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Some Observations on Democracy in Thailand

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Some Observations on Democracy in Thailand

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Thailand's political system, similar to other sub-systems of the Thai social formation,¹ is often seen as being a hybrid, which means that it includes both authoritarian and democratic elements.² Contrary to the usual assumptions found in the literature on transitions to and consolidation of democracy,³ political systems with hybrid characteristics can be understood "as alternative directions, not way stations to liberal democracy." However, this does not mean that such countries "are doomed never to achieve well-functioning liberal democracy" (Carothers 2002:14, 17; for a similar position, see Merkel 2004). Scholars working on the history of democratization in Europe note that this was not, "a process that was achieved in single moments of wholesale regime transition but rather [has to be seen] as a protracted and punctuated 'one institution at a time' process ... it is crucial to emphasize that the complex institutional configuration of democracies rarely emerges all at once. On the contrary, different institutions often emerge at different times, often for different reasons" (Capocchia and Ziblatt 2010:940). In other words, even the "established" democracies of contemporary Europe have a past in which they often looked like present-day hybrid systems. Indeed, one may say that Thailand is a good illustration of the benefits of an approach that, "conceptualizes democratization as an inherently long-run chain of linked *episodes* of struggles and negotiations over institutional change" (ibid.:957; italics in the original).⁴

In Thailand, these "struggles and negotiations over institutional change" in the political system has featured five main participants. *First*, there is the monarchy as Thailand's former socio-political apex (until the overthrow of the absolute monarchy

in 1932) with its renewed claim (since the late 1950ies) of being the country's enlightened as well as enlightening "soul of the nation."⁵ This positioning includes the vast informal power wielded by the king, members of his Privy Council, and assorted members or associates of the court.⁶ *Second*, there is the military as a self-interested and closed organization that also poses as the self-appointed guardian of national security and survival, protector of the monarchy, and final arbiter about who can govern the country. The civil bureaucracy serves in a supporting role. Both the military and the bureaucracy long enjoyed governing the country according to their own ideas. *Third*, the formal and informal socio-political networks of leading bureaucrats, technocrats, and associated academics (collectively categorized as *ammatt* or *aphichon*; see below) claim to possess superior knowledge regarding the country's social, political, and economic direction (Plato's "true navigators").⁷ Thus, they cherish any opportunity of being able to influence the making of collectively binding decisions and, even better, to determine the rules of the political game. More than two decades ago, Thinapan and Likhit (1989:177f.) made a statement that still rings true today,

political leaders, including military officers, civilian bureaucrats and academicians (*sic*), still cling to the idea that the country should be ruled by a small group of elites. This elitism is based on the logic, whether right or wrong, that they are the most appropriate and qualified group to hold the scepter of power and handle the reins of administration.⁸

Fourth, the politicians (including their provincial-level informal and exclusionary networks, or *phuak*, factions, and political parties) are latecomers to the Thai political order. Yet, they claim that they represent the people, as proven in elections, and are thus entitled to govern the country and dominate and instruct the military and the civil bureaucracy in the name of "democracy." The politicians' view is countered by critics who called them "electocrats," and the resultant system "electocracy," which was defined as, "the tyranny of the rural majority and urban uncivil society" (Kasian 2005:128ff). Because of this "tyranny," the tiny social classes of more qualified and enlightened Bangkok-based middle-class citizens as well as the *ammatt*, who are supposed to possess clear political vision and only have the good of the country and their fellow citizens at their hearts, are prevented from doing good deeds in the public interest.

Fifth, the people themselves, in their new role as the supposed sovereign of the democratic political system, have had a rather mixed history of involvement. The mass uprisings in 1973 and 1992 (whether the UDD's mass protests in 2010 will be included might depend on who will finally win and thus can write the history of this period)⁹ as well as the voters' electoral behavior in 2001, 2005, 2006, and 2007 stand out. Civil society, non-governmental organizations, localized protests actions, advocacy, and interest groups also belong here. The ("yellow," monarchist, anti-politician) People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and the ("red," pro-Thaksin, versus *ammatt*) United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) seem to have opened a new chapter of sustained confrontational mass politics in Thailand, including the possible emergence of mass-based political parties (on the PAD, see Nelson 2010b).¹⁰

The institution building and maintaining negotiations and struggles in which these five categories of actors participate belong to two principally different ideal types of political models (see the chart below). The highest value of the first type (groups one to three) is the trinity of "nation, religion, and monarchy" (NRM; see below for more details), which was developed to support the absolute monarchy ideologically (Murashima 1988). Here, legitimacy is derived from the claim to act in the interest of nation and country.¹¹ Therefore, paternalism (hierarchy, top-down) is the basic model of the polity. It requires attempting totalistic mind control via indoctrination and propaganda in order to make sure that the people remain in their assigned position as obedient and conformist subjects looking up to their masters, the establishment. James Stent, a longtime resident and astute observer of Thailand noted,

Over the decades, this establishment has instilled this view of the nation throughout all levels of society, with inculcation starting in the schools and reinforced continually through media, portraits of the royal family, etc. To dissent from the main elements of this consensus is to be "Un-Thai." (Stent 2010:1; for an academic treatment, see Connors 2007)

