story. Any proposal that even hints at loosening the grip on “Thai” territory risks being seen to insult that legacy and, thus, the monarchical tradition itself (McCargo 2012a: 134).

Leaving aside the question of autonomy, however, there remain several sources of advocacy for enhanced decentralization as a means of redressing the conflict in southernmost Thailand. A number of Thai academics have been studying the question of decentralization and, in particular, participatory development planning and budgeting as it relates to the crisis in the Deep South. Mahakanjana (2006: 2), for example, surveyed attitudes and perceptions of political efficacy amongst various groups and found that, compared with the kingdom as a whole, the southernmost provinces could be particularly amenable to further decentralization measures. This argument is supported in the main by her finding that Muslims (bilingual Muslims in particular) have particularly positive perceptions of their own political efficacy at the local level. Mahakanaja was also an academic consultant – alongside Thai decentralization scholars Weerasak Krueathee and Supsawad Chardchawarn – for a UNDP-funded program in the southernmost region entitled the Southern Thailand Empowerment and Participation Project (STEP). This project also emphasized participation in development planning and budgeting as a key means of ensuring that the large development budgets allocated to the region are applied in a manner that addresses the needs and desires of the population. Both Mahakanjana’s study and the STEP project address the question of decentralization from the perspective that the root cause of the ongoing conflict is an unresponsive, over-centralized state. Thus, they are concerned in the main with alleviating the source of political grievance among the local population and advocate strongly for decentralization as a remedy that goes straight to the heart of the problem.

In addition, reference to citizen participation at the local level has become standard in planning documents and other publications of state agencies operating in the region. The Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC), for example, emphasizes participation at the local level as a means of improving state responsiveness. In its “Operational Plan for Development in the Southern Border Provinces 2013-2014” (SBPAC 2014), SBPAC identifies one of its 9 key targets to be “improving civilian administration in the areas of development and solving the problems
of the three border provinces by creating coordination between policies, strategies, commands and operations and giving priority to the processes of citizen participation” (ibid: 2). It goes on to identify an operational strategy of “strengthening the democratic system of administration such that the people participate at the village and community level and achieve equitable development in keeping with the local way of life, identity, language, cultural traditions, the desires of the people and solving problems they face” (ibid: 4). Such references to “citizen participation” (gan mi suan ruam kong prachachon) are nearly ubiquitous in development planning documents at the provincial and subdistrict level in the region. They are illustrative of the degree to which the rhetoric of participatory local government has permeated the conceptualization of effective government in a region where ending violent conflict and engineering social harmony between various social groups is the primary focus of policy making.

Notwithstanding the important work of academics like Mahakanjana (2006), and the efforts of international organizations and Thai state agencies, very little of the advocacy for decentralization and, in particular, participatory local government proceeds from a strong empirical and evidentiary basis. There exist few, if any, in-depth studies of the relationships between citizens in the Deep South region and the local-level state. Moreover, what studies do exist (e.g. Mahakanjana 2006; Deep South Watch 2015; Asia Foundation 2010) tend to proceed on the basis of survey data that, while useful, cannot be relied upon to uncover subtle dynamics and power relations that operate within and around formal administrative institutions. This is all the more true in a context of insecurity and uncertainty that can render survey respondents less than forthcoming as to their genuine views and experiences. Thus, the chapter at hand endeavours to offer a unique perspective on the relationship between citizens and decentralized government in the southernmost region. In so doing, it points to shortcomings in the institutional design of decentralized government that inhibit the development of relationships to the local state grounded in rights-based citizenship. Whereas citizenship – at least in theory – is a category that cuts across categories of ethnic and religious identity, the particularistic relationships that develop in the context of an insufficiently democratic form of decentralized local government can, to the contrary, hinge on precisely those categories of belonging.
7.4. Popular Representation in Changpa Subdistrict

In Changpa Subdistrict Municipality, the position of “mayor” has been held since its inception by Nayok Loh, a Malay-speaking Muslim man with extensive kinship ties in the area. Having already occupied the post of subdistrict chief (kamnan) for eight years, Nayok Loh won the inaugural mayoral election in 2007 – following the introduction of the “Strong Mayor” system – and ran unopposed in 2011. As several residents of Changpa Subdistrict indicated to me, Nayok Loh is connected to the “clique” or “power network” (pak puak) of Wan Muhammad Nor Matha,¹ perhaps the most influential politician in the Malay-majority region of southernmost Thailand. The Changpa Subdistrict Municipal Council, meanwhile, is comprised of 12 councillors directly elected from two electoral districts, with electors selecting six representatives from the slate of candidates for their electoral district. The most recent Municipal Council election in Changpa municipality was held in November, 2011 and returned a slate of 10 male and two female representatives. 11 of the 12 representatives were Malay-speaking Muslims and one – a man from Ban Lomyen – was a Thai-speaking Muslim.

In conversations and interviews, several Buddhist villagers in Ban Lomeyn indicated that, owing to their local minority status and the situation of ongoing insurgent violence, their continued presence in the area was only made possible by the continued support of powerful local figures, specifically Nayok Loh. Concomitant with that perception of contingency was an experience of powerlessness to express criticism of the local government, lest that support should be withdrawn. A frequently encountered response from Buddhists when asked about their opinion of local politics was that they “live under a system of ‘influence’” and “can do nothing.” During a conversation with group of Buddhist men in their 30s, for example, I was told that the mayor and his clique are powerful and must be obeyed. According to their ominous assessment, the consequences of openly disagreeing with the mayor included “[going] back to wherever...

¹ Wan Nor’s Al Wadah faction had formed a key component of Thaksin Shinawatra’s Thai Rak Thai (Thais love Thai) government, before being summarily rejected by southern voters in the election of February 2005 (McCargo 2009: 70-75). The faction has since ceased to play a significant role in Thai national politics, but the network of connections that formed its structure continue to be important conduits for power in the Deep South region.
you were before you were born.” This condition of contingent and precarious existence informed a general orientation toward local government of passivity and avoidance. This was in keeping with the generally insular nature of Buddhist village life, where villagers rarely ventured out of the Buddhist-dominated “Upper Village.” In the language of Bourdieuan sociology, Thai Buddhist villagers had developed a group *habitus* characterized by group insularity and disengagement from the field of power at the subdistrict level.

The pervading orientation of disengagement from local-level politics was further informed by the failure of municipal council elections to produce Buddhist representatives. This was despite the fact that three out of the four villages in electoral district 2 of the municipality are home to significant Buddhist populations. For some Buddhist villagers, the lack of Buddhist representation on the subdistrict council and in the subdistrict executive was symptomatic of an electoral system incapable of providing adequate representation for local minorities (i.e. non-Muslims). According to one Buddhist villager – the only Buddhist in the village I observed to be genuinely conversant in the local Malay dialect and someone who maintained friendly relations with his Malay-speaking Muslim neighbours – Buddhist candidates could not hope to win office in subdistricts with predominantly Muslim electorates. Muslims, he said, “get together” to ensure that only Muslim candidates succeed. Another Buddhist villager suggested that local politicians “play on relations” to achieve office. If such connections were seen as particularly important to gaining political office, however, so too was money. This view was expressed by another Buddhist villager, who pointed out that votes in subdistrict elections are bought and sold for 1,000 baht (USD$27). “If you don’t have money,” she said, “you cannot have power.” Yet another villager put the matter in similarly succinct terms, saying “this is a system for people who have (good) livelihoods.”

There existed, however, a more proximate and straightforward cause of the absence of Buddhist representation in the subdistrict council: no Buddhists had come forward as candidates in the election. At least three factors might help explain this outcome. First is the perceived danger that becoming involved state business entails. It has been well documented that non-military state agents – including bureaucrats,
teachers, Buddhist monks\(^2\) and elected officials – have been core targets of insurgent violence (see: Deep South Watch 2014). In Bannangsata district, however, less than five per cent of the 881 people killed and injured in violent incidents between 2004 and 2014 were local government officials, while nearly half were regular civilians (Deep South Incidents Database 2014). These figures suggest that gaining public office does not drastically increase an individual’s chance of being made a victim of insurgent violence. A second explanatory factor is that, as indicated by several respondents in this study, Thai Buddhists have no hope of succeeding in a local election in a Muslim-dominated subdistrict. This explanation, however, is difficult to substantiate given the failure of Thai Buddhists to contest local elections. A third factor, and the one that probably best explains the outcome in question, is that the representative function of Subdistrict Council members is almost totally eclipsed by the dominance of the executive. Under this condition, the incentives for seeking elected office in the subdistrict government revolve around gaining access to the informal network of power through which the business of the local-level state actually functions. This network – centred around the figure of Nayok Loh – operates within a particular ethno-religious milieu that presents limited points of entry for non-Muslims.

The perception of Nayok Loh’s dominance over the subdistrict government is further substantiated by the comments of Thai-speaking Muslims in Ban Lomyen, who expressed views of the subdistrict government strikingly similar to those of their Buddhist neighbours. For example, one Thai-speaking Muslim man who had lived in Ban Lomyen since he was a young child told me that people live in fear of Nayok Loh and would never openly disagree with him. He submitted that disagreeing with the mayor would carry with it the risk of having budgets for village infrastructure and other services redirected elsewhere. He also suggested that violent reprisals could result (although he could not provide any examples of that having happened in the past). Another Thai-speaking Muslim villager suggested that, as outsiders to the region, Thai-speaking Muslims could not press their interests in the subdistrict government and had to accept the will of “influential people” (\textit{poo mee itthipon\)}. Still another summed up the condition in terms that spoke directly to the conditions of citizenship at the local level: “we have

\(^2\) There exist multiple links between the Thai state and the ecclesiastical order of Buddhist Monks in Thailand, some of which are specific to the region of the Deep South and the ongoing conflict. (see: Jerryson 2009; McCargo 20012: Chapter 2)
rights, but it is as though we have none at all.” These responses are indicative of a relationship to subdistrict-level political authority that renders most Thai-speaking Muslim villagers – much like their Buddhist neighbours – passive subjects reliant on the good will and favour of the powerful, namely Nayok Loh and his clique.

The similarity between Buddhist and Thai-speaking Muslim assessments of the subdistrict government, however, fails to account for the long-standing political dominance of Thai-speaking Muslims in Ban Lomyen itself. This dominance is evidenced by the fact that, since the village’s establishment in 1983, all five of the men elected to the position of village headman have been Thai-speaking Muslims. It also extends to the election in 2011 of a Thai-speaking Muslim man named Sor Tor Mat to the subdistrict council as its sole non-Malay-speaking member (“Sor Tor” being the acronym of Samachik Sapah Tong Tin or “local council member”). Owing in part to the fact that the majority of Thai-speaking Muslims were recruited into the Nikhom Project from two villages in Pattalung province, members of that community tend to have more kinship relations living in the village than is true of Malay-speaking Muslims and Buddhists (see Figure 1). This fact partially accounts for the ability of Thai-speaking Muslims in the village to mobilize the necessary social resources to contest elections successfully, despite the fact that Buddhists and, more recently, Malay-speaking Muslims account for larger shares of the total village population. However, it is also widely understood among villagers that anyone occupying an official position in either village or subdistrict level government must align him/herself with Nayok Loh or risk having his/her village neglected in subdistrict budgets (or, as some suggested, far worse). In this regard, Muslim religious identity can be seen as a valuable asset, particularly given the fact that all of the village headmen and subdistrict council members from other villages in Changpa Subdistrict are Muslims and that many of the opportunities for network-building among them are centred around Islamic religious activities (see below).

The monopolization of elected positions in Ban Lomyen by Thai-speaking Muslims should not, however, be taken to indicate effective representation for that community. To the contrary, the comments of Thai-speaking Muslim villagers suggest that the village headman, Sor Tor Mat and other subdistrict council members primarily represent their own private interests and the interests of their associates when discharging their official duties. As one villager put it, “local politics is primarily about
cliques. For the most part, politicians are selfish.” Another pointed out that the benefits of
development programs and other schemes typically accrue to the families of politicians
and their friends. At the same time, however, the financial benefits of subdistrict council
membership accruing to Sor Tor Mat appeared modest. He received a salary of 9660
baht (USD$270) per month, which supplemented his income from farming a modest
rubber plantation (10 rai) and working with his wife as a share-cropper on another. He
was also able to channel some development funding toward his own family members.
Such was the case for example, when funds became available for the establishment of a
women’s craft-making collective (glum satree) in the village and Sor Tor Mat’s wife was
made chair of the group. This example notwithstanding, however, it was clear that, three
years after having gained office in the Municipal Council, the economic status of Sor Tor
Mat and his family had not progressed beyond what was typical of a Thai-speaking
Muslim household in Ban Lomyen.

What winning election to the subdistrict council did offer Sor Tor Mat and other
elected members was a measure of prestige and an opportunity to further develop and
expand a network of valuable social connections. In the language of Bourdieuan
sociology, the position of subdistrict councillor brought with it significant symbolic capital
as well as opportunities to amass valuable social capital (Bourdieu 1986: 253). The
symbolic capital derived from the position of subdistrict councillor was evident every time
a fellow villager referred to Mat by the official title “Sor Tor.” This title was a mark of
distinction that immediately differentiated Sor Tor Mat from his neighbours. Opportunities
to amass social capital, meanwhile, arose within the meetings of the subdistrict council
itself as well as during the numerous functions to which council members are unfailingly
invited. These included, for example, the practice of taking Friday prayers and
communal meals following the conclusion of some subdistrict council meetings. They
also included invitations to the various fast-breaking meals hosted by the subdistrict
“sheriff” (kamnan), Nayok Loh and others during the holy month of Ramadan. Invitations
to attend such meals and to select a group of men to accompany him afforded Sor Tor
Mat opportunities to forge ties of loyalty within his own community and to rub shoulders
with the elite of neighbouring villages. Another such network-building opportunity took
place during the period of field research when Nayok Loh arranged to take all of the
subdistrict councillors and his deputies on a 15-day Haj tour at a reported cost of 60,000 baht (USD$1,680) per person.\(^3\) It is notable that these kinds of network-building opportunities are directly associated with Islam and the Islamic community (ummah). As such, they are inherently exclusive of Buddhists.

This centring of political network building activities around Islamic religious practices might be expected to present similar avenues to participation for Malay-speaking Muslims, who are possessed of identity characteristics and cultural competencies that facilitate participation in a predominantly Malay-speaking, Muslim milieu. Comments from Malay-speaking Muslim respondents regarding questions related to local government, however, indicate a disinclination to engage directly with local power structures. In interviews carried out in conjunction with a household survey, several Malay-speaking Muslim respondents (both men and women) offered sometimes elaborate criticisms (often veering well into the territory of ‘conspiracy theory’) of “the government” (ratthaban) and “officials” (jao natee). On the subject of local politics, however, respondents tended to become much more guarded, as was the case with one man who declined to elaborate his views on the subject beyond the one-word answer “good.” Still more expressed an inability to answer the question on the grounds that they “don’t understand,” “can’t explain” or “don’t really know” about local politics.\(^4\) Still others were more direct in expressing their disinterest in local politics, stating that they “don’t think about it one way or the other,” or that they “don’t know and don’t care.” One respondent, however, may have summed up the subtext of these various evasions when he simply replied “[I’m] afraid.” This disinclination to engage with local politics can be explained, at least in part, by the group’s relative lack of deep roots and strong webs of relationships in the subdistrict.

In Ban Lomyen, Malay-speaking Muslims represented a minority community that had only recently expanded to reach rough numerical parity with the Thai-speaking

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\(^3\) According to Sor Tor Mat, the cost of this trip was born personally by Nayok Loh. I was unable to confirm that as the trip took place shortly after the conclusion of my field research.

\(^4\) Lest it should be suspected that these answers stemmed from the respondents’ inability to express more nuanced assessments in Thai (the primary language in all interviews), it should be noted that the majority of these comments came in response to questions on local politics at the end of the household survey and were typically preceded by lively discussions (in Thai) on a number of topics, including national politics.
Muslim and Thai Buddhist populations in the village. This is evidenced by the fact that, on average, the heads of Malay-speaking Muslim households had lived in the village for 15 years, while the heads of Thai-speaking Muslim households and Buddhist households had lived in the village for 27 years. As noted above (and in Figure 1), Malay-speaking Muslim households also enjoyed fewer kinship connections in the village, with each having, on average, 1.5 households in the village to which it could claim a direct kinship connection. This is comparable with Thai Buddhist households (with average of 1.8) but is significantly less than Thai-speaking Muslims households, which averaged 3.8 related households in the village. These factors suggest lower stocks of social capital, an important resource in an environment characterized by insecurity and uncertainty. In addition, a higher proportion of Malay-speaking Muslim households in Ban Lomyen were landless (41%) than their Buddhist and Thai-speaking Muslim neighbours (33% and 24% rates of household landlessness, respectively). Among land-owning households, Malay Muslims also averaged smaller holdings (10 rai) than Buddhists and Thai-speaking Muslims (averages of 13 and 16 rai, respectively). This indicates that Malay-speaking Muslims in Ban Lomyen were, on average, less well-endowed with economic capital than their Thai-speaking neighbours. These factors – the relative lack of social and economic capital among Malay-speaking Muslims in Ban Lomyen – explain to a significant extent the political passivity of that group as a whole. As was the case with Buddhist villagers, the objective conditions of Malay-speaking Muslims in Ban Lomyen appear to have been inscribed in a group habitus characterized by disengagement from the field of power at the local level. Unlike Thai Buddhists, however, this type of disengagement characterized the typical Malay-speaking Muslim’s orientation to agents of the central state as well (most prominently, the military and police).

\[5\] All data in this paragraph was obtained through a comprehensive household survey of Ban Lomyen
7.5. Subdistrict Representation in Ban Namsai

If Malay-speaking Muslims in Ban Lomyen could be considered a marginalized ethnic minority in the context of that village, the same could not be said of Malay-speaking Muslims in Ban Namsai, who make up the entirety of the village population. For villagers in Ban Namsai, the question of representation in the subdistrict council and subdistrict executive did not call to mind issues of ethnic or religious group exclusion, but rather issues of access to resources via kinship and quasi-kinship networks. To continue in the vein of Bourdieuan concepts of capital, the cultural and symbolic capital necessary for fruitful engagement with the network of power centred around Nayok Loh was relatively widely dispersed throughout the village. What was in rather shorter supply was the economic and social capital necessary to gain access to it.

As noted in Chapter 1, the village of Ban Namsai was established several years before Ban Lomyen and was created to house families displaced by a major infrastructure project. Thus, as a whole, residents of Ban Namsai have comparatively more extensive roots in and denser networks of relations in both the village and the subdistrict in general. This is evidenced by responses the household survey in Ban Namsai, which indicated that the average household in that village claimed direct kinship ties to 3.6 households in the village and 1.3 households elsewhere in the subdistrict. Economically, Ban Namsai was very similar to Ban Lomyen, particularly given the related facts that the families settled in both villages received 18 rai rubber plantations and that virtually every household in both villages was involved in some capacity in the rubber economy. At the same time, however, Ban Namsai exhibited a somewhat more egalitarian distribution of land and, in particular, a lower rate of household landlessness (32% of Ban Lomyen households were landless, compared with 12% in Ban Namsai). In general terms, it can be said the Ban Namsai was characterized by denser networks of kinship relations and somewhat lower levels of economic differentiation than Ban Lomyen.

6 At least since the mass exodus of Buddhist villagers in 2006
7 The figure for kinship connections within the village is comparable with that of Thai-speaking Muslim in Ban Lomyen (see Figure 1)
These figures are relevant to the discussion at hand because Ban Namsai is home to three representatives on the Subdistrict Municipal Council and one appointee to the Subdistrict Municipality Executive Committee. Of the three Municipal representatives, one was (at the time of research) a 47-year-old man named Sor Tor Sae, who claimed kinship relations to 7 households in the village and 2 more elsewhere in the district. The second was a 29-year-old woman named Sor Tor Da, who claimed kinship relations to 12 households in the village and 9 others elsewhere in the district. The third was a 40-year-old man named Sor Tor Air, who claimed kinship relations to five families in the village and none outside of it. All three were children of original village members who had been settled in Ban Namsai at the village's inception. Two of the three reported agricultural holdings that would place them in the 90th percentile for the village while the third, Sor Tor Da, was the daughter of one of the most prosperous rubber traders in the upland part of the subdistrict. Finally, Ban Nam Sai was also home to a man appointed by Nayok Loh to the position of Executive Committee Secretary for the Changpa Subdistrict Municipality. This individual, known locally as Bae Kri, reported roughly average landholdings and kinship relations. It was quite clear, however, that he commanded considerable respect in the village. During the nightly socializing that would take place between the fourth and fifth of the day’s obligatory prayers, he was always to be found occupying a seat at the central table outside of the mosque, flanked by one or more Municipal Council members, the village head man (before his untimely death) and/or members of the Village Administrative Council (*Kana gammagan boriharn moo ban*).

As this description makes evident, Ban Namsai was – numerically speaking – very well represented in the subdistrict municipal government. In speaking with villagers, however, it soon became clear that very few understood the function of the Municipal Council Members to be that of representing villagers’ interests in the policy-making process. Instead, numerous respondents opined that the municipal government was under the control of Nayok Loh and both the executive committee and the Municipal Council were made up of his nominees. According to one such respondent, villagers were afraid to vote in municipal elections for any candidate who did not receive Nayok Loh’s endorsement. He echoed a fear expressed by several respondents in Ban Lomyen that failure to acquiesce to the Nayok’s wishes – in the case, his choice of subdistrict council candidates – could result in development funds being directed elsewhere. Other
respondents seemed to be in agreement with this assessment, with one woman suggesting that Nayok Loh could not simply select the victors himself, but could apply the threat of reduced budgets to ensure his nominees succeeded. For their own part, Subdistrict Council members were seen to be primarily interested in skimming from subdistrict budgets. Several respondents indicated that the financial benefits of membership in the subdistrict council extended well beyond the official salary. While a significant number of respondents declined to elaborate their views of the subdistrict government, several of those who did painted a picture of a patronage network in which silent acquiescence to the Nayok’s decisions granted elected members access to spoils of office. Notably, however, discussions of subdistrict politics in Ban Namsai were largely free of the language of fear and vulnerability evident in Ban Lomyen.

Direct observation of Subdistrict Municipal Council Meetings and reviews of minutes from additional meetings would seem to substantiate villagers’ assessments of its role. In the three Subdistrict Municipal Council meetings I attended personally, 11 desks were arranged facing a head table, at which sat the Subdistrict Municipal Council chairman, Nayok Loh, the deputy district officer assigned to Changpa Subdistrict and the deputy district officer’s chief of staff. The 11 desks were occupied by 9 subdistrict council members, one Deputy Chief Executive and the Executive Committee Secretary. The two female Subdistrict Council members occupied seats in the area reserved for public observers. During these meetings, none of the council members (with the exception of the council chairman) spoke, except in the highly formal manner of nominating and confirming the nomination of members to various subcommittees. At no point were any concerns of problems of local people raised in the formal setting of the council meeting. This is not to suggest that the council and the municipal government in do not discuss or are not concerned with the problems facing the local population. It is simply to point out that, whatever discussions do take place in that respect, occur outside of the official, public forums established for that purpose. It is also to point out that, given the arrangements observed in these meetings and the prevailing patterns of social interaction observed among council and executive committee members outside of the

8 It is notable that all four of the subdistrict council members interviewed in this study underreported their official salaries.
meetings themselves, it is highly unlikely that the female committee members would be included equally in informal discussions of subdistrict government business.

7.6. Participatory Development Planning

If institutions like the “Strong Mayor” and municipal council failed to provide villagers in Ban Lomyen with effective representation in the local-level state, Thailand’s system of decentralized government also includes mechanisms for direct participation that could potentially compensate for this shortcoming (see discussion in of participatory mechanisms in Chapter 6). From the outset of its shift toward limited decentralization, Thailand has embraced the rhetoric (if not the practice) of public participation. The implementation of participatory local government has progressed furthest with respect to the production of development plans at the subdistrict and municipal level and, in particular, through village-level meetings known as “civic forums” (wetee prachachon). Local development planning committees – which include a limited number of citizen representatives – spearhead the drafting of Development Strategies and Three Year Development Plans through processes that are required to include consultation with citizens through civic forums and other public meetings. The end product of these processes is a rolling Three Year Development Plan that is then presented to the municipal or subdistrict executive for approval and, finally, to the Department of Local Administration for final endorsement.

Analysis of the Three Year Development Plan for Changpa Subdistrict: 2015-2017 (Changpa Subdistrict Municipality 2014) substantiates the conclusion that participatory mechanisms have a limited impact on development planning in the subdistrict. While the plan identifies civic forums as an integral component of the development planning process, nowhere does it refer directly to the outcomes of those forums. The only reference to the input of regular citizens into the process comes in the third chapter, which lists 5 “problems and needs of the citizenry with respect to development.” These include the problems of insurgent violence in the region, poor
communications and transport infrastructure, the low price of agricultural commodities, difficulties in collecting tax revenue, and the lack of income from tourism. Of these five issues, only those regarding agricultural prices and infrastructure resonate with answers given in the household survey for this study regarding respondents’ desires for improved local government service. The remaining three issues were rarely if ever mentioned by respondents as issues to be remedied by local-level government and do not show up in records of civic forums held in 2014. Notably, however, each features prominently in the Three Year Development Plan for Yala Province (Yala PAO 2014), which is itself authored by central government bureaucrats under the supervision of the provincial governor (a non-elected bureaucrat). In fact, a close comparison of the provincial and subdistrict municipality development plans suggests a degree of coordination that would be at best unlikely given a significant scope for citizen influence over local level development planning.

One of the “civic forums” held as part of the process of producing the Three Year Development Plan for Changpa Subdistrict was held in the open air hall located in the centre of Ban Lomyen. The meeting lasted about one hour and began with introduction given by the chief of staff in the office of the deputy district officer (the senior representative of the Interior Ministry in the municipal government office). The official chairing the meeting conveyed a list of development strategies in the areas of education, culture, religion, health, quality of life and so on. Finally, the official asked if anyone had anything to add. In the Ban Lomyen forum I observed directly and in the meeting minutes of the civic forum held in the village one year earlier, no villagers submitted any comments or questions during the meeting. Finally, the official chairing the meeting asked for nominations for the Local Development Planning Committee, for which three villagers – all Muslims – were nominated by fellow villagers. In the event, none of the villagers nominated were selected to the committee and the only resident from Ban Lomyen to serve as a citizen representative on and of the planning committees was the village headman (*poo yai ban*), himself a Thai-speaking Muslim.

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9 Low prices for agricultural commodities was a frequently cited problem that most respondents laid squarely at the feet of the prime minister
A survey of Buddhist villagers’ attitudes with respect to these kinds of village forums revealed a generalized aversion to presenting ideas and suggestions within them. For example, when asked about his willingness to present ideas in civic forums, one Buddhist villager complained that he had suggested several times in the past that the main road in the village needed repair, but money was allocated to an access road to rubber plantations that, in his estimation, only benefitted villagers with “good connections.” Another Buddhist man told me that he had presented the same idea (for constructing a children’s playground) many times in the past without results and had since given up. Others expressed the idea that the purpose of the meetings was just to give the impression that subdistrict politicians were interested in their concerns. Yet another man was much more ominous is his assessment, saying that Buddhists were afraid to present their ideas in public forums because, by doing so, one risked being seen to be at odds with the priorities of Nayok Loh. People who oppose Nayok Loh, he said, “have short lives.”

Among Malay and Thai-speaking Muslims, similarly negative assessments of village forums prevailed. While the vast majority of respondents indicated that they attend village meetings whenever they are asked, few claimed to have presented their ideas in these forums. In particular, a number of Malay-speaking Muslim respondents indicated that they attended village meetings out of a sense of duty and came “whenever the village headman asks me to.” Others indicated that the presentation of ideas in public forums was the role of “leaders” (poo nam) like the village headman and not that of common villagers. One such villager (a Malay-speaking Muslim woman) indicated that it would be inappropriate for her to present ideas, because she “isn’t anybody [important].” Meanwhile, a rather more cynical attitude – echoing that expressed by some Buddhists – was evident amongst a number of Thai-speaking Muslim respondents, who intimated that the real purpose of such community forums was merely to give the impression of genuine consultation. According to one respondent, the true purpose of such meetings was to obtain photographs of officials conducting their duty for inclusion in their reports. At the same time, however, a few individuals held more positive views of village meetings. The teacher at the village’s Early Childhood Development
Centre\textsuperscript{10}, for example, felt that it was her duty to provide input to such meetings and that officials gave serious consideration to villagers’ inputs. Nevertheless, such positive assessments were rare. By and large, residents of Ban Lomyen did not view civic forums as effective means of gaining influence over the policies and practices of the local level state.

Residents of Ban Namsai offered broadly similar assessments of “civic forums” and other types of ostensibly consultative meetings. By far the majority of respondents (89 per cent) indicated that at least one member of their household usually attends such meetings, but only a quarter of those respondents indicated that they have ever contributed to the discussions that take place within them.\textsuperscript{11} The most frequently cited reason for this reluctance to speak was the impression that it was strictly the role of community leaders to do so. Echoing similar sentiments heard in Ban Lomyen, several respondents in Ban Namsai indicated that speaking up in civic forums and other meetings risked offending community leaders. One man indicated that, as a common person he “has no right” to speak up in village meetings. This comment met with an immediate rebuttal from his wife, who said that everyone has the right to speak in the meetings, but most people are too embarrassed to do so. Others indicted that they had been active in meetings when the practice was first introduced – requesting funds for street lights, road improvements etc. – but had grown weary at the lack of results and had since given up. Still others simply laughed at the suggestion that they should speak up in meetings. As one woman one put it, “no one listens to poor people.” Finally, and once again echoing sentiments encountered in Ban Lomyen, one man suggested that the entire purpose of the meetings was “create an image” of consultation. “That’s how it is in Thailand,” he said.

These responses suggest the near total failure of forums as mechanisms for effective citizen participation in local government. A small minority of respondents (7%) in Ban Namsai expressed confidence that officials listen to the suggestions made by villagers in “civic forums” and put them to use in their work. However, a larger minority (30 per cent) expressed the view that the contributions made by ‘regular villagers’ had

\textsuperscript{10} A rather grandiose title for what was, in essence, a small daycare facility.
no effect on official decisions-making, while the remaining majority were ambivalent on the question. Thus, while not a total indictment of the village-level participatory process, the experience of civic participation in Ban Namsai fell well short of the lofty goals for participatory development planning laid out in regional, provincial and subdistrict planning documents. Furthermore, discussions with residents of Ban Namsai illuminated a dimension of exclusion from participatory processes that goes entirely unrecognized in planning documents and is of particular significance to the Deep South region: numerous female respondents indicated that they do not attend civic forums and other village meeting because those meetings are typically held in the atrium adjoining the village mosque. Although women are not explicitly barred from entering the mosque or the compound upon which it sits, the area is the hub of the male sector of the village’s gender-segregated social scene. The degree to which women felt unwelcome in this space was such that even the village’s female Subdistrict Council members did not attend civic forums in the village for precisely this reason. This example can be taken as strong evidence that effective participatory mechanisms for responsive and accountable local government must consist of more than simple community meetings. It also substantiates the argument raised by such researchers as Baiocchi (2003) and Heller (1999) that participatory government must actively include and develop the capacities of historically marginalized groups, including women.

7.7. Analysis and Conclusion

The empirical evidence reviewed in this chapter paints a particularly dim picture of representative and participatory mechanisms in the municipal government on Changpa Subdistrict Municipality. Put simply, it would appear that the subdistrict government has fallen under the domination of a local strongman who sits atop a patronage network fueled by rent capture and, at least to some extent, maintained by the underlying threat of violence. That conclusion alone would come as no surprise and offer little of note to scholars of decentralization in the developing world or of Thailand in particular. The significance of these observations, however, stems from the role of
institutional features of Thai decentralization in making such local-level state capture possible and of the repercussions of that condition for relations between distinct ethnic and religious communities in the subdistrict. The first point is described in the preceding chapter and should be amply illustrated in the preceding sections of this one. The second point, to be fully appreciated, must be understood in light of the discussion of relations between citizens in the two villages of focus in this study and the central state, as described in chapters 3-5.

As described above, the largely negative assessment of representative and participatory mechanisms on the part of Buddhist villagers in Ban Lomyen corresponded with a general orientation of disengagement and avoidance with regard to local government. As described in chapters 3-4, Buddhist villagers in Ban Lomyen were a self-reliant group, tied together through near universal membership in the Village Defence Volunteers group (Or Ror Bor). This group and its fortified headquarters functioned as something of a social space in which Buddhist villagers would share meals, watch news and sports on television, and drink alcohol. Their shared feeling of being a threatened community charged with its own defence contributed to a sense of unity that was associated with symbols of Thai national identity. These included, most prominently, the King and Queen of Thailand and the figure of a famous southern Thai monk known as Luang Pho Thuat, who is strongly associated with the incorporation of the Deep South into the Thai kingdom (Jory 2008). The leadership of the Village Defence Volunteers also played a prominent role alongside Border Patrol Police officers in ceremonies marking the King and Queen’s birthdays and the Buddhist community in general enjoyed friendly relations with the state security personnel, all of whom were Buddhists. Thus it can be seen that Buddhists’ alienation from the practices of citizenship at the level of local government was offset by practices that reemphasized their national citizenship in what was symbolically represented as a distinctly Buddhist Thai nation.