Following Anek Laothamatas (2006, 2007, and 2009) and Thongchai Winichakul (2008), both of them former student activists during 1973-1976, we can refer to this dominant establishment stratum as *aphichon*. This can be translated as aristocrats or, in this context, seen as the label for components of a traditional social stratum that sees itself as societal elite superior to the ordinary members of society. Unlike Anek and Thongchai, I would tentatively include the monarchy rather than count it as a sep-

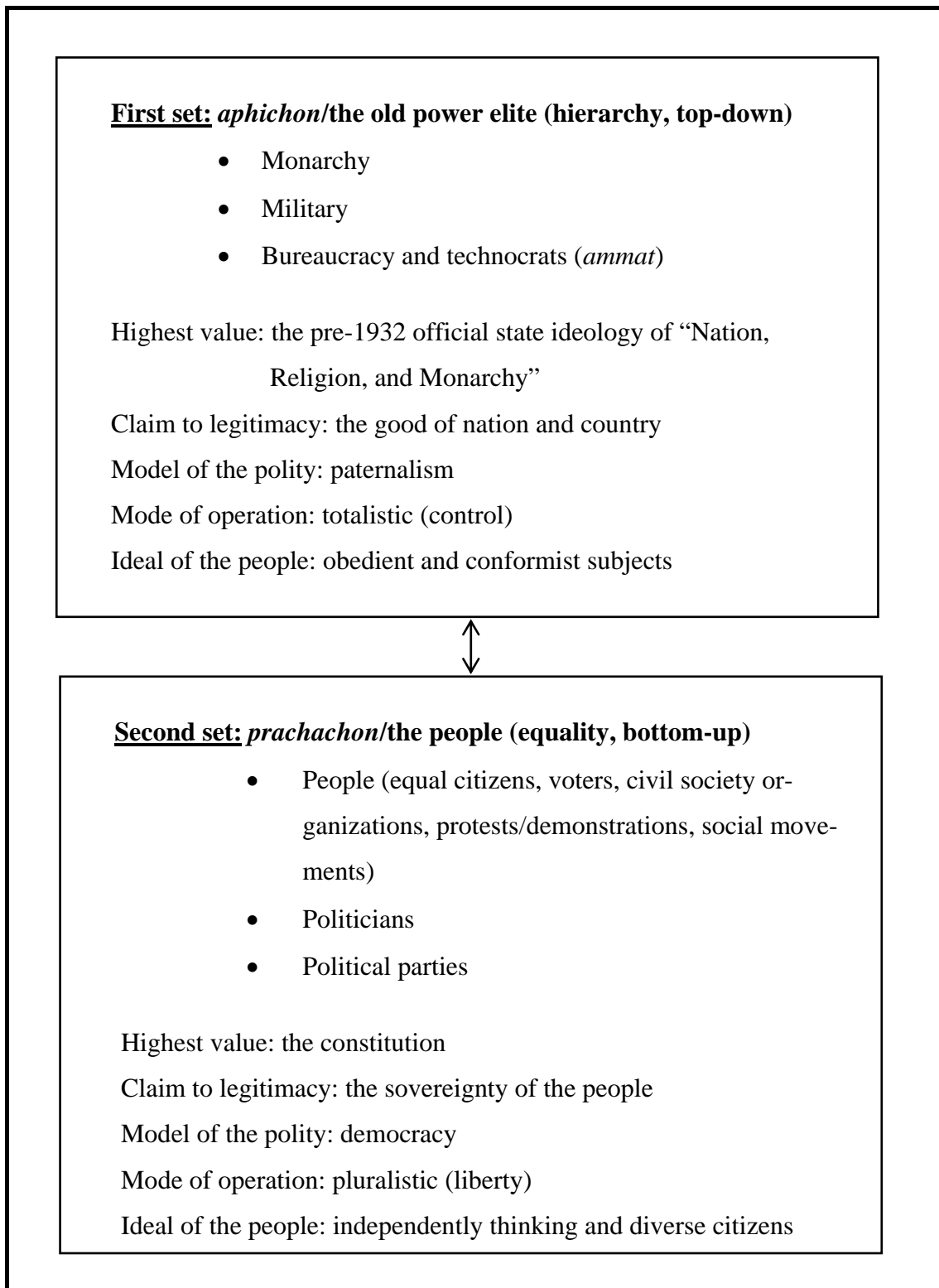
arate unit, because culturally it is the key point of ideological orientation and symbolism for this group, and structurally one might well say that, “The monarchy is ... the central structure of the current Thai state” (Somsak 2010). The *aphichon* is what Benedict Anderson a few decades ago called “the old feudal-bureaucratic upper class” (Anderson 1977:13).

Though Anek and Thongchai both used the word *aphichon*, they were far apart in evaluative and normative political terms. Anek was impressed by balancing effects that were assumed to occur in “Thai-style democracy,” or in the “mixed regime” comprising the monarchy, the *aphichon*/aristocracy, and democracy.¹² He believed that this arrangement of three components was the “appropriate” political system given Thailand’s structural and cultural conditions. His was the conception of a corporative state with three separate and hierarchically ordered classes, reminiscent of the pre-democratic British mixed constitution comprising the monarchy, aristocracy (upper house), and democracy (lower house). Thongchai, on the other hand, strictly rejected any claims by the self-appointed old power elites to extra-democratic dominance, or to “mental superiority.”

Suthachai Yimprasert, a history lecturer at Chulalongkorn University and UDD supporter, referred to the same structure as Anek and Thongchai, but rather used the word *ammatt*, which was the UDD’s most prominent point of attack against the current Thai political system. Suthachai’s label for it then was “*rabop ammatayathipattai thi mi kanlueaktang*” (aristocratic/bureaucratic system that has elections). According to Suthachai, the *ammatt* had the highest power in this system. While this elite stratum allowed people to elect representatives, voters were advised to elect only politicians that the *ammatt* approved of. Violations would result in party dissolutions, and the legal exclusion of the people’s personnel preferences from politics. Thus, the mandate of the people was largely irrelevant in this system (Suthachai 2010). What from Anek’s point of view appeared as a necessary balance amongst three hierarchically ordered corporative strata, Suthachai evaluated as undemocratic elite rule, and thus unacceptable.¹³

Turning to the second ideal type (groups four and five), its highest value is the constitution, while its claim to legitimacy is anchored in the idea that the people are the sovereign. In this type, the basic model of the polity is democracy (equality, bottom-up), in which the people are seen as independently thinking and diverse citizens who freely communicate in a pluralistic public sphere. From the perspective of the

Chart 1: The dual structure of the Thai polity



Source: Slightly revised from Nelson (2010a:34)

first ideal type, democracy is not something that encompasses the entire polity. Specifically, it neither subjects the military and the bureaucracy under the principle of popular sovereignty¹⁴ nor reduces the monarchy to a European-style symbolic role.¹⁵ Rather, democracy in this view mainly concerns the political dealings of those sections of the population that comprise the second type. Moreover, one of the important tasks of the actors making up the first type is to see to it that those in the second type develop and conduct “proper” democratic behavior, and do not violate the interests of the nation. This task includes writing constitutions aimed at preventing behavior in the second type that is seen as undesirable by those in the first. The constitution-drafting assemblies and constitution-drafting committees of 1997 and 2007 are typical examples of this approach.¹⁶

Whether the people fulfill this ideal is, of course, another question; it also concerns historical development. The great majority of the Thai people, especially the great majority of rural and small-town dwellers, have long been seen by the Bangkok-based *aphichon* as being uneducated, politically uninterested,¹⁷ and easily bought by election candidates. However, the socio-economic development of the last few decades—especially the political events and struggles since 2001—has been accompanied by a tremendous process of politicization.¹⁸ The *aphichon*, notably their academic segment, often overlook, deny, or play down these processes.¹⁹ Rather, they tend to stick with their outdated model of the Thai people, according to which the people’s poverty and ignorance makes them sell their votes to their up-country patrons working for corrupt politicians.²⁰ One of the *aphichon*’s most admired senior members, Anand Panyarachun, seemed to have adopted a more realistic stance. He said,

Our country has witnessed, albeit at a great cost, the political awakening of the people. ... In hindsight, we may see the empowerment of the rural and impoverished sectors of our electorate as a critical and necessary step for the development of Thailand’s democratic system. It is imperative that we recognize the legitimate concerns and voices of these social groups in our electoral and other decision-making processes. ... Change is inevitable. (Anand 2010)²¹

A veteran foreign observer, William J. Klausner, warned,

The stereotype of villagers largely held by those in urban society must be challenged and overcome. Urban society is largely in the throes of a serious cultural lag as it still sees rural folk as uneducated and narrow minded provincials. Such a view no longer represents either the social or political reality. Rural society has undergone a cosmic change during the past half century which urban dwellers often simply refuse to recognize or accept. (Klausner 2010)

In this context, the UDD could be seen as a force that was “in the process of redrawing the Thai political space,” that had “entered into forbidden territory hitherto reserved solely for urban Thai elites” (Chairat 2010). Anthropologist Yukti Mukdawijitra interpreted the red-shirt protestors as “emerging active citizens,” who had developed political consciousness, and suggested, “It means that if we can’t reverse the clock [to the existence of an up-country population considered politically ignorant and apathetic], we will have to walk hand in hand with this group of people” (Pravit 2010).²² Surachart Bamrungasuk, a lecturer with sympathies for the UDD, arrived at a similar conclusion. Thai democracy, he said, could be made strong and sustainable only if the middle class rescinded its monopolization of democracy and instead joined the lower classes in building an inclusive system. This would lead to what in the English-language literature on democratization is referred to as, “Democracy is the only game in town” (Surachart 2010:37; he used the English expression with a preceding Thai translation).

In sum, for once avoiding the label “hybrid” (democracy, authoritarianism), one might say that Thailand has created a dual polity, and not a political system characterized by a substantial degree of internal structural and cultural homogeneity as seen in established democracies or dictatorships. This situation—including the structures, respective cultural resources, goals, interactions between the policy’s components, and internal as well as external changes—accounts for most of the important political conflicts over the past four decades. Elements of the second set of actors and ideas obviously have been able significantly to drive back what used to be known as the “bureaucratic polity” (Riggs 1966) by expanding their political space, regarding both structures (action) and culture (topics for communications). But these actors have been neither able fully to replace it with their “democratic polity” nor to produce exemplary democratic structures that could not easily be challenged or criticized by what in the Thai discourse is often called “the old powers.”