In comparison, Thai-speaking Muslims were much better placed to engage with local-level government, both in terms of their ability to gain access to it and to benefit from such access. In the first instance, the capacity of some Thai-speaking Muslims to participate in local-level politics can be attributed to their advantages in terms of social capital in the form of kinship and quasi-kinship relations. In certain cases – as was
reported to me with regard to the village headman’s campaign for election to that position – such kinship networks could be drawn upon to amass the requisite economic capital to shift the outcome of elections through vote-buying. In terms of gaining benefit from such access, Thai-speaking Muslims also enjoyed a relatively good position, owing to their Muslim religious identity. As Muslims, members of this group possessed the kind of identity characteristics and cultural competencies to engage fruitfully in networking activities in a predominantly Muslim field of power. This in turn introduced an incentive for Thai-speaking Muslims to practice their Muslim faith in a public manner and to emphasize the significance of religion as an identity category. This dynamic helps to explain the diligence with which many Thai-speaking Muslim men attended Mosque, the widespread adoption of Malay-Muslim styles of dress and the value attached to attending such events as the Ramadan fast-breaking meal held at the home of Nayok Loh. These practices, while often entirely sincere, further endowed practitioners with symbolic capital as “good Muslims,” which is an asset that carried value in the field of power in Changpa subdistrict. To that extent, practices of citizenship that convey membership in the polity at the local level are indistinguishable from practices that convey membership in the Islamic ummah.

That social capital formed around kinship networks represents the most important asset in gaining access to power and resources in Changpa district also explains to a significant extent the position of Malay-speaking Muslims in Ban Lomyen. As latecomers to the village, the Malay-speaking Muslim community in Ban Lomyen developed slowly and was, until recently, the smallest of the village’s three readily apparent identity groups. Unlike Thai-speaking Muslims, Malay-speaking Muslim villagers in Ban Lomyen did not share common origins in ancestral villages, nor did they enjoy the same kind of symbolic relationship to Thai national citizenship and the Thai security forces as Buddhist villagers. As a result, even as their numbers grew, Malay-speaking Muslim villagers remained a politically marginalized community. While they possessed the requisite symbolic and cultural currency to participate in a predominantly Malay-speaking Muslim field of power, they lacked the social and economic capital through which entry into that field is gained. What the position of this community in Ban Lomyen indicates is that, in an ethnically diverse subdistrict such as Changpa in which the subdistrict executive exercises domination over the local government, successful participation in the field of power is not simply a matter of shared ethnic identity.
This point was further reinforced through analysis of the views and practices of Malay-speaking Muslims in Ban Namsai. That village was home to a significant number of Subdistrict Municipal Council members (3) and one appointee to the Executive Committee and might, thus, appear to have been over-represented in the subdistrict government. Comments given by village residents, however, were indicative of a widely shared view that neither the council nor the executive committee function as effective representative institutions. Nor were any more than a small minority of respondents of the opinion that participatory mechanisms like the civic forums offer effective and sincere means of giving citizens a voice in their local government. The business of local government was seen largely in terms of officials siphoning off development funds for personal benefit. Villagers’ comments also highlighted specific barriers to participation in such activities. One such barrier was poverty, which was illustrated by the fact that all three of the Subdistrict Council members from the village commanded economic resources well in excess of the average villager. Another barrier, as observed in the case of Ban Lomyen, was kinship relations, which are taken here as a rough proxy for social capital. All three of the Council members from Ban Namsai could lay claim to relatively extensive kinship networks and were members the original group of families to settle in the village. A third barrier was gender, as illustrated both by the passivity of female Subdistrict Council members and the widespread avoidance by female respondents of village meetings and civic forums held on the mosque compound.

To label the practices of avoidance, disengagement and what might be called ‘passive attendance’ as “citizenship practices” is to stretch the definition of citizenship almost to the breaking point. This is the case because the type of state-society relations described in this chapter very rarely proceed on the basis of rights. Instead, the practices of denizens of Changpa Subdistrict Municipality with respect to the local-level state more closely resemble those of subjects, whose access to the benefits of membership in the polity are contingent on the good graces of the powerful. In the case of Ban Lomyen, this chapter has argued, those practices are informed by objective conditions that are shared, in general terms, between members of the village’s three ethno-religious communities. At the same time, however, those practices inform the continual process of making and remaking group boundaries – Thai Buddhists associating ever more closely with the overtly Buddhist symbols of the central state, Thai-speaking Muslims emphasizing their common link with Malay-speakers as Muslims. In Ban Namsai,
meanwhile, patterns of engagement with the local-level state were informed by perceptions of propriety (leaving the decision making to leaders) as well as a widely shared ambivalence as to the efficacy of active participation. As the following chapter will argue, access to positions of leadership in the village (and in the subdistrict more generally) was subject to the approval and support of the subdistrict chief executive (Nayok Loh). To that extent, the “blurred boundary” between the state and society was manifest in the role of informal “influence” (itthipon) over positions of state-sanctioned authority (amnaat). Such informal influence operated through networked connections that offered few if any points of access to non-Muslims. The interpenetration of state and society in Changpa subdistrict thus renders the symbolic capital of Muslim identity valuable in the field of citizenship/subjecthood at the local level, which in turn contributes to the polarization of local society along a Muslim/Buddhist ethnic binary.
Chapter 8. Deconcentrated Government, Blurred Lines and Village Leaders

8.1. Introduction

On the fourth of September 2014, residents of two adjacent villages in the Bannagsata district of Yala province, Southern Thailand, congregated at a soccer field located just outside one of the villages. Clad in rubber boots and rubber-resin-flecked work clothes, they gathered in clusters, chatting amongst themselves and paying little heed to speeches given by the district officer (Nai Amphoe), subdistrict mayor (Nayok Tesaban) and representatives of the Forestry Department and the Border Patrol Police. Taking turns at the podium, those officials welcomed the assembled as participants in the “Program to (re)Plant the Forest in Honour of Her Majesty the Queen” (kornggan plook pa totdaen chalerm pragiard somdejpraao Sirikit prabrom rachini nad). When the speeches came to a close, two dozen motorcycles, a handful of pickup trucks and two armoured personnel carriers belonging to the Border Patrol Police began making their way up a deeply-rutted red-earth road leading to an area of protected forest. With the district officer leading the way, more than 150 villagers, subdistrict officials, police officers, teachers and students marched up a steep trail carrying bundles of saplings. The saplings were to be used in the replanting of an area of protected forest estimated by forestry officials to encompass more than 100 hectares (700 rai). Only several months earlier, that expanse of forest had been felled and burned by local residents in an attempt to expand their rubber plantations. Where towering 30-40 meter tropical hardwoods had recently stood, rubber saplings and weeds now poked up around their charred carcasses.
Over the course of the next hour, officials posed for photographs patting the dirt around carefully planted saplings while a few intrepid villagers ventured part way up the steep slopes to embed their young trees in the denuded soil. Once the photos had been snapped, however, most of the officials and many of the villagers began their return journey. A group of schoolchildren continued planting trees for another hour or so before they too headed back down the trail. Barely a third of the saplings provided for the program by the district government had been planted, and those over only a small section of the illegally cleared land. The remaining trees were left for the villagers to do with as they pleased (many were taken home to be planted around homes). Senior officials, however, had already obtained their photographic evidence of the program having been dutifully carried out. Thus, according to several villagers, the primary purpose of the day’s event had been achieved.

Notable absences from the replanting activity included those of the village headman of Ban Lomyen and his chief deputy (Poo Chuay). This was no coincidence. Several months earlier I had inquired as to the source of large plumes of smoke rising from behind a hilltop adjacent to the village. A group of villagers gathered at a makeshift food-stall replied that the village head and his chief deputy were clearing land for a rubber plantation. Within weeks of the ineffectual program to replant that illegally-cleared land, villagers from Ban Lomyen had returned to the area to tend to their gardens and rubber plantations (none of which had been removed). According to one villager (himself a member of the village headman’s “Village Administration Committee”), the purpose of the replanting activity had not been to restore the forest, much less to identify and punish the culprits. Instead, its primary function was to “create an image” (sang phaap) of officials dutifully executing a program mandated by the central government. I asked another group of villagers if the replanting scheme and the crackdown on forest encroachment in Thailand in general could spell trouble for those who cleared the land. Their response was that the village headman himself had been the central figure in the illegal deforestation and that there would be no repercussions for him or anyone else.

This episode illustrates several points that are pertinent to the question of local-level government and practices of citizenship in this remote area of Thailand’s Deep South. The first is the apparently insincere and superficial manner with which some programs initiated by central state ministries are implemented. Second is the dearth of
effective mechanisms for ensuring accountability and preventing the abuse of power by village-level officials - village headmen and their deputies. Third is the issue of the relationship between the institutions of decentralized government at the subdistrict level and those of de-concentrated government at the district and village levels. This chapter presents the argument that de-concentrated government at the level of the village is structured in a manner that facilitates the integration of village-level officials into informal networks of power operating at the subdistrict level, thereby exacerbating the problems described in Chapter 7. Unlike the case of subdistrict governments, however, village-level officials – once in office – are not subject to the pressures of contesting elections and there exist within villages few formal and mandatory mechanisms for popular participation. Accountability at the level of the village occurs almost exclusively through top-down mechanisms. As the following pages will show, in the region of the Deep South there exists significant potential for those mechanisms to fail.

8.2. “Deconcentrated” Government Thailand

Chapter 6 of this dissertation described what Nagai et al. (2008: Chapter 2) characterize as Thailand’s dual system of local-level government. That system consists of the local autonomy line of provincial administration authorities, subdistricts and municipal governments (discussed in detail in Chapter 7) and the local administration line, which includes provincial executives, districts and village-level officials. These two dimensions of local government in Thailand can be characterized as representing, on the one hand, the decentralization of state power to the local level (the local autonomy line) and, on the other hand, the deconcentration of central state power (the local administration line). Much of the literature on village-level government in Thailand has concerned itself with the role and function of village heads (poo yai ban) and subdistrict chiefs (kamnan) as interlocutors or “synaptic leaders” (Moerman 1979) positioned between the state bureaucracy and the village. The term “synaptic” is used here to refer to the role of village-level office-holders in passing information both “upwards” from
the village to the state (e.g. in the form of census data or tax information) and “downwards” from the state to the village (e.g. in the form of directives of policy initiatives) in a manner of synapses passing chemical signals between neurons.

The positions of village headman (*poo yai ban*) and subdistrict chief (*kamnan*) were established during the period of administrative reforms that straddled the turn of the 20th century. Initially, the positions were introduced to rural areas in Thailand’s central plains as a means of incorporating traditional community elites into the state administrative apparatus (Arghiros 2001: 27-28). Their formal incorporation into the institutional structure of the Thai state came in 1914 with the introduction of the Provincial Administration Act, which remains – through numerous amendments – the principal piece of legislation outlining the role and function of these local-level office-holders (Supsawad 2010: 26). The act stipulates a range of duties for village headmen that include attending monthly meetings during which the district officer (*nai amphoe*) communicates directives from various line ministries in Bangkok (including the Ministry of the Interior (*MoI*), which directly oversees district and village-level administration). Other duties include maintaining law and order in the village, conducting censuses, registering births and deaths, adjudicating minor disputes, collecting land taxes and organizing ‘village development’ (*pattana mooban*) activities (Arghiros 2001: 27). Subdistrict chiefs, meanwhile, act as the superintendents of village headmen and as the point of contact between them and the district officer. In the past, subdistrict chiefs were directly elected by subdistrict residents from amongst the village headmen, but since 2008 they have been selected from amongst that group by the district officer (Supsawad 2010: 27). Amendments to the Provincial Administration Act introduced in 2008 also did away with term limits for village heads and subdistrict chiefs, who now hold office until the mandatory retirement age of 60 or until they resign (ibid.). Both offices are subject to 5-year performance reviews at the hands of district officials as well as citizen representatives appointed by the district.

Notably, the duties of village headmen and subdistrict chiefs do not include acting as representatives of the village community. Despite their being popularly elected
by village residents, these local-level office-holders perform no formal role as interest intermediators. Instead, the popular “selection” of village heads and subdistrict chiefs should be understood in terms of the popular nomination of a local resident to represent the state in the village. Thus, while some village headmen and subdistrict chiefs may take it upon themselves to act as representatives of their respective villages, their official function might be better understood in terms of their role in the projection of central state authority. As Supsawad Chardchawan (2010: 27-28) and Arghiros (2001: 28-29) argue, the MoI has been at pains to preserve this fundamental function of village headmen and subdistrict chiefs. For example, the MoI took a leading role in drafting legislation that eliminated term limits for these offices, effectively minimizing lines of accountability to the village electorate and thereby preserving lines of accountability running between local level office-holders and the central government. Another indication of the MoI’s efforts to incorporate village-level office-holders into its institutional culture is the requirement that the latter don the khaki uniforms of the Thai bureaucracy – complete with epaulettes indicating their bureaucratic rank – when attending monthly meetings and other official gatherings (Arghiros 2001: 27). This practice, which is also adopted by public school teachers, accords village headmen and subdistrict chiefs a measure of prestige and distinction, particularly during public ceremonies such as those held in honour of the King and Queen’s birthdays.

In addition to the prestige of office, village heads and subdistrict chiefs receive monthly allowances of 6,000 and 8,000 baht, respectively, and additional benefits including healthcare for themselves and their families. Studies spanning several decades and covering various regions of the kingdom, however, indicate that many incumbents in those positions did not consider these material and symbolic benefits sufficient to offset inconveniences of office. In studies of village administration in the north and northeast of the country, Moerman (1979: 244-245) and Keyes (1979: 206) found those

1 The term “office-holder” is borrowed from Arghiros (2001: 29) and is intended to convey the ambiguous position of Village Heads and Subdistrict Chiefs as popularly elected quasi-bureaucratic officials.
2 As a deputy district officer proclaimed to me during the course of balloting for a new village head in one of the study villages, votes were being cast not as part of an “election” (gan luak tang) but merely as a process of “selection” (gan luek). This apparently meaningless distinction should be understood in terms of concerted efforts at multiple levels in Thailand to suppress and/or mask politics.
inconveniences to include being caught between the pressures inherent to leaders of “corporate villages” and the demands placed on village heads by an administrative apparatus in which they occupy the lowest position. This condition, both scholars noted, was peculiar to instances wherein the contours of the administrative village (mu ban) were coterminous with that of an organic community – a condition that obtains in only a subset of villages across the kingdom and not, as should by now be clear, in those at focus in the present study. Several other studies (e.g. Hall 1980; McVey 1984; Arghiros 2001), meanwhile, suggest that a significant portion of village heads and subdistrict chiefs leverage their positions to gain material benefit, either through misappropriation of village budgets or through the social connections and prestige their offices afford.

In placing attention on the “local administration” line of village-level government, the present chapter aims to examine the role of district and village-level officials in the everyday experience of citizenship in Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai. In so doing, it builds on existing literature on village-level government in the kingdom, much of which focuses on the function of village headmen and subdistrict chiefs as “synaptic leaders” linking the central state bureaucracy to the village. Indeed, this bridging role remains an important function of these office-holders and will factor significantly in the analysis that follows. In addition, however, the chapter aims to shed light of the complex forms of interaction between the two lines of local-level government, much of which occurs outside the bounds of formal institutional arrangements. Thus, the chapter shows how, under the institutional arrangements of Thailand’s partially decentralized system of local government, informal relations of power blur the lines between two largely parallel systems of administration. Specifically, the chapter will show how the domineering position of the chief executive within the subdistrict municipality of Changpa disrupts the already problematic relationship between these two lines of the local-level state. As a result, the position of village-level office-holders as intermediaries between the Thai state is further complicated, with damaging repercussions for the day-to-day experience of citizenship in Deep South villages.
8.3. Deconcentrated Government in Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai

The role of village headmen and subdistrict chiefs as “synaptic leaders” – bridging the gap between the state and the village community – has long been crucial to the Thai state’s largely successful efforts to penetrate rural society throughout the kingdom. As the final link of a chain that flows from central state ministries through provincial and district offices down toward the village, these village and subdistrict-level office-holders make possible the broad and comprehensive projection of central state authority. For a number of reasons, this function might be considered particularly indispensable in the case of rural villages in the Deep South. In particular, the dearth of Malay-speaking Muslims in the Thai civil service has been noted in numerous studies of the region’s ongoing political crisis (e.g.: Fraser 1960; Surin 1985; Cornish 1997; McCargo 2009). Village headmen and subdistrict chiefs – being, as they are, directly or indirectly elected from the local population – are, in a great many cases, Malay-speaking Muslims who can potentially mitigate the extent to which the state is perceived as a foreign or alien presence. Notably, this particular function goes some distance toward explaining why such local-level office-holders have often been the target of anti-state violence on the part of groups whose political objectives are antithetical to the acceptance and legitimation of the Thai state’s authority. The very fact of such violence, moreover, lends further importance to the role and function of village headmen and subdistrict chiefs. This is the case because provincial and district-level officials are often reluctant to travel to remote areas in the region. In some cases, such visits include the mobilization of significant security resources, particularly when the officials in question hold senior positions.