Many of the formal-legal structures found in the Thai constitution then result from contention between the five forces making up the two ideal types of *aphichon* (the old power elites), and the *prachachon* (the more recent popular forces).²³ They interact and partly overlap (the Democrat party and the New Politics party, for example, mostly support the values of the first set), based largely on differing definitions of what the problems of Thai politics are. Constitutional solutions devised for democratic polities in other countries are also important resources that are referred to in determining the Thai constitutional order. Democracy in Thailand since the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932, if it existed at all, then has been rather variable in form and substance. In fact, military dictatorship, and Thai-style or semi-democracy have been the prevalent forms of the political order. In a royalist academic tract about the period between 1932 and 2000, historian Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian went as far as claiming that “Thai-style” “semi-democracy” was rooted in,

the condition of the [Thai] mind that has made undiluted Western democracy impractical in Thailand. The Thai population ... find it almost impossible to accept fully the principle of sovereignty of the people. The Thai mindset reveals a strong preference for more tangible but extra-constitutional sources of power. (Kobkua 2003:29)

Those extra-constitutional forces, according to Kobkua, included the military, appointed parliaments, and the monarchy. Similarly, Chai-anan Samudavanija, in a publication promoting the “new politics” of the PAD, was quoted as having said, “In the end, Thailand must return to the system of semi-democracy [*kueng prachathipattai*], that is, politicians must use power jointly with other forces of society” (*Positioning*, September 2008:113). Readers are justified to assume that “Other forces of society” is a reference to the *aphichon*. Especially for the time since the coup of September 2006, one might characterize the national-level Thai political system by a phrase often used to depict the situation of local governments in many developing countries after the implementation of decentralization—“elite capture.” From this perspective, democracy—as a normative political order, and as constitutional-political practice (at the national, regional, provincial, and local levels)—is not “the only game in town,” and it is certainly not the dominant element of Thailand’s current political system.²⁴

Thai-style hybrid democracy/authoritarianism²⁵

The paper will now sketch a number of structural and ideological characteristics of this current Thai political order. However, we start by noting that a number of landmark events did provide observers and participants alike with the opportunity to couch the course of Thai political history in terms of democratization, the abolition of democracy, and the renewed “transition” to democratic rule. Thus, the elite-led revolution of 1932 is officially seen as the “beginning of democracy” in Thailand (according to this common view, Thailand is now in its 79th year of “democracy”). However, this first attempt did not last long, and it was only after a long period of various forms of military dictatorships that the student uprising of October 1973 is said to have started the “democratic period,” which ended with the right-wing assault on students in Thammasat University and the military coup in October 1976. The period since 1980 was called a “stable semi-democracy” (Chai-anan 1989) in which an unelected prime minister (former army chief and current chairperson of the king’s Privy Council Gen. Prem Tinsulanonda), bureaucrats, and technocrats allowed elected politicians some room for participation. Since this system did not diminish democracy but rather lessened the degree of authoritarianism, a more accurate label might be “semi-authoritarianism.” Similarly, the usual references to “Thai-style democracy” might better be replaced by “Thai-style authoritarianism.”

The “democratic transition” to the “fully elected” Chartchai government in 1988 was “reversed” with the military coup of January 1991. Many members of the Bangkok middle class welcomed this temporary return to “authoritarianism,” because Chartchai and his cabinet had been perceived as highly corrupt and inept. Yet, when it seemed that the coup group tried to prolong its power beyond its welcome by constitutional and electoral manipulation, sections of Bangkok’s middle class, decisively supported by sections of the lower classes, rose up in May 1992 to force a “re-democratization” (crucially helped by an intervention of King Bhumiphol). The following system was called an “unconsolidated democracy” (Case 2002), a “low-quality democracy” (Case 2007:627), and, especially for the Thaksin era, a “delegative democracy” (Wigell 2008, Croissant 2008),²⁶ until the coup of September 2006 ended this period.²⁷ Concerning the time after the red-shirt protests in May 2010, Thitinan Pongsudhirak suggested the label “hybrid authoritarianism” (*Bangkok Post*, September 27, 2010). Some months later, an important oppositional faction leader, Pairoj

Suwannachawee,²⁸ called the Thai system a “‘no-choice’ democracy,” because “the power of the gun” would force all smaller political parties to form a coalition government with the Democrat party (*Bangkok Post*, January 28, 2011:3).²⁹ The military-led establishment would see smaller parties joining the Phuea Thai party in forming a coalition government as a gross challenge of its sustained crusade against the “Thaksin regime” since 2006.

In order to move beyond the above labels, I will now sketch some characteristics of the current Thai political system (whether it is seen as authoritarian, democratic, or hybrid), by making six observations, three each concerning structural and ideological issues.