At the time of research, the village head for Ban Lomyen was a Thai-speaking convert to Islam whose ancestral home was in Pattalung province, in the “upper south” region. Insofar as he was a Thai-speaking Muslim, he was typical of all five of the men who had preceded him in the position of village head since the establishment of the village. Where the present village head differed from his predecessors, however, was with respect to his religious conversion and his path to residency in the village. The
village head had not been an original member of the Self-Help Land Settlement (*nikhom*) project that was responsible for the village's establishment, but was instead a paramilitary Ranger who had been stationed in the region during the period of relative calm that prevailed over the Deep South from the late 1980s until the early 2000s. It was during his time stationed in the region that he met and fell in love with a young Thai-speaking Muslim women who resided in Ban Lomyen and who was the daughter of the local Imam. Thus, he eventually converted to Islam, married the young woman and relocated permanently to the village.

His ascent to the position of village headman came after his having resided in the village for over ten years and followed a tightly contested campaign that pitted him against his neighbour, the incumbent and a man with extensive kinship ties throughout the village’s Thai-speaking Muslim community. The extended family of the challenger’s wife, however, was equally large. According to several villagers, the difference in the election came down to the superior resource mobilization of the eventual winner. The oft-repeated rumour with respect to that campaign was that the family of the current headman’s wife had mobilized half-a-million baht to help influence the outcome, primarily through vote-buying. For his own part, the headman declined to discuss the details of his campaign with me in any detail, but did explain that “these days” to win an election for the position of village headman, a candidate must be able to mobilize upward of a million baht. Whatever the exact figure, it can be deduced that the position of village headman was one highly sought-after and for which individuals and their families were prepared to mobilize significant resources. It is also noteworthy that (as discussed in Chapter 7) competition for the position was restricted to individuals with extensive kinship ties in the village. Thus, it would appear that the ability to gain access to the office of village headman relied on the ability to mobilize significant stocks of both economic and social capital.

That individuals and their families would be willing to make such significant economic outlays to secure access to the position of village headman implies that the benefits of holding that office far outstrip the modest stipend and health-care perks that constitute the official remuneration. Accordingly, it was widely assumed throughout the village that the headman – along with his deputy and members of his “work team” (*teem ngan*) – were engaged in various forms of graft. Few villagers, however, were prepared
to level specific accusations against the headman and many limited their criticisms to some version of the euphemistic accusation that he and his affiliates “eat” a lot (gin yer). At the same time, a number of unofficial benefits of holding office were apparent. First, as detailed in the introductory vignette to this chapter, the headman for Ban Lomyen was at the centre of a large-scale encroachment on an area of protected forest. Other villagers who were involved in this illegal expansion of their agricultural holdings indicated to me that they were required to pay the headman for such access. Second, as discussed below with reference to the “Village Quality of Life Improvement Project,” the implementation of programs initiated by the central government (usually under the rubric of “development”) provided, at least in the eyes of village residents, opportunities for the misappropriation of funds. Third, the position of village headman facilitated and, indeed, required access to the network of the subdistrict mayor (Nayok Loh). Given the powerful position the Nayok occupied in relation to subdistrict-level budgets and development plans (see Chapter 7), access to this network almost certainly carried with it the potential for economic gain. The nature of the connection between village-level government and the power network of Nayok Loh can be illustrated to a greater extent through an examination of an election for the position of village headman in Ban Namsai.

8.4. The (S)election of a Village Head

In September 2013, while attending a meeting at the Changpa Subdistrict Office, I met a man in his mid-thirties who introduced himself as the village headman for Ban Namsai. After a few words of introduction, he invited me to come and meet him in his village the following day to discuss an ongoing problem facing his villagers: elephants. When I arrived at the appointed meeting place the next day, he was in the company of the commanding officer of a unit of Border Patrol Police Paratroopers headquartered in his village (see Chapter 4). The men explained to me the problem at hand: Over the past several years, groups of wild elephants had been routinely invading rubber plantations and fruit orchards, felling valuable fruit trees, destroying newly planted rubber
saplings and terrifying villagers. Some compensation had been forthcoming several years earlier, but it had been woefully inadequate and efforts to obtain further redress to the situation had proven unfruitful. He asked me if I could be of help and, not knowing what I could possibly do, I told him that I would contact a colleague at the Thailand office of the World-Wide Fund for Nature for advice. That first meeting gave me an impression of the village headman as someone who took the concerns of his co-villagers seriously, was active in seeking redress to their problems and engaged with (sometimes unpopular) agents of the Thai government in doing so.

Over the course of the next several months, my subsequent meetings with the village headman of Ban Namsai led me to a limited qualification of that early assessment. Subsequent observations – such as those stemming from a hastily designed scheme to support rubber farmers suffering from low prices for their commodity (see below) – suggested that the young office-holder was not immune to the temptation to use his office for personal gain. On the whole, however, he gave the impression of conscientiousness in carrying out his duties (this assessment was substantiated by conversations with several village residents). He was also forthright in discussions with me on a range of issues, including answering questions regarding prevailing attitudes toward the Thai state and the insurgent movement that sought (and still seeks) to overturn its rule.³ By the time that I was shifting my residence from Ban Lomyen to Ban Namsai better to facilitate my research in the latter village, I was looking forward to engaging him in conversation more regularly. Sadly, no such conversations would be possible. In April of 2014, the headman returned from his early morning work in the rubber fields in a strange condition. According to his wife, he was drooling, unable to speak and soon fell into a coma. He remained in that state for several months, before finally passing away on July 29, which, in 2014, was Hari Raya Puassa: the day of

³ Direct questions of this nature frequently elicited vague answers or even silence, particularly on the part of Malay Muslim respondents.
feasting that follows the holy month of Ramadan. According to the headman’s widow, the cause of his sudden illness remained a mystery.4

The village headman’s passing necessitated the organization of elections for his replacement. To that end, the deputy district officer responsible for Changpa Subdistrict (Palad Somchai) visited the village to hold a meeting with members of the Village Administration Committee (kanna gammagan borhian mooban) to decide upon the composition of a Village Election Committee. The result of that meeting was an election committee composed of members of the Village Administration Committee (the late headman’s “work team”). The following day, the committee began accepting nominations for candidates. Two were forthcoming: one candidate who had been the former village headman’s chief deputy (poo chuay) and whose older brother had been village headman until being murdered by unidentified assailants in 2008 and another who was the son of a former village headman (the predecessor to candidate one’s elder brother) who remained one of the biggest landowners in the village. The announcement of their candidacies ignited a flurry of political interest and conversation that would last several weeks. Two topics were chief amongst those discussed in the village in the lead-up to the election: corruption and narcotics.

As was often the case in discussions regarding the corruption of village-level office-holders, villagers were often very reluctant to discuss details. For the most part, however, discussions of corruption centred on the individuals the recently deceased headman had appointed to his Village Administrative Committee (kanna gammagan borihan mooban). According to several informants, there were a number of members of the “team” who were widely reviled in the village for their greed and indifference to the interests of the village as a whole. Those members were accused of “eating” the village budget, of using village funds to benefit themselves and their friends and, in a damning accusation expressed to me by one villager, of misappropriating funds derived from a large area of rubber plantation owned by the village mosque. At least two villagers

4 Several villagers expressed the belief that a spider bite had been responsible for his illness, but others refuted that claim, saying that doctors had inspected his body and found no marks. A childhood friend and neighbour expressed a different theory: according to him, several years earlier the village head had returned from a period of seeking work in Bangkok having developed a heroin habit. He suspected that the habit may have returned.
pointed out to me that the candidate for the position of village headman who had been a member of that team was not among those most widely reputed to be corrupt, but he had already made clear his intention to retain the existing membership of the Village Administrative Committee. Thus, a vote for him was considered a vote for the incumbent team. Amongst his opponents – who, in the initial stages of the campaign, appeared to be in the majority – a vote for him was also considered a vote for the status quo.

The issue of narcotics, meanwhile, formed one of the principal points of critique of the other candidate and his team (the "challenger"). Several villagers indicated to me that, while this candidate was himself an intelligent and capable young man (he was one of a handful of young men in the village with some post-secondary education), the group he intended to install as members of the Village Administrative Committee included several drug addicts. The drug in question was the aforementioned cocktail known locally nam thom. In both Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai its use was a daily ritual for many young men and a source of grave concern for many of their parents' generation. In Ban Namsai, the stigma around krathom consumption was a major cause of tension between the generation known colloquially as "wairoon" ("youths," even though many were well into their late twenties and early thirties) and that of their parents. For example, numerous young men indicated to me that they didn’t attend mosque regularly because they knew they would be admonished for their krathom habits by the older men who gathered there every day. The prevailing sentiment among the older generation was reflected in many of their fears about the younger of the two challengers for the position of village headman. Neither he nor the majority of his close allies were regular attendees at the mosque and their lack of regular public presence was seen as characteristic of habitual krathom users. As had been the case with the other candidate with respect to corruption, several villagers were quick to point out that the allegations of drug use were not being levelled at the candidate himself, but at certain members of his team. The

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5 As noted in Chapter 1, "Nam thom" is a mixture of tea made from the leaves of the krathom plant (a relative of the coffee plant), codeine cough syrup and Coca-Cola. It is often referred to in the Thai popular media as "sii kun roi" (4x100) in reference to four key ingredients. Media accounts often speculate as to the nature of the fourth ingredient, with candidates including crushed mosquito coils, powder from fluorescent light tubes and gunpowder. However, numerous young men in both villages indicated to me that there is no such ingredient and on the numerous occasions I witnessed its preparation I never saw anything added to the abovementioned three components.
accusation was strong enough, however, that at least an handful of residents referred to his candidacy as being that of the “narcotics group” (glum ya sepdit).

In addition to the issues of corruption and narcotics, there was a third issue that emerged only through some investigation and one instance of fortuitous timing (fortuitous from the perspective of the researcher). The issue was that of the subdistrict mayor’s role in the election campaign. Long before the issue of an election for the position of village headman arose, I had been made aware by several villagers that Nayok Loh held powerful influence over the heads in each of the subdistrict’s six villages. In fact, on my first visit to the area, a former member of parliament for Yala province (Burhanuddin Useng) had informed me that, if he approved of my conducting research in the area, Nayok Loh could and would command the village heads to accommodate me. Nayok Loh himself told me that he did not have to visit any of the villages in the subdistrict, because, as soon as he called for them, the various village headmen would come to receive instructions from him. Thus, from very early on in the research period it was evident that, despite having no formal supervisory role with respect to village-level office-holders, Nayok Loh exercised a great deal of influence over them. The campaign for the election of a new village headman in Ban Namsai provided an opportunity to observe the workings of that influence.

Early in the campaign I learned that one of the candidates (the older “incumbent” candidate) was somehow related to Nayok Loh. Upon learning this, I began asking many of the villagers I spoke with whether they thought the Nayok had a preference between the two candidates. Several of the villagers answered that the Nayok would prefer the incumbent candidate, which I – perhaps erroneously – assumed was somehow a product of their being related. Another villager – a school teacher whose husband was the foreman on a construction crew often hired by Nayok Loh to carry out subdistrict contracts – soon offered a corrective to my misconception. She informed me that both candidates were, like herself, relatives of Nayok Loh (although the incumbent, she conceded, was more closely related). She suggested that the mayor would not intervene directly in the election and would accept any outcome, but also indicated her strong preference for the incumbent, owing to her belief that a victory for the challenger would remove any hope of dealing successfully with the village’s drug problems. If familial ties were not enough to draw Nayok Loh into the electoral fray, however, they were not the
only reason he might become interested. The challenger in the campaign, I soon learned, had been campaigning on a platform of transparency and anti-corruption. While drumming up political support, he had been promising to open up the village’s financial records and put an end to the misappropriation of village funds. This, according to one villager, would cause problems for Nayok Loh, who might be implicated in any misdoings. As one respondent summarized the situation, a victory for the challenger would result in a shake-up of existing arrangements, which would be inconvenient for the mayor. Over the course of the campaign it became more and more clear that, at least in the perception of the villagers themselves, Nayok Loh’s preference was for the (re)election of the incumbent team.

If the precise reasons motivating Nayok Loh’s preference for the incumbent team remained somewhat opaque, the direction of his preference became very clear during an incident several days prior to the election. During that period, I had been on the look-out for signs of vote buying, which several informants had told me occurred in every election in the region and would certainly be a part of the village head elections this time around. The challenger candidate and several of his supporters had repeated to me several times his intention not to engage in this type of behaviour and I was very interested to see if he would hold true to that commitment. On the day in question, I was going to visit a man (Sii) in his mid-30s who was a small time merchant at various day markets in the subdistrict and a construction worker under the employ of Nayok Loh. From my earliest days in the area, Sii had been one of my most valuable informants, speaking to me freely about several topics – political violence, enforced disappearances, the implication of the police in incidents of violence, corruption, the narcotics trade, etc. – and had already given me valuable information regarding the workings of vote buying in the region. He was also a nam thom addict. One the day in question, I found him and seven other young men sitting around a large bowl of nam thom, with one man constantly mixing the broth and refilling the single glass for each drinker in turn. All of the men had, in the past, been employed by mayor’s construction team and all were members of the demographic most closely associated with the challenger for the position of village head.

Rebuffing my suggestion that I should come back another time, Sii insisted that I come in for a cup of instant coffee, which I did. Only then did I notice that one of the men in the room was not a village resident and that he was in the midst of delivering some
kind of speech to the other men. I recognized him immediately as Nayok Loh’s personal bodyguard. As he continued to speak to them men in the clipped dialect of Patani Malay, I simply waited for the conversation to end and for an opportunity to ask my informant for a recap of its contents. After a few minutes, the bodyguard stood up, retrieved the M-6 assault rifle he had propped up against the wall and exited the house. Sii turned to me and uttered the single word “kliat” (stressed). After a few more minutes passed and the rest of the nam thom drinkers had left, I asked Sii to recount the contents of the bodyguard’s message. He told me that the man had come to “encourage” people to vote for the incumbent. He had told the young men that a change in the village-level administration could cause uncertainties and that, in order to ensure that there are still jobs available for local people (including those involved in construction work), people should try to avoid unnecessary changes. Sii admitted that he was beginning to get nervous about what might happen if the challenger team was elected, particularly if and when they began investigating and publicizing the village’s financial records. If not entirely subtle, the visit from the Nayok’s heavily-armed bodyguard had succeeded in conveying its message.

As heavy handed as it may have been, the visit to Sii and his friends by Nayok Loh’s bodyguard cannot be considered a decisive factor in the election itself. The bodyguard did not make rounds throughout the village and it is unlikely that the effect of his message would have spread much further than the families of those to whom he spoke directly. What might be considered a much more decisive factor in the election was the distribution of 1,000 baht bills by members of the incumbent’s team on the eve of the polls. On the morning of the election I found myself sitting on the front step of a house with three young men and two of their wives, all of whom I had met, but none of whom I knew very well. When I joined the group, they were already in the midst of a spirited conversation (the local Malay dialect) concerning the election. With a little help from one of the young women on the porch who was acting as my translator, I learned that the distribution of cash had continued from late night until the morning and that adults of voting age had been offered 1,000 baht. I was also told – and this was confirmed by many other villages I spoke with subsequently – that only the incumbent’s team had been distributing money. The group on the porch that morning pointed out to me that the price of rubber had been very low for over a year and that that many people
in the village were desperately in need of cash. For many of the bigger households in the village (including that of one of the men on the porch), these payments could be as much as 5-7000 baht. That was equivalent to several weeks’ work in the rubber fields. Another of the men, however, was a close friend of the challenger candidate and had not been offered any payments. It is worth noting that the tone of the conversation did not imply indignation at the practice, but rather a degree of resignation that the incumbent team had played its trump card and would inevitably win the election.