Structural issues

First, if democracy means that, “Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in officials elected by citizens” (Dahl 2005:188), how does Thailand score on this point? In this country, elected governments have to accept their limited policy-making authority (besides also suffering from limited policy-making capabilities and inclinations). Security policy and military affairs, for example, have long been the prerogative of an independent-minded military, whose acceptance of civilian superiority is rather limited, as can be seen (not only, but most obviously) from the many coups and coup attempts since 1932. In the democratization literature, military forces are seen as a prominent “veto-actor,” reflecting the limited democraticness of such political orders.³⁰ For Thailand, the well-known commentator “Chang Noi” noted,

The big winner from the political chaos of the last three years [since the coup of 2006] has been the Thai military. Possibly, the generals are now more powerful than at any time over the past twenty years. ... The most spectacular evidence of the military’s success is in the national budget. Over three budget cycles, the allocation for defence has almost doubled from Bt85 billion in 2006 to Bt167 billion in 2009. The allocation for internal security has also soared from Bt77 billion to Bt114 billion over the same period. No other segment of the budget has grown in the same way, and indeed most have been shaved down to accommodate this growth in security spending. (Chang Noi 2009)

Regarding military coups, however, many observers believed that given Thailand's advanced socio-economic and political structures, "the only kind of military dictatorship possible now is a softie or semi-dictatorship" (Kasian 2007:22).³¹ Neither the coup makers of 1991 nor those of 2006 could aim to establish permanent military governments. On the other hand, in planning these coups, the generals knew that the civilian establishment (as well as many citizens) would not use abstract norms of democracy principally to reject their usurpation of state power. Rather, the coup plotters could count on scores of highly qualified civilians being ready to assist them if they found their reasons for staging the coup acceptable.³² In fact, most of these civilians would see their selection to coup-appointed bodies as a confirmation and enhancement of their importance and social status (which is very important in a hierarchical class society such as Thailand), and proudly present their memberships in their résumés.³³

Coups, though, are merely one very drastic measure that can be employed by the military for solving real or imagined political problems (or for protecting their interests). Behind-the-scenes actions by military personnel can have just as problematic consequences, as the formation of the Abhisit government in December 2008, and the resultant protests by the UDD in the years 2009 and especially 2010 taught us. One newspaper columnist rightly noted,

What was the starting point [of the protests, the political turmoil, and the use of force to dissolve them, the dead, and the injured], if it was not the demand that the prime minister must return the power to the people? The crucial point was that his origin was illegitimate, that [his government] was set up in a military camp, with a general giving orders and supervising its establishment. This use of influence above the political parties, the intervention in democracy with this kind of management, is dangerous and erodes important principles of the system. (Chamlong 2011)³⁴

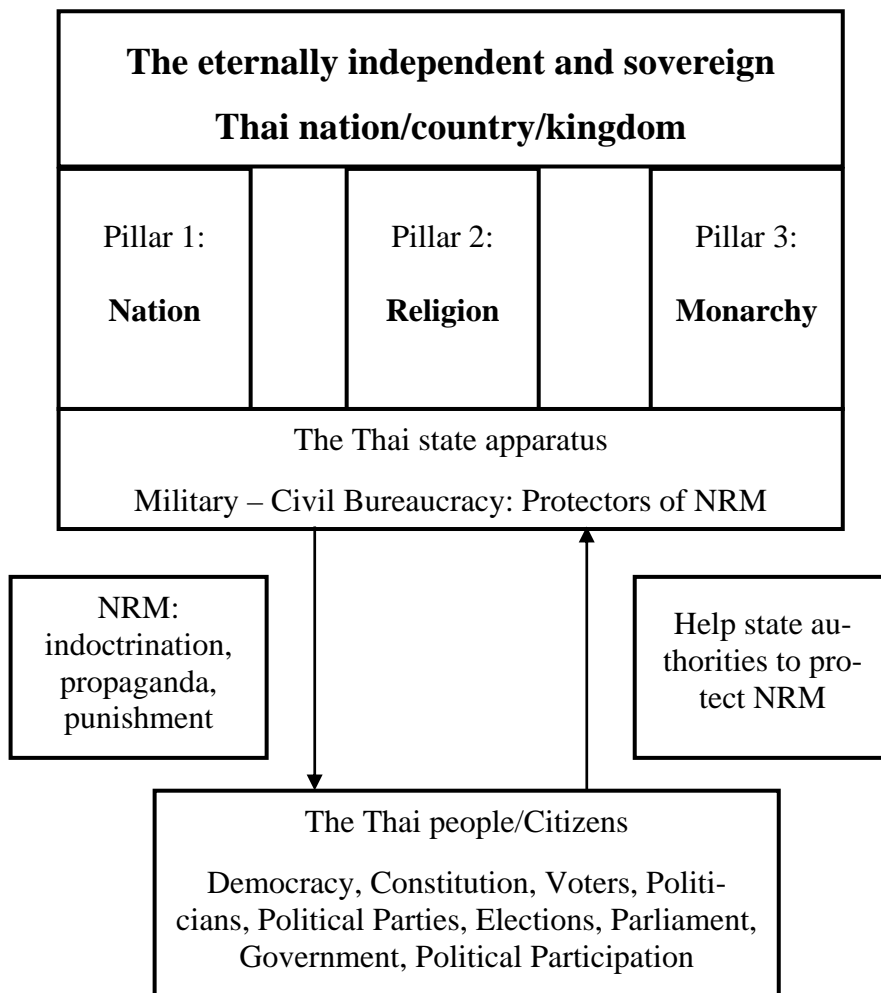
In the traditional *aphichon* understanding of the Thai state structure, there cannot be any military that is subject to democratic control, because it plays the primary role in protecting the trinity of "nation, religion, and monarchy," if necessary against any elected government. In a right-wing political tract on the Thai military, Phinit Phinthusan stated,

In particular, the Thai military has the sacred and profound obligation to protect or maintain the institutions of being the Thai nation, the institution

of the Buddhist religion, and the institution of the monarchy. (Phinit 2010:62)

This traditional ideology of the Thai state structure can be illustrated by rearranging the elements of Chart 1 above, as shown in Chart 2 on the next page. From this vantage point, the military does not serve any *demos*, but is the most important part (because it is equipped with weapons) of the foundation on which NRM rests, while the stability of this trinity in turn guarantees the existence of the eternal Thai nation, its independence and sovereignty. Consequently, any actions imagined by its ideologically assigned guardians to harm NRM, such as remarks considered *lèse majesté*, necessarily become a matter of national security, and thus very urgent.

Chart 2: The traditional model of the Thai state



In this scheme of things, the people have come to occupy two fundamentally contradictory positions. At the older upper level, they appear as Pillar 1 – the Nation, defined as the uniform or standardized thinking and feeling of the Thais, which is usually referred to as “Thainess” (*khwampenthai*).³⁵ In order to ensure this Thainess, the Thai people must be subjected to indoctrination from an early age, and to a constant stream of propaganda when adults. This is one of the most important tasks of the Thai state apparatus, whether civilian (such as the education system) or military. At the more recent lower level, however, the people ideally constitute the foundation of a democratic political system that features a pluralistic, diverse, and independent-minded citizenry with a strong sense of civic self-organization. Nevertheless, this new role of the people does not at all make the upper level disappear. Rather, the military and the civil bureaucracy assume supervisory roles over the newer political structures and actors. This even includes a peculiar duty of resistance.

[If] especially the politicians, who have the power to govern the country, develop the evil thought that they wanted to overthrow the three institutions, or think to change the system of government, then the military must certainly come out to resist by all means. This certainly also includes coup d'états. ... It is therefore not strange at all that sometimes the military would perform coups in order to topple governments that had evil thoughts towards the three institutions, and thus were greeted with boisterous agreement and satisfaction from the people who loved the nation, because they knew well that [these coups] were carried out for the common good of the nation. (Phinit 2010:62 and 64)³⁶

The civil bureaucracy, as shown in Chart 2, joins the military in providing the foundation for NRM (in the traditional conception of the Thai state). In practical terms, it has maintained its own policy plans vis-à-vis their ministers, who they often despise, and who are subject to frequent reshuffles. Many high-level bureaucrats and technocrats still do not see why elected politicians—at least the one's Thailand produces by the political system's current structures—are an improvement compared to authoritarian times. Conflicts between “political officials” (politicians in the Cabinet) and “permanent officials” (technocrats, bureaucrats) have existed as long as political leaders have tried to establish their superiority over bureaucrats, who were not used to taking orders from elected politicians (beyond taking care of their individual pet projects). The Chatchai government (1988-1991) established a group of young advisors (the so-called Ban Phitsanulok group, after the name of the building that housed their offices),

who were tasked with developing policies independently of the bureaucracy. The actions of this group contributed to one of the reasons given for the coup of 1991, namely, “Political appointees abused their power to oppress and bully honest civil servants” (Announcement No. 1, 1991). The government of Thaksin Shinawatra expanded the scope of the former Ban Phitsanulok group to encompass both the comprehensive policy dominance of this political leader and a sustained drive of “state sector reform” that challenged “Thailand’s deep-seated bureaucratic traditions with their formal, stately and convoluted patterns of decision making” (Painter 2005:1). It might not have been incidental that important members of Chartchai’s group joined Thaksin in key positions: Pansak Vinyaratn (chief policy advisor), Surakiat Sathirathai (foreign minister), and Borwornsak Uwanoo (secretary general of the cabinet).

The policy-making powers of “officials elected by citizens” was also limited by members of the *aphichon* when they drafted the 2007 constitution by forcing any government, in the constitution’s long chapter V on “Directive principles of fundamental state policies,” to put into practice a wide range of policies. With laudable frankness, a constitution drafter who had a special interest in this particular section, Pakorn Priyakorn (then dean of the faculty of public administration at the National Institute of Development Administration), noted in his quasi-official text,

The directive principles of fundamental state policies provide the framework of national administration to ensure continuity and consistency of the administration of public affairs of the country, without being subject to illogicality or idiosyncrasies of each administration. (Pakorn 2007:88)³⁷

The purpose of redrafting the 1997 version of the state policies was made clear in the CDC’s document comparing the 1997 and the 2007 constitutions produced for the public hearing phase. It stated,

[T]he provisions in this chapter have the intention to bestow enforcement character so that the cabinet must draft laws or determine policies according to what has been stipulated [in chapter V]. This is different from the previous constitution, which stipulated them to be only performance directions. (Khanakammathikan 2007:51)

The chapter on directive state policies therefore might be seen as fundamentally contradicting the key democratic principle stated in article 3, “The sovereign power belongs to the Thai people.” Popular sovereignty, after all, primarily translates into any

elected government's freedom of making collectively binding decisions as they see fit. *Aphichon* members of the CDC, apparently seeing elected governments as dominated by "illogicality and idiosyncrasies," tried to reduce the policy-making government to a set of elected implementers of a constitutional public policy agenda made compulsory by a democratically illegitimate and unaccountable group of elite academics and bureaucrats serving on committees established by virtue of the coup-plotters' "Interim Constitution."