After having a number of similar conversations with people around the village, I returned to the village school to observe the close of the polls and the vote count. Upon arriving, I was immediately greeted by the deputy district officer responsible for Changpa Subdistrict, Palad Somchai. Upon greeting him I remarked that the election had been quite an exciting time for me to be in the village. To this Palad Somchai offered the immediate correction that what had been taking place in the village was not an “election” but merely a “selection” (mai chai gan luek tang. Gan luek yang diaw). I expressed confusion at the distinction, which prompted Somchai to begin explaining the difference between the political wing of the state (that having to do with members of parliament, prime ministers, etc.) and the administrative wing (that having to do with civil servants and, it would seem, village-level office-holders). The administrative wing, he sought to impress upon me, was not political. To emphasize his point – and quell any suspicion that what had been occurring in the village over the past several weeks was, in fact, an instance of politics – he proclaimed in a voice loud enough for everyone to hear that “this is not politics!” (gan luek nii mai chai gan muang!). He then threw his arm over my shoulder and marched me to the polling booth to observe the vote count.

The final tally in the election was 210 votes for the incumbent and 143 for the challenger. 17 voters had selected the “no vote” option. In the evening, a feast was held at the home of the Village Administrative Committee member who had acted as chair of the Village Election Committee. There I met the father of the village headman-elect, whereupon I learned that – in addition to his eldest son who had been village head of Ban Namsai until his murder in 2008 – he had another son who was headman of a village in a neighbouring district. I also visited the home of the now-defeated challenger. He sat quietly with his wife and expressed a strong sense of relief at the campaign’s completion. He intoned that he had always preferred a private life of working in his fields
and had only run for the position because of pressure from friends and a feeling that the village administration had become too corrupt. He was not surprised to have lost, given that he had refrained from attempting to buy votes. He was only a bit disappointed that so many people had expressed their support for his candidacy, but avoided eye contact with him when walking out of the polling booth. He knew at that point, he said, that he had lost.

The episode of the election for the position of village headman in Ban Namsai illustrates several shortcomings of village-level government in Changpa Subdistrict and, perhaps, in Thailand more generally. The problems of vote buying and petty corruption at the village level have been widely studied and should come as no surprise to even casual observers of Thai politics. The degree to which the subdistrict mayor played a role in the village election, however, should give pause. The system of local-level government comprises two distinct lines: that connected directly to central-state ministries (deconcentrated government) and that made partly autonomous through institutional reforms at the turn of the 21st century (decentralized government) (Nagai et al. 2008). The election in Ban Namsai is illustrative of the ways in which informal power can work to blur the distinction between those lines. In particular, the concentration of power in the office of the subdistrict mayor engenders conditions in which the power and influence of the individual who holds that office can easily exceed the parameters of the office itself. To the extent that the excess of power comes to bear on the office of village headman, it disrupts the function of that office described by Moerman (1979) and others as that of “synaptic leadership.” That is, to the extent that village headmen come under the sway and influence of subdistrict mayors, their functions as intermediaries between the central state and the village population is further complicated. Whereas Moerman (1979: 244-245) and Keyes (1979: 206) described situations in which Village Heads are (in some contexts) torn between the demands of a state administration in which they occupy an inferior position and village communities in which they are expected to play some sort of representative and/or protective role, the situation described above is one in which these two roles are refracted through a networked power relationship centred at the level of the subdistrict. One of the important functions affected by this dynamic function is that of facilitating access to the entitlements of citizenship through connecting village residents to the bureaucratic state and its programs. This dynamic will be
explored further in the remainder of this chapter through an examination of two such programs: a “Village Quality of life Improvement Project” and a “Rubber Growers Support Scheme.” First, however, the inherent distance between the village and the bureaucratic state – the distance the position of village head is, to a significant extent, intended to bridge – will be illustrated through reference to a visit to one of the study villages by the provincial governor.

8.5. The Governor’s Visit: Personal Largess or the Entitlements of Citizenship?

In late March 2014, the then-governor of Yala Province, Dechrat Simsiri, visited Ban Lomyen as part of the “Mobile Province” Project (Kronggan Changwat Kluenthii). The project entails the governor paying a visit to a different village in Yala province each month, bringing with him a retinue of aids and representatives from various line ministries and departments. The visits are organized in the manner of a one-day festival, complete with musical performances, food stalls and giveaways. Officials from a range of ministries and departments including public health workers, agricultural extension workers, veterinarians, village handicraft craft marketing (OTOP) program workers and soldiers set up stalls offering free services to villagers. In the case of Ban Lomyen, the festival was attended by a significant majority of the village’s residents and also attracted visitors from neighbouring villages. Officials from all levels of subnational government – including the district officer, the subdistrict mayor (Nayok Loh), the subdistrict chief, several deputy district officers and most of the village headmen from the subdistrict – were in attendance, all dressed in the khaki uniforms of the Thai state bureaucracy. Also in attendance were both leading candidates for the senatorial election that would be held ten days hence. Thus, for one afternoon, this rather sleepy village became a hub of activity and the centre of attention for many of the province’s most influential officials.
On the morning of the governor’s arrival, the village was abuzz with anticipation. The village’s all-Buddhist sixth “long drum” (głong yao) troupe was busy making final preparations for the performance they had been rehearsing over the past several weeks. Members of the Village Administrative Committee were busy erecting tents and arranging chairs at the pavilion in the village centre. Meanwhile, two armored personnel carriers arrived carrying a unit of Special Forces soldiers who, along with members of the Border Patrol Police and Volunteer Defence Corps (Or Sor’), worked to secure the area ahead of the arrival of dignitaries. The governor arrived in the company of the district officer and subdistrict mayor as well as a troop of likae hulu performers, who soon began arranging themselves on a makeshift stage. Their performance—which was nearly drowned out by a simultaneous performance of the village long drum troupe—served to gather the crowd ahead of the governor’s speech. When the governor did eventually take the stage—following the obligatory series of official greetings from the village headman, subdistrict mayor and district officer—he continued the musical theme of the afternoon by singing a traditional song while playing the ukulele. He then delivered a speech to the assembled—the majority of whom continued chatting amongst themselves throughout—which was, in the main, concerned with the importance of tourism to the economic development of the area and the need to “solve the problem of violence” (gae panha kwam mai sangop) in order to allow tourism to flourish. Notably, the governor emphasized the responsibility of citizens themselves to participate in ending violence. Finally, following his speech, the governor began presenting a large number of “gifts” to local residents. These included academic prizes of 1,000 baht each for local school children, several wheelchairs and walkers for elderly and disabled people and care packages for the elderly. Thereafter, he made a tour of the various stalls offering food, health checkups, agricultural extension information and haircuts before boarding his van and making his departure. All told, the governor’s visit lasted about two hours.

6 The group did, in fact have one non-Buddhist member: a young girl whose father was a Malay-speaking Muslim (and caretaker at the local school) and whose mother was a convert to Islam originally from Saiburi in Pattani province.

7 See: Chapter 4.

8 Likae hulu (Malay: dikir barat) is a seated musical and dance performance with origins in the border region of Thailand and Malaysia.
The governor’s visit to Ban Lomyen (no similar such visit was paid to Ban Namsai) is notable for a number of reasons. First, the stated purpose of the visit and the program of which it was a part was to extend services to a remote and underserved area. At least to some extent, this effort can be understood in terms of the Thai government’s counterinsurgency strategy of “Understanding, Accessing and Developing” the restive south (see: Moore 2014: Chapter 3). Much of the style and substance of the visit was oriented toward demonstrating the Thai state’s caring regard for Deep South villages. Notably, that care was expressed in highly personal terms. The manner in which academic prizes and wheelchairs were distributed effectively blurred the line between the provision of state services and the personal largesse of the governor himself. Indeed, every item that was distributed to a villager came by way of the governor’s own hand. Interestingly, the nature of these disbursements – being related to healthcare and education – addressed what were the complaints most frequently given by villagers with respect to government services: the poor quality and inaccessibility of schooling and healthcare. Moreover, the arrival of teams of healthcare professionals and agricultural extension workers to the village – both of them being rarities – was seen to coincide with the presence and attention of the governor (and all of the other officials in his entourage). The entire program thus presents an image of the state as a benevolent caregiver capable of bestowing gifts on a grateful populace. Importantly, however, it renders the provision of government services in a manner antithetical to the notion that villagers are entitled to such public goods as rights-bearing citizens. Instead, the governor’s visit communicated to villagers that had been the object benevolence on the part of a superior to whom, as loyal subjects, they owed a debt of gratitude.

As much as the governor’s visit served to emphasize the Thai state’s benevolent concern for the wellbeing of rural subjects, it also highlighted the relative absence of district and provincial officials in the day-to-day life of the village. Indeed, the occasion of the governor’s visit was the only time during my 13-month research period that the district officer visited Ban Lomyen (visits by senior official to Ban Namsai were equally rare). Neither did lower-level district official workers visit with any regularity. According to several villagers, the reason for this was that civil servants (karachagan) were afraid of travelling outside of the district or provincial centres. Whatever its true cause, the lack of visits to the village by district officials in particular meant that villagers hoping to take
advantage of state services had to travel to the district centre some 20km distant down a steep and deeply potholed road. The majority of respondents in my household surveys indicated that they seldom travel to the district to access such services, and their responses were generally indicative of a lack of clear information as to which services were available to them. For the most part, the villagers were totally reliant on the village headman for information as to what programs were underway and what benefits they were entitled to. In some cases (notably, the Rubber Growers Supper Scheme, discussed below), the result was that villagers were largely unaware of whether and when they might receive the benefits of state development and welfare support schemes.

8.6. The Village Quality of Life Improvement Project

The most notable exception to the observation that district and provincial officials rarely visited the villages at focus in the study is that of deputy district officer Somchai (Palad Somchai). As deputy district officer, Palad Somchai was responsible for coordinating development projects and other district-level initiatives in Changpa Subdistrict. His duties required semi-regular trips to various villages throughout the subdistrict and I became acquainted with him shortly after arriving in Ban Lomyen. A brief description of that first meeting will help give some sense of Palad Somchai's character, which is quite important to understanding his role in village-district relations.

One morning during the third week of my residence in Ban Lomyen, the village headman sent for me and asked that I join him at his house. When I arrived, I found him sitting on the verandah with a bearded man dressed in the khaki uniform of a civil servant. An unlit cigarette hung from the man's lip and he had on the table in front of him

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9 The exception was the case of primarily health care, which could be accessed at a Primary Health Care Clinic in Ban Namsai, 5km from Ban Lomyen.
a large pistol in a leather holster. He introduced himself as “Palad Somchai” and, after asking me a few questions about my own origins, began describing himself as well as his personal habits and philosophies in great detail. He explained, for example, that although he was a Buddhist, he wore a beard so that local Muslims would be more accepting of him. He explained that he always kept an unlit cigarette in his mouth, but never smoked (he had long-since quit). He described to me his dietary habits and boasted about his health and vitality – all the while squeezing and releasing a spring-loaded grip-strength trainer. In a matter-of-fact tone, he explained that he was well-liked in the area and was unafraid of travelling feely throughout the district. As several villagers and my own observations confirmed, these last two points were essentially accurate; Somchai had indeed managed to develop a very congenial rapport with the local population.

Some weeks later, Palad Somchai was back in Ban Lomyen to introduce the annual “Village Quality of Life Improvement Project” (Kronggan Panom) for the fiscal year 2014. This project is funded by the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC) and administered by district and subdistrict officials across the southern border region. The project, which began in 2008, allocates a sum of money (in 2014 the figure was 80,000 baht, or approximately US$2,300) for use in projects of activities that will “improve the quality of life for villagers” (SBPAC 2013).10 In addition, a manual for the project published and distributed by SBPAC specified some rather loftier objectives. These include strengthening participation from all parts of society in solving the problems of the southern border provinces; strengthening village-level democracy as government “of the people, by the people and for the people”; eliminating fear and suspicion between communities and inspiring love (kwam rak), harmony (kwam sammaki) and agreement11 (kwam samanchan) among the people; helping create virtuous and moral citizens of Thailand, ASEAN and the World; combating injustice and inequality; and promoting the king’s philosophy of “sufficiency economy.” Of particular note is the project’s explicit aim at fostering the happy coexistence between multiple religious communities in what it describes as the “multi-cultural society of the southern

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10 The description of the program contained in this paragraph derives from a project booklet published by SBPAC in 2013.

11 An alternative translation of this term would be “conformity”
border provinces.” Equally important is the project’s emphasis on popular participation in the selection and design of project activities in each village. The project demands the organization of village forums in which at least 80 per cent of village households are represented by one or more adult members. These forums are intended to facilitate open discussion of problems in the village and deliberation over the most effective use of the project funds in addressing them.

In addition to having lofty objectives and a strong emphasis on popular participation, the “Panom” project includes a multitude of mechanisms to ensure that villages select activities that are consistent with the project’s overall aims and that the funds allocated are put to use as intended. For example, the project guidelines require that the Village Administrative Council convenes a meeting of various key figures (leaders of voluntary groups, religious leaders etc.) to identify potential uses for the fund. The committee is then charged with making an announcement to the community of those proposals such that there is sufficient time to consider them ahead of the public forum. Once a public forum has been held and the community decides upon a project, the proposal is to be sent to a subdistrict-level Quality of Life Development Team for review. Pending approval, it is then sent to the district officer for his endorsement and finally to SBPAC for final ascent. At that stage, the Village Administrative Council is to nominate a three-person purchasing committee as well as a three-person review committee for approval by the district officer. These committees are charged with collecting all the relevant receipts and invoices for the project and pictures show the project during and after its implementation. All of this information is to be presented in a report to the district officer. The subdistrict Quality of Life Development Team also required to make a report to the SBPAC office overseeing the project.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the implementation of the program in Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai failed to live up to its lofty objectives. To being with, when the village headman of Ban Lomyen and Palad Somchai called a village forum to discuss the project, only about 40 people arrived – well short of the requirement that 80% of households be represented in the meeting. After a lengthy introduction of the project – during which he berated the attendees for showing up late and coming in such small numbers – Palad Somchai listed several types of projects that would not be eligible for funding, including any that involved hiring expert trainers, anything involving travel
outside of the village and anything requiring recurring costs for maintenance or upkeep. The floor was then opened to suggestions from villagers, of which three were forthcoming. The first, presented by a Buddhist man and long-time resident of the village, was for the construction of a children’s playground. This, the man said, was something he had suggested several times in the past to no avail. The second, coming from the father-in-law of the village headman, was to complete the repairs on a long-inoperative water purification system for the village. This was ruled out on the grounds that the system would require recurring maintenance costs. A third, coming from the brother of the current Imam, was that the money be divided in two and half be used to finance communal fast-breaking meals during the holy month of Ramadan, with the other half allocated to the Buddhist community to be used as they deem fit. It was noted that this had been done in the past, but both Palad Somchai and the village headman were quick to reject any suggestion that the money be divided between religious communities. Palad Somchai then espoused the virtues of the children’s playground proposal as something that would be of equal benefit to everyone. The headman, in turn, proposed a vote on the playground proposal, which passed handily. A short while later, a villager who was a member of the Village Administrative Council told me that he had overheard Palad Somchai and the village headman agreeing about one hour prior to the meeting that the funds should be used to build a playground.

Nine days later, Palad Somchai convened a similar meeting in Ban Namsai. In that instance, the meeting was held in the pavilion in the courtyard of the village mosque, immediately following the conclusion of Friday prayers. This fact helps explain why only two of the 35 attendees of the meeting were women (see Chapter 7). Unlike the meeting in Ban Lomyen, Palad Somchai’s introduction of the program and explanation of its parameters was much less detailed. This is, in part, explained by the fact that all of his comments had to be translated from Thai to Malay by the village headman. At any rate, the discussion quickly turned to the consideration of various proposals for the use of project funds. The first proposal came from the village headman’s chief deputy (poo

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^12 Nearly all of the attendees were fluent Thai speakers, but the language of the village is Patani Malay and it was common practice for presentations by visiting officials to be translated by either the village head or a municipal official. One potential outcome of this process is that the translator may omit or misinterpret certain of the information contained in a given official’s Thai-language message.
chuay), who suggested that the funds be used to purchase paint for the tadika (an Islamic prayer school). Upon hearing this question, Palad Somchai (who had, by this point, abandoned the practice of Thai-to-Malay translation) suggested that, in addition to paint, the funds could be used to purchase new chairs and desks for both students and teachers. He then pointed out a problem: the purchase of paint in addition to desks and chairs might overrun the budget for the program. How much, he asked, would paint for the tadika cost? After some discussion, the headman’s assistant suggested the cost might be around 30,000 baht. This, Palad Somchai explained, would leave too little in the budget for the purchase of desks and chairs. Thus, he suggested, it would be better to focus on the chairs and desks alone. The poo chuay agreed and the desks and chairs proposal – which had come, it will be noted, entirely from Palad Somchai – was put to a vote. When the assembled were asked whether they supported the chairs and desks proposals, one man who was himself a member of the Village Administrative Committee instructed everyone to raise their hands. A photograph was then taken to document the process of citizen participation.

In several respects, these village meetings are illustrative of the sometimes significant gulf that exists between the formulation of policies and programs and their on-the-ground implementation. First, and perhaps most obvious, is the seeming disconnect between the rhetoric of participation and the practice of village-level forums. As was discussed in Chapter 7 with respect to the participatory development planning process, many villagers – including members of all ethnic/religious communities – held pessimistic views regarding the democratic potential of the village forum. Those views ranged from the outright dismissal of such meetings as a façade masking arbitrary decision making of self-interested elites to a view of political order in the village that left little if any room for active citizen involvement in the business of administration. The latter view is reminiscent of an orientation to the state and its agents observed almost half a century ago in the Northeast of Thailand by Stephen B. Young (1968). According to Young, residents of his study village understood state business as the duty (natthee) of elected and appointed officials and thought it inappropriate and unwise to get involved themselves (ibid.: 881). This persistence of such dispositions over such a long period of time suggest that, while there may be evidence of a general political awakening of hitherto passive rural populations in parts of the kingdom (see: Walker 2013: 5-6), the
themes of duty and deference contained in many of Thailand’s 20th century ‘citizenship manuals’ continue to influence state-society relations.

However, even those who took up the mantle of participation found their efforts yielding very limited results. This was particularly evident in the case of Ban Namsai, where Palad Somchai so deftly shifted the focus of the conversation from paint to desks and chairs. In the case of Ban Lomyen, however, the man who forwarded the proposal for a children’s playground confided in me a few days later that he had little confidence that his proposal would actually be carried though. He noted that two years ago he had made the same proposal and had been supported by the majority of those who attended the meeting. In the event, however, the Village Administrative Committee had opted to purchase exercise equipment, which had, since the first rainy season following its purchase, been sitting in a locked storage room near the village pavilion. In the year of observation for this study, however, the motion to construct a children’s playground was brought to fruition when, approximately two months after the meeting, three pieces of playground equipment made of repurposed construction material (rebar) were offloaded in the centre of the village. As the snickering remarks of numerous villagers suggested, however, there was very little confidence that the cost of the equipment had even approached the project budget.

A second observation from these meetings is that the efforts by the program’s designers to ensure its proper implementation were readily bypassed. For example, in both villages attendance at village forums was far below the requirement that 80% of village households be represented. Enforcing such a requirement would be very nearly impossible, but bypassing it was apparently rather straightforward, as I witnessed first-hand in a third village in the subdistrict. After the conclusion of the village forum in that village, I joined Palad Somchai and several members of the Village Administration Committee for lunch at the home of the village headman. During the lunch, it was noted that the list of attendees at the meeting was far below the mandated minimum. This problem was quickly overcome by members of the Village Administrative Committee, who simply filled in the names and address of various villagers who had not, in actual fact, attended. Care was taken to ensure that both Buddhist and Muslim villagers were included in the amended attendance list. In addition, the requirement to nominate purchasing and review committees was to play little if any role in the project’s
implementation; in neither Ban Lomyen nor Ban Namsai was there any mention of such committees in the course of the village forums. Reports filed to the subdistrict Quality of Life Development Team and District Officer would have to have included a list of names for these committees, but even members of the Village Administrative Committee in Ban Lomyen could not tell me who was involved in them. Moreover, a review of information on past iterations of the program supplied to me by officials in the district office suggested that the misrepresentation of actual practice was a common feature of the reporting process. The reports for 2013, for example, indicated that all of the villages in Changpa subdistrict had used the funds to pay for communal meals during the holy month of Ramadan. However, residents of two of those villages indicated to me that the funds had in fact been divided between the Buddhist and Muslim communities for use in separate communal activities. In both villages, it was reported to me that the Buddhist communities put their share of the funds toward the construction of decorative floats for the annual chak pra festival.

The obvious question that these observations raise is why Palad Somchai and other, village-level office-holders would deliberately bypass the guidelines for this project and misrepresent the project’s implementation. To this question, the most obvious possible answer is that both the deputy district officer and the Village Administrative Committees were misappropriating project funds. As is typically the case with instances of corruption, however, this suspicion is very difficult to substantiate. Nonetheless, the widely-shared perception of corruption in the administration of this program among villagers is itself significant. The observations that participatory processes involved a bare minimum of citizen input and deliberation, that oversight mechanisms – to the extent that they were put into action – were not even mentioned in the description of the program provided to the villagers and that the delivered outputs were so far removed from the project’s lofty rhetoric all contributed to the suspicion on the part of villagers that the project had been implemented in bad faith. Thus, the implementation of the Panom project represents another instance in which the function of the village head as a synaptic link between the village community and the central state is distorted. Rather than providing a link to state-supplied programs, village heads – in conjunction with the deputy district officer – acted as filters through which those projects and their benefits passed. In the eyes of many village residents, their role had been to capture or “eat” the
benefits of those program for themselves and not to facilitate the effective implementation of the project for the general benefit of the villages.

8.7. Rubber Support Scheme

In August of 2013, hundreds of rubber farmers from around southern Thailand established a roadblock on the main highway running through the upper-south province of Nakorn Sri Thammarat. Their purpose was to pressure the government of then-Prime Minister Yingluk Shinawatra into extending support to rubber farmers suffering from the steady decline in market prices for natural latex.\(^{13}\) Spokespersons for the protest argued that the Yingluk government had committed upwards of US$18 billion to a much-maligned scheme to support rice farmers while neglecting the plight of rubber farmers, whose produce accounts for an even greater share of Thailand’s exports than does rice (Time 2013). The protests – which briefly turned violent – failed in their stated objective of pressuring the government into buying semi-processed rubber sheets at first 120, then 100 baht per kilo (above the prevailing market price of approximately 75-80 baht/kilo). However, in early September, the prime minister announced a scheme that would award farmers a one-time subsidy of 2520 baht per rai of productive rubber plantation, up to a maximum of 25 rai (4 hectares). This, according to the government’s calculations, would be equivalent to a 10 baht/per kilo subsidy over the seven-month period from October to April. The protests were soon called off and, as farmers returned to their homes across the south, the Prime Minister’s Office began the work of drafting an implementation plan for its hastily designed program.

\(^{13}\) Rubber prices had peaked in 2011 amid high global commodity prices and, in particular, sustained high oil prices (the global price of natural latex being closely tied to that of oil as the latter is the principle input into synthetic rubber). In April of 2011 the price of semi-processed “smoked sheets” at local markets in Thailand (i.e. not FOB) peaked at 172.14 baht/kilogram. By September 2013 it had fallen as low as 75 baht/kilogram.
The Project to Solve the Problems of the Rubber System (Kronggan Gae Kai Penha Yang Para Tang Rabob/The Rubber Support Scheme) was rolled out across the country beginning in late September 2013 and involved the coordination of provincial, district, subdistrict and village-level officials. In Yala province, officials in the provincial office of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives coordinated with district-level officials of the same ministry to arrange meetings with subdistrict officials and village-level office-holders. In Changpa subdistrict, this meeting took place on October 14, 2013. Chairing the meeting were a pair of officials from the provincial office of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, who were joined by officers of the district-level Department of Agricultural Extension, the Office of the Rubber Replanting Aid Fund and village headmen from across the subdistrict (the subdistrict mayor did not attend). Over the course of the one-hour meeting, provincial officials informed the village headmen that they – in conjunction with the Department of Agricultural Extension and the Office of the Rubber Replanting Aid Fund – would be responsible for registering village residents for the program and physically inspecting each of the plots claimed in registrants’ requests for support. They also detailed the parameters of the program, indicating the conditions under which farmers would or would not receive aid. Two such conditions were of particular significance in the case of Changpa subdistrict. First was that only plots containing trees that had continuously harvested for at least 3 months and that were no more that 25 years old would be eligible. This criterion was based on an estimation of the productive lifespans of the rubber varieties typically grown in Thailand. Second was that farmers would have to provide proof of land ownership in order to receive funding.

Immediately, several of the village headmen attending the meeting recognized the potential for problems stemming from these conditions. The allowable age range for trees, one village headman pointed out, would disqualify any of trees planted as part of the Self Help Land Settlement (nikhom) project that had been responsible for the establishment of Ban Lomyen and two other villages in the district. It would also disqualify trees planted as part of the resettlement of villagers affected by the mid 1970s infrastructure project, including those provided to families now residing in Ban Namsai. The village headman pointed out that there was a longstanding problem in the upland area of human-elephant conflict, which prevented many farmers from replacing aging
trees (elephants would regularly invade newly planted plots and eat the saplings). Thus, many local farmers continued to tap trees that were more than 30 years old. The provincial official replied, however, that the parameters of the project were not negotiable. Thereafter, the village headman for of Ban Lomyen pointed out that many farmers in nikhom villagers would not be able to produce the necessary documentation demonstrating land ownership. This was the case because, under the terms of the nikhom settlement project, villagers had been given temporary, non-transferable land tenure documents (known as Nor Kor 3 documents). The conversion of those documents into salable deeds was contingent on repayment of the Asian Development Bank-funded loans with which nikhom members purchased their plots (see: Chapter 2). As a result, many of the farmers who had purchased land from original nikhom members had no documentation to support their claims to ownership. Another village headman (himself a Malay-speaking Muslim) opined that there would be no problem with Buddhist residents presenting their land tenure documentation – they had, after all, all arrived in the area under the state-organized resettlement scheme – but that problems would likely arise with respect to Muslim residents. The provincial official replied that, in such cases, villagers could supply land tax receipts as proof of ownership.

On October 22, representatives of the district agriculture extension office, the Rubber Replanting Aid Fund and the subdistrict office arrived in Ban Lomyen to launch the registration and inspection processes for the project. When they arrived at the village pavilion, several dozen villagers were waiting for them. The meeting was also attended by roughly a dozen non-residents, all of whom owned land in the village and had either been original nikhom members or had purchased land from the same. The official from the Rubber Replanting Aid Fund quickly launched into a brief overview of the project, emphasizing the various restrictions pertaining to eligibility of rubber plantations. A number of questions were then forthcoming with respect to the age limit on trees, with the officer responding that the 25-year age limit was firm and would have to be verified by the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives’ records. He then indicated that the inspection process would begin with members of the Rubber Replanting Aid Fund, while non-members would be required to travel to the district office of the Agricultural Extension Department to register for the program. This caused visible frustration amongst many of the attendees, who had already spent more than an hour of their
morning waiting for the late-arriving officials only to be told that they would not be able to apply for aid that morning. Following that announcement, the officials proceeded to call members of the Replanting Fund forward one at a time in order to inspect their land ownership documentation and register their claims.

Two days later, the equivalent meeting was held in Ban Namsai. In the case of this village, however, the meeting began prior to the arrival of district officials (no subdistrict officials joined on this occasion). Following the conclusion of midday prayers, the village headman for Ban Namsai gathered with a group of about 35 men and ten women in a pavilion outside the village mosque and, speaking in Patani Malay, gave a brief overview of the parameters of the project. Thereafter, the same officials from the Rubber Replanting Aid Fund and the district Agricultural Extension Department office encountered in Ban Lomyen arrived to begin the registration process. Unlike during the meeting in Ban Lomyen, however, these two officials (both Thai speaking Buddhists) offered no further explanation of the project. Instead they simply began calling from a list of names of individuals whose rubber trees, according to their records, were too old to be included in the program. Those called were asked to come forward to sign or thumbprint a document indicating that they understood the reasons for their disqualification. Following this, a number of people – several of whom were not residents of the village – came forward to present evidence of land ownership and other documentation in the hopes of ensuring that they would be registered for the program. After seeing to these people, the two district officials then packed up their things and returned to the district centre. As had been the case in Ban Lomyen, the village headman was left with the responsibility of assembling a team to conduct the physical inspection of the various plots of land for which villagers had submitted claims.

Over the next several days, the Rubber Support Scheme became a central topic of conversations in tea shops, village defence bunkers and other gathering spots in both villages. Much of the discussion focused on the question of 25-year age limits for trees and the inherent injustice of this requirement, given local conditions. Several villagers expressed frustration over the requirement to supply documentation of land ownership, particularly where land had been bought without legal transfer of title deeds; a few conceded that presenting proof of tax payments would not be a feasible alternative, given that they had never paid tax on their land. Another complaint, however, touched on
an issue that none of the village headmen had raised during the initial meeting to launch to project a week prior: the project contained no measures to support share-croppers, who were equally affected by the ongoing decline of rubber prices. This gap in the program’s coverage affected the 46 per cent of households in Ban Lomyen and 50 per cent of households in Ban Namsai who derived at least part of their household income from rubber sharecropping. Of these households, 60 per cent in Ban Lomyen and 34 per cent in Ban Namsai\textsuperscript{14} were landless, meaning they had no opportunity to benefit from the project whatsoever. In that way, the project, by its very design, failed to address the needs of those most vulnerable to the effects of falling rubber prices.

In addition to the various complaints villagers in both Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai had about the restrictions on eligibility for the Rubber Support Scheme, the discussions I had with villagers about this project over the next several months were marked by considerable confusion as to whether and when its benefits would reach the village. The project guidelines provided to village headmen during the October 14 meeting (as well as the instructions given in a project manual produced by the Agricultural Extension Department (AED 2013)) specified that villagers were to be given certificates indicating their successful registration in the program. These certificates, however, were issued prior to the conduct of physical inspections of the land holdings in question, so many villagers were unaware as to whether their land had been approved for compensation or not. At the same time, both my own observations and numerous comments made to me by residents of both villagers suggested that no such physical inspections had in fact taken place. On several occasions I asked the village headman of Ban Lomyen if I could accompany his team on the inspection tour and he agreed, but I was never told when such an inspection would take place. According to one villager in Ban Lomyen, headmen in some villages (he would not specify which) had been accepting bribes to overlook exaggerated estimates of the area of land under rubber cultivation. Several months later, a villager in Ban Namsai was more specific: she said that she had paid 1,000 Baht to have the headman and his team forego the inspection

\textsuperscript{14} That the majority of households engaged in sharecropping in Ban Namsai were also landowning households is in large part explained by the preponderance of multi-generational households in that village, wherein adult members of the second generation of the household were often engaged in sharecropping while their parents tended to their own plantation.
process altogether. She speculated that anyone who had been approved to receive the aid money had done the same.

There are several reasons (in addition to those already stated) to suspect that the village headmen of both Ban Namsai and Ban Lomyen would be less than enthusiastic to conduct thorough inspections of registered rubber plantations. The first is that, owing to the physical geography of the villages and their surrounds, any such inspection would have been a very arduous and time-consuming endeavor. In the majority of rubber plantations across southern Thailand (and most other places where rubber trees are grown commercially) trees are planted in evenly spaced rows, allowing for optimal growing conditions and easy harvesting. On the steep slopes surrounding Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai, however, rubber trees were often planted in a haphazard manner, making the assessment of the coverage of rubber trees in a given plot much more difficult. Moreover, access to these fields typically involved travelling up steep, deeply-rutted red-earth roads and walking up and down step embankments, both of which are particularly difficult and unpleasant during the region’s long (October-April) rainy season. A second reason is that village headmen had very little to gain from conducting thorough inspections. Conducting an inspection that resulted in a villager’s application being rejected would only incur that individual’s displeasure and offer no obvious rewards to the headman or his team. On the other hand, being put in the role of inspector with little if any effective oversight from outside officials put headmen in a position to solicit side-payments in exchange for easy passage through the inspection process. It must be stated, however, that many residents of Ban Lomyen indicated to me that this had not been the case in their village, while in Ban Namsai the opposite was true. Whatever the case, it would appear that the implementation of the inspection phase of the project did not conform to the directive of the Prime Minister’s Office.