In practice, though, the implementation of this chapter might remain unenforceable as long as a government satisfies the constitutional reporting and planning requirements in a formal sense. For example, the Democrat-led government (since December 2008) seemed to have largely ignored its constitutional duties under this section, though it did, in a formal-bureaucratic sense, produce the "plan for the administration of the state" (*phaen kanborihanratchakan phaendin*) that is required by section 76 of the 2007 constitution (Khanaratthamontri 2009).³⁸ Moreover, in the run-up to the elections of 2011, neither the Democrat nor the Phuea Thai parties seemed to have felt restricted by the constitutional stipulations, and came up with a raft of what is often seen negatively as "populist policies." By comparison, the constitutional directive state policies are intended as belonging to their positive counterpart, called "welfare state" (*rat sawatikan*).

Certainly, the part on directive state policies in the 2007 Constitution also reflects serious performance deficiencies of the Thai political system—as seen by the *aphichon*. Moderate CDC member Woothisarn Tanjai thought that the citizens could use these policy directives to evaluate the governments' sincerity in comprehensively caring for them. The people received a constitutional guarantee that governments would deliver respective services. In the public hearings, the people had agreed with the policy directions (small wonder). They represented one way of empowering the people vis-à-vis the government (Khanakammathikan 2007, no. 33, p. 13). This approach reflected the view that electoral authorization by the voters did not translate into responsive governmental public policy making, certainly not concerning those policies that the *aphichon* thought were necessary. Hard-line CDC member Sriracha Charoenphanit flatly stated, "If we allow the politicians and the political parties to determine public policy, then they will only emphasize policies from which they will gain benefits. There will not be policies that will directly concern and affect the people" (*ibid.*, p. 16).³⁹ Therefore, political parties had to be "forced" (*bangkhap*) to im-

plement the constitutional policy directions. Sriracha graciously did not mind if any government came up with additional policies beyond those laid down in the constitution (ibid., p. 17).

Second, the Thai political order, as far as its politics is concerned, has not yet developed what regarding European political history has been called “nationally available categories” (Tilly 1998:10) of political contestation (such as Conservatives, Social Democrats, Liberals, or Greens). Rather, it remains “highly localized and territorialized” (Caramani 2004:1). The political party system thus shows low levels of institutionalization (Kuhonta 2009, Ufen 2007)⁴⁰ and nationalization, which is defined as “the extent to which parties compete with equal strength across various geographic units within a nation” (Kasuya and Moenius 2008:126).⁴¹ European conceptions of the national political contest as being one between organized forms of national-level collective political positions rooted in socio-economic cleavages and interests largely fail in Thailand. The standard view why this issue is so important goes like this,

Without more structure, it is difficult for citizens to learn about the policy choices available to them, and translate this into meaningful electoral choices. Without more structure, it is difficult to ensure accountability in the democratic process. ... a major question is whether new democracies [such as Thailand] will develop a system of liberal-democratic responsible party government and electoral choice, and what are the consequences if they do not. (Dalton and Klingemann 2009:12).

Thailand, one might say, has been dealing with those “consequences.” Political parties have mostly remained transient and exclusive clubs of local notables and their supra-provincial factions, thereby recruiting political personnel with serious deficiencies regarding modern national-level policy-making and administrative capabilities (in fact, all societal areas in Thailand have serious capacity building problems). William Case found the subtle phrase that elected politicians were “distorting parliament’s functioning and cabinet-level decision making” (Case 2007:630). The political attention of the fragmented localized political oligarchy in the House mirrors the range of the national bureaucracy’s functional areas of work only to a very limited extent, thereby preventing increased levels of state policy responsiveness and political-administrative accountability. As a result, the citizens’ representation in the policy-making process is seriously compromised (Nelson 2011a).⁴² For these reasons, the performance advantages of functional differentiation and its principal institutional set-

up in the political sphere remain elusive, placing Thailand among those “new democracies” that “have failed to deliver the full cornucopia of anticipated political and socioeconomic benefits” (Case 2007:623).