Uncertainty surrounding the final outcomes of the Rubber Support Scheme continued for several months following the completion of the mandated 30-day period during which inspections were to take place. Throughout the more than 11 months following the project launch whilst I continued living in these two villages, I made a habit of regularly asking villagers if they had received any funds from the project. With the exception of those who had been deemed ineligible from the outset, numerous villagers expressed confusion as to whether and when funding might be forthcoming. With that
confusion in mind, I made several trips to the district office of the Department of Agricultural Extension where – with unfailing politeness – I was repeatedly promised that reports would be made available to me upon my next visit. Finally, I was provided with a hand-written note that merely listed the number of applicants for the project, the number whose applications had been rejected and the reasons for those rejections. They are as follows: For Ban Lomyen 154 farmers registered for the project and 70 applications were accepted. Of the 84 applications that were rejected, all were for reasons of having trees over the age of 25, having “incorrect” land tenure documents or having no such documents whatsoever. For Ban Namsai, 97 applications were received and 50 were accepted. 47 applications from Ban Namsai were rejected for the same reasons listed in reference to Ban Lomyen. These figures indicate that rates of registration and approval varied significantly between the two villages. In Ban Lomyen, for instance, 59 per cent of officially registered households\textsuperscript{15} registered for the program, while in Ban Namsai the figure was much lower at only 35 per cent. In both cases, the inspection of land tenure documents and records of planting and replanting maintained by the Department of Agricultural Extension and the Rubber Replanting Aid Fund resulted in the rejection of approximately half of the applications from both villages (55 per cent rejection in the case of Ban Lomyen, 49 per cent in the case of Ban Namsai). Thus, only 25 per cent of officially registered households in Ban Lomyen and 18 per cent in Ban Namsai received funds from the Rubber Support Scheme.

It was around time that I received this hand-written breakdown of the project outcomes (in June 2014) that I began encountering residents in both villages who had in fact received project funds. From that point forward, the villagers fell into roughly three categories: those who had been rejected from the outset, those who had received their funds and those who remained uncertain as to whether any funds would be forthcoming. Several villagers expressed to me the opinion that, since the registration and inspection processes had occurred in several stages, some villagers were likely to receive their funds before others. Thus, at least some villagers held out the possibility that more funds would be forthcoming. Such a sentiment held sway in Ban Lomyen until the final night of

\textsuperscript{15} Due to a number of factors discussed in Chapter 3, the number of officially registered households in both villages differs significantly from the number of families actually residing in the villages.
my period of residence in the area. I visited Ban Lomyen in the evening (at that point I had been residing in Ban Namsai for several months) to pay my respects to the many villagers who had shown me such hospitality and support. Just prior to leaving the village for the final time, I stopped in at the bunker of the Village Protection Volunteers *(Chor Ror Bor)*, where I found the village headman and six other Thai and Malay-speaking Muslim men playing cards, watching English Premier League football and smoking nipa palm-leaf cigarettes. After a short conversation, I asked the headman a final question: did he know when the next round of payments for the rubber support scheme would be deposited in villagers’ accounts? He answered sharply that the project was complete and all of the payments had been made. Several of the men – people who socialized with the headman on a regular basis – openly expressed their surprise at this. Like the rest of the village, they had largely been in the dark with respect to the project’s completion.

It would likely be a mistake to impute a deliberate attempt by the village headman of Ban Lomyen to withhold information on the Rubber Support Scheme from the residents in his village. Instead, the village headman’s lack of concerted effort to keep villagers abreast of developments surrounding the project might better be attributed to a relatively circumscribed understanding of his own duty in that regard and a lack of clear incentives to take initiative beyond the minimum requirements imposed upon him by district and provincial-level officials. Regardless of the motivating factors, however, it is clear that the village headman’s involvement with the project was characteristic of a mode of project implementation observed in both villages that treated farmers with suspicion and was not oriented toward facilitating their access to relief funds. This orientation was evident from the initial meeting at the subdistrict office, during which both provincial-level officials and village headmen highlighted a number of ways in which villagers might try to “cheat” the project. It was also evident in the meetings marking the village-level roll out of the program, during which comments from agricultural extension officers focused almost exclusively on the various reasons for which applications might be rejected. Finally, the lack of concerted effort on the part of village, subdistrict, district and provincial officials is evidenced by the high rate of rejection of applications and the very low rate at which households in the two villages actually gained access to project benefits. The only instances in which villagers were observed to have received help in
gaining access to the project funds were those handful of cases in the village of Ban Namsai wherein villagers informed me that they had paid a bribe of 1,000 baht to the village headman to ensure that they passed the inspection process.

8.8. Conclusion

The five vignettes examined in this chapter paint a dismal picture of local-level government in Changpa Subdistrict. The account of the election in Ban Namsai suggests that villagers’ concerns regarding misappropriation of village budgets and other funds are readily subordinated to more practical concerns stemming from the precarious position of rubber farmers under a weak market for their commodity. It also suggests that the informal power structures play an important role in warping the institutional arrangements of the dual-line system of Thailand’s local-level state. The visit by the provincial governor of Yala and his retinue to Ban Lomyen, meanwhile, is illustrative of the paternalistic orientation of a Thai state that many village residents regard as having failed to provide them with adequate services, particularly in the areas of health and education. Designed as an expression of concern for and interest in remote rural communities, the personal nature of the governor’s distribution of awards and benefits framed the relationship between citizen and state in terms of the latter’s generosity and largess. Any notion that villagers were entitled to such benefits of citizenship were obscured by the ‘photo-op’ nature of this interaction with an unelected official. Finally, the Village Quality of Life Improvement Project, the Rubber Support Scheme and the forest replanting project with which this chapter opened exhibited modes of project implementation plagued by self-interested behavior by officials at various levels, a perception of villagers as being inherently untrustworthy, and a preoccupation with the appearance of faithful implementation over actual delivery of project benefits.

The analytical question, from the perspective of this dissertation, is how these shortcomings in local-level administration shaped the day-to-day experience and
practices of citizenship in the two villages in question. Recalling Moerman’s influential study of a village headman in Thailand’s northeast (Moerman 1979), the role of the village headman can be understood in terms of intermediation between the village-dwelling citizen and the centralized, bureaucratic state. Thus, the experience of the state-citizen relationship in the village context is indirect, mediated by the quasi-bureaucratic, quasi-political office of the village headman. Direct interactions between agents of the central state and the villagers – as in the case of the governor’s visit – are exceptions to the rule. However, the mediated relationship between the villager and the state is adversely affected by the perception and, no doubt in some cases, the fact of corruption and self-interested behavior on the part of village headmen and their deputies. Under such conditions, access to state programs and their benefits becomes a matter of uncertainty, which, in turn, leads to practices that diverge significantly from the ideals of rights-bearing citizenship.

One such practice, common to rural/peasant communities in much of the world, was that of disengagement. Many villagers saw little benefit to engaging with state programs as they were being delivered by local-level officials. This was reflected in low turnouts for village meetings and low rates of participation in programs. In the village of Ban Namsai, for example, only 97 out of 257 registered households attempted to register for the Rubber Support Project. Obviously, not all of the 257 households were eligible (many were landless), but in my village survey I found that 82 per cent of households in that village had at least some land planted with rubber trees and more than 80 per cent of those had some sort of legal documentation of their land tenure. Another readily apparent practice was that of paying bribes in order to access program benefits. This was apparent in the case of the rubber support program, for which a handful of respondents admitted to having paid the village headman in order to gain easy passage through the inspection process. Another, related, practice is that of resignation. This was evident in the comments of villagers discussing the practice of bribing to ensure a successful application to the Rubber Support Scheme, who described the practice as “a normal thing” (ruang pokathit). Villagers developed a view of the local-level state that expected corruption and saw no practical reason to resist or oppose it.
The notable exception to this orientation of resignation was the campaign for the position of Village Head by the young man referred to as the “challenger” candidate in Ban Namsai. His campaign, which centred around issues of transparency and eliminating the misappropriation of village funds ignited a degree of excitement and enthusiasm for change among many of the village residents. As the description of that campaign indicated, however, external pressure from the subdistrict mayor and, perhaps more importantly, the distribution of money by the incumbent candidate was sufficient to overcome that excitement and, in the eyes of at least some villagers, perpetuate the status quo. The influence of money – much like the need to pay bribes for access to services – was regarded by several villagers as an inevitable part of the election process. Thus, while the challenger candidate successfully resisted the practice, he was rewarded for his principled behavior with electoral defeat. Meanwhile, the influence of the subdistrict mayor in the election – while very difficult to quantify – also served to undermine the village-level office-holder’s role in mediating the villagers’ relationship to the central state. In exerting his influence over the election, the subdistrict mayor put the headman-elect and his team in his debt, drawing them closer into his network of influence. Villagers were widely aware of Nayok Loh’s preference in the election. More generally, it was widely “known” that all of the village headmen in the village were “the mayor’s men.” Thus, while observers like Moerman (1979: 244-245) and Keyes (1979: 206) have noted the countervailing pressures exerted on village headmen as “synaptic leaders,” the informal influence of the subdistrict mayor adds a third dimension to that condition and further undermines the already limited capacity and incentives for village headmen to act in the interests of their constituents.

Among several institutional factors that contribute to the conditions described in this chapter, two are paramount. The first, as discussed at length in chapter 6, is that of the “Strong Mayor” system, which imbues the subdistrict mayor with a preponderance of power over subdistrict budgets and development plans and facilitates the development of informal power networks that undermine the democratizing potential of substantive decentralization. The second is the introduction of extended term limits for village headmen. This reform (introduced through a 2008 reform that amounted to a reinstatement of an outmoded system) make the kind of election campaign observed in Ban Namsai something of a rarity. Two important consequences follow. The first is that,
once elected, village headmen are only minimally accountable to their fellow villagers. As noted, village heads are subject to performance reviews by the district officer every five years and citizen participation in those reviews is legally mandated. As the examples of citizen participation described in Chapter 7 suggest, however, the existence of such mandates is, in and of itself, insufficient to ensure effective citizen influence over outcomes. Second, the infrequency of village headman election is such that the returns to financial investment in campaigns (though such practices as vote-buying) are potentially far greater. It scarcely bears explaining that a village headman (and his network) who will hold office for only five years before the next election will think much more carefully about engaging in widespread vote buying than one who can expect 10, 15 or 20 years in office in which to recoup that investment. Thus, the cause of poorly functioning local-level government in these two villages – and the negative consequences of that poor functioning for the conditions of citizenship in them – can be traced to the legally mandated structure of local governance institutions.

Returning, finally, to the question of the relationship between practices of local-level citizenship and relations between the various ethno-religious communities that populate these two villages, it would seem that the experiences described in this chapter are only superficially mediated by ethnic or religious identity. To a great extent, the experience of ineffectual, insincere and corrupt local government was common to members of all groups. Where these failures of local level government were of significance to inter-communal relations in Ban Lomeyn and, not unrelatably, to the development of what might be described as an organic or corporate community in Ban Namsai was in their failure to provide tangible benefits to collaborative participation. This was perhaps best illustrated in the case of the Village Quality of Life Development Project, the meetings for which were poorly attended and elicited only limited participation. In the absence of tangible benefits to collaboration – one of the outcomes that the Village Quality of Life Development Project explicitly set out to achieve, villagers are more likely to engage with the sate, if at all, through tried and tested channels. As Chapters 4-7 of this dissertation have shown, access to those channels tends to be mediated by ethnic and/or religious identity. Thus, the shortcomings of local-level government contribute to the stability of “citizenship” practices that are informed by such identities and reinforce the barriers that define them.
Chapter 9. Conclusion

9.1. Introduction

This dissertation has presented the argument that state-society relations at the local level represent an important site for the production of interethnic estrangement in Thailand’s Deep South. The purpose of developing this argument has not been to offer a complete account of the emergence of intergroup tensions in southernmost Thailand, but rather to shed analytical light on what has been, hitherto, an underappreciated factor in that development: the ethnically differentiated nature of relations between various branches of the Thai state and local society. A core assertion forwarded in the foregoing chapters has been that the nature of political subjecthood in Thailand’s Deep South is such that access to certain public goods is contingent upon the discretion of powerholders (as opposed to being accessible on the basis of citizenship rights). This condition leads to the emergence of practices by which people position themselves to benefit from the discretionary distribution of such goods. The substantive chapters of this dissertation have described a number of such practices that entail or indirectly inform the (re)production of mutually exclusive categories of belonging and the expansion of the social distance between them. The present chapter concludes the discussion by drawing together the core arguments developed throughout the dissertation. The chapter itself concludes with a discussion of the implications of this research for practical efforts to address the ongoing crisis in southernmost Thailand, the most recent phase of which has coincided with a national-level political crisis that shows no signs of abating.
9.2. Revisiting the Arguments

The opening chapters of this dissertation described the conditions of ethnic coexistence in Thailand’s Deep South as being characterized by “inter-group estrangement.” It was noted that ethnic communities in that region were not locked in communal conflict, nor, to quote Marc Askew, has the region witnessed the widespread emergence of “mutually hostile ‘communities of fear’ that mark fully-blown ethno-nationalist conflict elsewhere in the world” (Askew 2009: 61). Instead, society in the Deep South is characterized by high levels of social closure between ethnic communities. This is true despite some (limited) evidence suggesting a history in that region of patterns of social interaction that transcended ethnic categories. The purpose of this study has been to investigate inductively the role of the state in the production of inter-ethnic estrangement. It has done so by taking a bottom-up view of the state as it is encountered at the village level in two villages in the province of Yala. That bottom-up view of the state presents a fragmented picture in which the state is manifest in a number of more-or-less distinct entities. Moreover, the experiences of residents in the villages of Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai have shown that the terms of engagement with these various state entities are equally distinct and, in important respects, mediated by the ethnic identity of the individual in question. As a result, the act of engaging with the state in many instances entails practices that reproduce existing inter-group boundaries or emphasize certain dimensions of ethnic identity over others. To some extent, these observations reflect existing scholarly arguments regarding the nature of state authority in the Deep South and the alienation of the Malay-speaking population from full membership in the Thai national community (see: Fraser 1960; Surin 1985; McCargo 2009, 2012a). Where this dissertation differs from such accounts, however, is the effort to disaggregate the state and to analyse the dynamics of interaction between its various aspects and local society as distinct fields.

Several of the analytical arguments forwarded in the preceding chapters are predicated on an understanding of the nature of membership in the Thai polity as lacking the core components of modern citizenship. Thus, Chapter 3 argued that the Thai state has long proffered a notion of the individual’s relations to the state that emphasizes the
performance of duty and demands conformity to a constructed, quasi-ethnic conception of national identity expressed in terms of “Thainess” (kwam pen Thai). Furthermore, the “rights” enjoyed by Thai “citizens” have been, for nearly all of the kingdom’s post-absolutist history, subject to arbitrary revocation at the hands of military elites (and their allies in the civilian bureaucracy and the palace) who have perpetrated a continual cycle of coups d’état. This has created what David Streckfuss (2011: 304) referred to as a “permanent state of exception” in which state elites claim that the peace and order (kwamsangopriaproi) necessary as preconditions for Thai nationals to exercise their citizenship rights are constantly under threat, thereby justifying the curtailment of those rights. As a result, access to the benefits of membership in the Thai polity remain, in many instances, contingent on the performance of duties that communicate loyalty and deservingness as “real Thais” (khon Thai jing). These conditions are even more pronounced in the Deep South region, where the ethnic-identity of the Malay Muslim majority problematizes the performance of Thai national identity and the presence of a protracted insurgency justifies the suspension of the rule of law under emergency legislation. Thus, this dissertation proceeds from an understanding of denizens of the Deep South as political subjects with extremely limited capacity to make rights-based claims on the state.

Chapters 4 and 5 examined the provision of what is one of the most important and scarce public goods in the Deep South region: security. The arrival of professional state security personnel in Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai was examined in terms of its effects on relations between the major ethno-religious communities in those villages. In the village of Ban Namsai, it was noted that the arrival of state security personnel (army Special Forces, paramilitary Rangers and, later, Border Patrol Police) followed shortly after the mass exodus of the entirety of the village’s Buddhist population and their subsequent resettlement in a nearby village. This episode illustrated the ways in which Thai Buddhists were able to mobilize the symbolic capital of Thai-Buddhist ethno-national identity to secure support from both the monarchy (in the person of the Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn) and the state security apparatus. The manner in which the Border Patrol Police established themselves in the village (occupying Buddhist-owned homes) and the nature of their relations with Malay-speaking Muslim residents contributed to the perception among those residents that the state provision of security was directed
exclusively toward the protection of Buddhists and their property. Meanwhile, in Ban Lomyen, the confrontational nature of some interactions between Border Patrol Police officers and Muslim residents (both Thai and Malay-speaking) engendered the perception among many Muslim residents that security agents viewed Muslims as an undifferentiated and inherently threatening group. The effect of this perception on Thai-speaking Muslims in particular was telling. A group that has historically been considered inherently part of the Thai national community, Thai-speaking Muslims in Ban Lomyen found themselves being regarded as having suspect loyalty to the nation, strictly on the basis of their religious identity. This, it was argued, was indicative of the hardening and polarizing effect of the state provision of security on inter-ethnic boundaries in Ban Lomyen.

The provision of security in Thailand’s Deep South also involves the direct participation of civilians, either as members of paramilitary organizations like the Rangers or as volunteers with one of two village-level civilian militias found in villages throughout the region. Chapter 5 examined the role of these kinds of organizations in Ban Namsai and Ban Lomyen, noting, first, that the Rangers were not active in the villages and were only indirectly connected to the Ban Lomyen by one young Thai-speaking Muslim man’s employment as a Ranger in nearby Raman District. Of more direct relevance to these villages were the two civilian militias known by their Thai acronyms Chor Ror Bor and Or Ror Bor. The former organization was formally active in both villages (as well as the vast majority of other villages in the Deep South), but was found in Ban Namsai to be active in only the most limited sense of the word. In Ban Lomyen, meanwhile, it was found that, while the official membership of the Chor Ror Bor included both Buddhists and Muslims, in practice only Muslims participated. At the same time, the Or Ror Bor operated (as is usually the case) as an exclusively Buddhist organization. The result was the de facto operation of two parallel civilian militias, each representing a different religious grouping. Thus, it was argued, the involvement of civilians in the provision of security reinforced in a dramatic fashion the social division of the village between Muslims and Buddhists. In this regard, the analytical value of Ban Lomyen came to the fore, as the composition of civilian militias in the village illustrated how engagement with the state recast the interstitial position of Thai-speaking Muslims
in the Deep South region as unambiguously falling on the Muslim side of a binary conception of Deep South society.

Relations between state security agents and the residents of Ban Lomyen and Ban Namsai were observed to follow dynamics that would be largely predictable on the basis of existing accounts of state-society relations in southernmost Thailand. Chapters 6-8 of this dissertation, however, examined aspects of the everyday experience of the state in the Deep South that have received substantially less scholarly attention. These chapters focused on the local-level state and what Nagai et al. (2008) have referred to as a ‘dual system’ of local administration. Chapter 6 set the stage for this discussion by describing the process through which Thailand’s limited program of decentralization came into being and was ultimately held in check by the influence of bureaucratic interests that saw decentralization as a threat to their base of power. The chapter argued that Thailand’s process of decentralization has failed to produce genuinely responsive and accountable local-level government and instead vests an inordinate degree of control over subdistrict development planning and budgeting in the hands of the subdistrict chief executive (nayok tesaban). As a result, the boundaries between official state power (amnaat) and informal “influence” (itthon) are, in some cases, profoundly blurred. This was the case in Changpa Subdistrict, where the subdistrict chief executive was found to wield overwhelming influence over the development planning and budgeting processes and where representative bodies and participatory mechanisms failed to achieve their democratic functions. The interconnectedness of formal authority and informal influence was such that the operation of political power in the subdistrict took place outside of the formal institutions of decentralized government. Power in Changpa Subdistrict flowed through a distinctly Malay Muslim network centred on the person of Nayok Loh. Access to the network was made possible for Thai-speaking Muslims in Ban Lomyen due to the fact that some members of that group wielded sufficient stocks of economic, social and symbolic capital to both win local elections and to take part in network-oriented activities that were inaccessible to non-Muslims. This condition undermined the potential for decentralized local government better to represent and respond to the interests of residents of all ethnic and religious identities. Instead, it produced powerful feelings of alienation among some Thai-speaking Buddhists, who identified all the more strongly with the central state.
The second aspect of the “dual system” of local-level administration is the deconcentrated system that flows from central state ministries to the district government and down to the village headmen (poo yai ban) and subdistrict chiefs (kamnan) who constitute its broad base. Interviews and conversations with villagers in Ban Lomyen revealed the widespread perception that the headman and his team embezzled funds from the village budget and otherwise directed state resources to their families and associates. It was widely acknowledged that ‘vote buying’ had played a major role in the election of the headman, as had his extensive kinship connections in the village. In Chapter 8 it was argued that the problem of vote buying and graft in village-level administration is exacerbated by the extremely generous term limits offered to village-level office-holders (village headmen need only be elected once and can retain their office until the mandatory retirement age of 60). The analysis of an election for village headman in Ban Namsai not only confirmed the role of money in the electoral process, but also the powerful influence of the subdistrict chief executive in shaping electoral outcomes. In addition, examinations of an annual “quality of life improvement” scheme and a program to support rubber farmers affected by low commodity prices illustrated the failure of village-level office-holders to facilitate villagers’ access to state-provided public goods in an equitable and transparent manner. The outcomes of these projects fed into disillusionment with participatory processes and village-level office-holders in general that was widely-shared. Villagers’ experiences in their relations with deconcentrated local-level government was marked by perceptions of corruption, unresponsiveness and bias in the distribution of public goods. These experiences in turn fostered practices – including disengagement from the state or paying bribes – that stood in stark contrast with the practices envisioned in programs like the Quality of Life Improvement Project, which included broad-based consultation with all segments of village society in a manner that might foster a shared sense of civic identity that transcends ethnic affinities.

Taken as a whole, these chapters suggest that that character of state-society relations in Changpa Subdistrict varies substantially according to both the branch of the state and the ethnic identity of the individual in question. In brief, relations with the security apparatus of the central state (in the guise, primarily, of the Border Patrol Police) were much more cordial and collaborative for Buddhists than they were for
Muslims, who, as a group felt threatened and under surveillance by security officials. This led to practices of avoidance on the part of Muslims and the perception – novel among Thai-speaking Muslims, less so for Malay speakers – that these particular agents of the state regarded them as Muslims first and Thais, if at all, only second. For Buddhists, meanwhile, engagement with a security force both casually and as members of the Or Ro Bor civilian militia reinforced a defensive posture among some members of that community that impeded friendly and collaborative relations with their Muslim neighbours. With respect to the decentralized local state, perceptions of Nayok Loh’s domination over the subdistrict government were widespread across ethnic communities. However, the ways in which power operated outside the formal confines of the subdistrict offered points of entry for at least some segments of the population. For Buddhists, however, the informal channels of power were largely inaccessible. Alienated from the local level state, the Buddhist community in Ban Lomyen had become insular, defensive and disengaged from the local-level state. Thai-speaking Muslims, meanwhile, adopted modes of dress and practices that emphasized their identity as Muslims, often in a manner that contrasted starkly with practices they and their relatives exhibited in their ancestral villages outside of the Deep South.

9.3. Implications for Decentralization and Autonomy Arguments in Southern Thailand

To the extent that this dissertation has succeeded in demonstrating a problematic tendency for state-society relations in the Deep South to exacerbate strained relations between ethno-religious communities, it must be asked what the implications of these findings are for proposals to alleviate the ongoing crisis in the region through institutional reform. The kinds of proposals that have received scholarly and public attention in recent years typically hinge on some form of more substantive administrative decentralization or, more controversially, regional autonomy. Proposals of this nature have emerged from several quarters during the most recent phase of insurgent violence, but the history of autonomy movements in the Deep South date back at least as far as the famed 7-part proposal presented by Haji SULONG to government of Thailand in 1947. The first of those
proposals was for “one entity to govern the four provinces (including Satun), with a ‘local-born’ governor empowered to appoint and dismiss officials” (quoted in McCargo 2009: 60). In the present period, calls for some manner of devolution of power to the regional level have come from foreign leaders (former Malaysian PM Mahathir Mohammad), former Thai Prime Ministers (Chavalit Yongchaiyudh), leading social critics (Dr. Prawase Wasi) and locally-based academics (see: Srisompob and McCargo 2008; McCargo 2012a: Chapter 7). There is also some evidence suggesting the members of the militant groups behind the insurgency have come to hold a more favourable view of regional autonomy as a potential outcome of their struggle, while other hardliners continue to demand outright secession (Davis 2009; McCargo 2014: 8).

Support for more substantive decentralization of power from Bangkok to the Deep South region stem from recognition of what Duncan McCago (2009: 189) observes to be the fundamental condition underlying political violence in the Deep South: a deficit of state legitimacy. To a significant degree, the observations described in this dissertation accord with McCargo’s argument, particularly as it relates to the relationship between Malay and Thai-speaking Muslims and agents of the centralized security state. At the same time, however, the present study draws attention to the distinct relationships that exist between different aspects (or branches) of the state and various segments of society. As such, it suggests that questions of state legitimacy should be approached from a similarly disaggregated conception of the state. Thus, while it can certainly be argued (as McCargo and others do) that the Thai state enjoys a higher degree of legitimacy in the eyes of Thai Buddhists in the region as compared with Malay Muslims, it cannot be safely assumed that the same holds true with respect to the decentralized local-level state. In subdistricts like Changpa, where subdistrict governments are dominated by Malay Muslims and there exist blurred lines between state-backed authority and informal “influence,” Thai Buddhists may in fact feel more alienated from the local-level state than their Muslim neighbours and, as a result, have a worse perception of the legitimacy of those who occupy its offices. Thus, institutional reforms that invest more power in the hands of local-level office-holders may have the effect of further alienating Thai Buddhists who, in the Deep South, represent a significant “second order minority” (Barter 2015). One result could be an even tighter and more exclusive
bond between Thai Buddhists and state-security apparatus, with deleterious consequences for the process of peace-building (see: ICG 2007a: 18).

The arguments developed in this dissertation could be seen to suggest that more substantive decentralization or regional autonomy threatens to exacerbate inter-ethnic tensions in the Deep South. Such a conclusion, however, would fail to appreciate the particular qualities of decentralized government that engender the polarizing dynamics detailed in the foregoing chapters. These include an institutional design that makes possible the capture of local-level government by powerful individuals and groups, a system of representation that fails to represent the interests of local communities adequately, participatory mechanisms that do not foster genuine deliberation that is inclusive of all segments of society and ineffective “top down” oversights that might otherwise enhance local-level government accountability. These shortcomings call to mind findings from comparative studies (e.g. Schou and Houg 2005; Siegle and O'Mahony 2005; 2010) suggesting that the direction of the impact of decentralization on subnational conflict hinges on, among other factors, the effectiveness of democratic mechanism and processes at the local level. As these studies suggest, what matters is not decentralization per se, but the manner in which decentralization is conceived and implemented. In order for decentralization or regional autonomy to foster improved relations between ethnic communities in Thailand’s Deep South, it will have to be (re)designed and implemented in such a manner as to engender widespread legitimacy and, crucially, a shared sense of civic identity that transcends but in no way seeks to displace ethnic and religious identity.

However, in order for institutional reforms to have a beneficial effect on state-society relations and, as a consequence, inter-ethnic relations in Southernmost Thailand, Thai nationals of all identities will require access to a more robust form of democratic citizenship. For nearly a decade leading up to the period of field research for this study, the foundations of democratic governance in Thailand had been buffeted by military and judicial actions that progressively dismantled the democratic development of the 1990s. During the course of the research period itself, this process was brought to near completion by a military putsch that removed nearly all limits on the power of the kingdom’s top generals. In a sense, the years since the 2006 coup that removed Thaksin Shinawatra from power have seen political development in Thailand locked in a state of
suspended animation as the country’s military and bureaucratic elites position themselves for the inevitable power struggles that will accompany the end of the 9th reign of the Chakri Dynasty. However, this most recent political crisis should not be read as an aberration. The whole of Thailand’s post-absolutist history has been marked by cycles of democratic development and subsequent backsliding such that, over eight decades hence, the Thailand that grew out of the 1932 “revolution” is scarcely more democratic than the pre-modern kingdom that preceded it. That revolution by and large failed to constitute a clear break from the mode of relations between the central state and Thai society that predominated during the late absolutist period. The persistence of this orientation of the central state (as sovereign) to society (as subjects) carries with it a continued preoccupation with the concerns of official nationalism and a tolerance of diversity only within strictly prescribed limits. Thus, patterns of political development in Thailand over the 20th and early 21st centuries preclude the active involvement of citizens in shaping the future of their country and their communities. In the Deep South, this translates to the near absence of civic ties that transcend ethnic categories and instead results in patterns of state-society interaction that perpetuate and fortify mutually exclusive categories of belonging.

9.4. Future Research

The insights presented in this dissertation stem from the in-depth analysis of two villages in a peripheral region of Thailand and it can, therefore, be asked whether or not these findings can be applied beyond the narrow scope of the study itself. It is clearly not the objective of this dissertation to present a grand theory of the emergence of inter-ethnic antipathies the world over, but rather to contribute to the development of a theoretical approach to better understanding of the contribution of state-society relations to those processes. In order to build upon this research, it will be necessary to move beyond the confines of Changpa Subdistrict and engage in explicitly comparative research that further clarifies the causal relationships involved in the processes at

16 At the time of writing, Thailand’s 88-year-old King Bhumipol Adulyadej (Rama IX) had very recently passed away. Most observers agree that his successor will struggle to gain even a modicum of the widespread adulation Bhumipol has long enjoyed.
hand. This will necessitate steps toward the construction of a formal model of the theorised causal processes, where state-society interactions in the various fields that comprise the blurred and multifaceted boundary between state and society are reconceived as independent variables and valid proxies are identified in order to measure the relations between members of various ethnic groups and the multiple facets of the state they encounter in their daily lives. A major challenge in conducting such work, however, will be obtaining the rich, contextual data necessary to tease out the dynamics at play in each of these fields or interconnection.

A first area of focus for future research following from this dissertation will be the region of Thailand’s Deep South. More work will be required to determine whether or not the dynamics observed in Ban Laymen and Ban Namsai are in fact widespread throughout the region. Researchers like Mahakanjana (2006) and organizations like the Asia Foundation (Asia Foundation 2010) have conducted survey-based research that offers some important insights into related questions of political attitudes and ethnic interactions in the region and suggest potentially fruitful ways forward for building on the research presented in this dissertation. A major challenge, however, will be overcoming the problem of obtaining high quality data through survey research in a region marred by violence and in which respondents can be extremely wary of outside researchers. Indeed, the research process for this study suggests that people in the Deep South region can be slow to open up to researchers and only offer their genuine opinions on various topics after a relatively prolonged and gradual period of trust-building. Perhaps higher quality data might be made available through long-term, in situ research in other villages and towns in the region, but research of that nature poses major challenges of its own, not least the time and resources required. Most likely, the best approach to further this research in the Deep South region would incorporate elements of survey-based research as well as techniques of observation-based, ethnographic research in order to obtain data from a small number (3-10) of comparable cases. Such research would facilitate the refinement of a causal theory of the role of state-society relations in the production of inter-ethnic estrangement in Thailand’s Deep South.

Just as this dissertation does not claim to develop a grand theory of inter-ethnic estrangement, however, neither should the insights presented in it be taken to apply
only to southernmost Thailand. Indeed, the ultimate objective of this research is to contribute to the development of middle-range theory. As such, another, equally promising line of future research could entail the development of a comparative study of state-society relations and inter-ethnic estrangement in various other countries. Much as Horowitz observes in his study “Ethnic Groups in Conflict” (Horowitz 1985: 14), there exist a great variety of potential comparative cases to choose from. Clarifying the scope of the argument will be of paramount importance in this endeavour. For example, the mode of political subjecthood in Thailand (described in Chapter 3) was clearly of relevance to the experience of marginalization on the part of Malay Muslims in the Deep South. Therefore, comparative studies involving cases from other countries should similarly focus on peripheral and ethno-culturally distinct regions in which the experience of incorporation into the greater nation is comparable with that of the Malay Muslims of southern Thailand. Similarly, the process of (limited) decentralization – and the specific institutional configurations that process produced – was shown to have been crucially important to the emergence of the countervailing dynamic of Buddhist alienation from the local-level state. Thus, comparative studies should also focus on regions that have undergone some degree of administrative decentralization. Regions like Assam and Nagaland in Northeast India or Aceh and Papua in Indonesia constitute examples of potentially valuable sites for future research in the Asian region. Detailed, contextualized research in these regions (or elsewhere) would be of great value in developing further and testing the initial steps at theory building presented in these pages.
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Thai Language Documents:


Appendix A.

Map 1: Ban Lomyen
Appendix B.

Map 2: Ban Namsai
Appendix C.

List of Paramilitary and Milita Organizations

**Rangers (thahan prahn):** A paramilitary force established with American support in the 1970s to aid in the campaign against the Communist Party of Thailand and that has played a major role in counter insurgency operation in the Deep South since 2004.

**Or Sor (Volunteer Defence Force):** Thailand’s largest paramilitary organization, operated by the Ministry of the Interior and, in the Deep South, primarily responsible for providing security to Ministry of the Interior officials.

**Chor Ror Bor (Village Development and Self-Defence Volunteers):** A village-level volunteer militia organized under the Ministry of the Interior’s Department of Provincial Administration. The *Chor Ror Bor* operates in the kingdom’s border regions, including the Deep South, where *Chor Ror Bor* units exist in the vast majority of rural communities.

**Or Ror Bor (Village Protection Volunteers):** A volunteer militia specific to the Deep South region. Organized in 2004 under the patronage of Queen Sirikit, the *Or Ror Bor* is officially open to participation by members of all ethnic/religious identities, but is, in practice, an all-Buddhist organization.