It is not surprising that this situation in some circles has undermined the ideas of freedom and democracy (or at least the Thai variants) as the most desirable foundations of governance. To many Thai observers with influence on the public debate (not merely the right-wing PAD), politicians, political parties, and parliament seem to have nearly exhausted their claim to normative supremacy and the usual hope for future improvements, though it is unclear who or what could take their place, and produce better policy outcomes, implementation, and popular political participation. Similarly, while important members of the Thai establishment perceive a welfare state (as distinct from former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra’s “populism”) as necessary to reduce political conflict, little is known about the socio-economic and political conditions of its creation, leaving hierarchy and management as alternative options.⁴³

Third, despite universal suffrage and the freedom of political association, the Thai political system mostly still lacks inclusive formal mechanisms of political recruitment that would allow ordinary people interested in active political participation to access institutions of decision-making.⁴⁴ There thus remains a “wide gulf between political elites and citizens” (Carothers 2002:15). At the provincial level, political (non-bureaucratic) structures are largely informal, invisible, and personal. They are hardly expressions of democratic public affairs, but rather seen by its dominant personnel as mere extensions of their family households and personal friendship/interest networks (*phuak*).⁴⁵ Politically interested citizens mostly cannot rely on a generalized, abstract, or formally institutionalized means of political access, such as political parties.⁴⁶ If they want to participate, they have to establish non-institutional, personal, and mostly non-ideological relationships with individual prominent politicians at the provincial, constituency, or local levels.⁴⁷ Alternatively, individual citizens can establish their own personal voter base, and then affiliate it with other politicians, higher-level leaders, factions, or political parties of their choice. They will need much time and money to succeed. Things will be easier if they, before entering politics, had already built a solid public recognition by continuously performing social activities or by occupying highly visible positions for some years, such as director of a district hospital, chief district officer, or head of an education network in their province, or

constituency. Being the scion of a widely known, well-connected, and accepted family also helps substantively.

This situation fundamentally contradicts the principle of equal democratic citizenship. If the “democratic relationship of representation is one of empowered inclusion of the represented” (Urbinati and Warren 2008:396), one can be satisfied with the existence of universal suffrage in Thailand. Yet, at the provincial and constituency levels, the lack of formalized political structures makes both empowerment and inclusion leaving much to be desired.⁴⁸ It remains to be seen what consequences the horizontally and ideologically mobilized red-shirt movement, and the generally increased degree of politicization of the people, will have on the *phuak*-oriented political structures in local areas and electoral constituencies (there is a variety of relationships between *phuak* politicians and red-shirt groups at the local levels).

Together with the preceding point, it is thus not surprising that voting is still largely determined by local conditions, rather than having passed through “processes of [national] political integration [that] translate in the *territorial homogenization of electoral behavior*” (Caramani 2004:1; italics in the original).⁴⁹ Therefore, the traditional normative proposition that “elected representatives [are] charged with carrying out the plurality’s preferences” based on the political parties’ “alternative policy packages” offered in elections (Luna and Zechmeister 2005:388), and that there is a regular nationalized “elite-mass interaction” (ibid.:389), cannot easily be expected to exist in Thailand. Thaksin, one could say, was called a “populist” in order to denote the personalized and ad-hoc nature of his interaction with the people.⁵⁰

However, again, one will have to keep in mind the processes of politicization that accelerated in 2001 with Thaksin Shinawatra becoming prime minister. By 2005, these processes had become rather strong, as shown in the election result of that year. The coup of September 2006 and subsequent actions of high-ranking personnel further accelerated this politicization, resulting in the emergence and expansion of the red-shirt movement (Nelson 2011b).⁵¹ Moreover, when Andrew Walker aimed to describe a specifically *local* “rural constitution” that guided citizens’ electoral decisions, he also noted that voters had included references to modernist and *nationalized* “general principles” (such as good governance, transparency, and capable governmental management) into their decision making. They posed a “clear challenge to localist values” (Walker 2008:94). The national-level party-list element of the Thai election system since it was applied for the first time in the 2001 parliamentary election cer-

tainly has also had a nationalizing effect. It induced voters to compare the electoral options (regarding parties, their leaders, and policies, their past and anticipated future political performance) available for forming the government in Bangkok, and rank order their preferences accordingly. (At first, the party-list element concerned only 20 percent of all members of the House. The constitutional amendments of early 2011 increased this percentage to 33.33 percent, with the formula being 375 constituency MPs to 125 party-list MPs.) The people's higher degree of nationalized politicization may collide with both the persisting stress of the election system on constituency candidates and the lack of intermediate political organizations in the form of a nationalized party system that is reliably represented at the constituency level. Finally, the circumstances described above also seriously hamper any democratic and citizen-oriented political socialization in families and political education in schools, and thus will continue to affect Thailand's political future.

Ideological issues

From the perspective of the Thai socio-political and monarchist establishment, which represents the old hierarchical nature of the Thai polity as well as subsequent long periods of military and bureaucratic rule, the preceding three observations are unproblematic. To this establishment, they only confirm that the present conditions of democracy in Thailand, including the lack of democratic qualifications and policy-oriented competence supposedly exhibited by politicians and voters, do not serve "the country/nation" well. Therefore, continued paternalistic elite rule (not government), though in a democratized way, appears to be justified, desirable, and necessary. The following three ideological issues, however, point towards the cultural underpinnings (political culture) of this elite claim to prolonged extra-democratic power, and thus are sensitive terrain in Thailand. It is not normally advisable to raise such issues, except when wanting to confirm their continued validity, since this might provoke emotional rejection (if not worse). In an international academic context, however, we need to deal with them, because they are at the core of current fundamental political conflicts and contestation. The forced (and enforced) silence on these points in Thailand has rendered scores of newspaper columns trying to analyze the current political conflicts and look for solutions very incomplete. In this way, Thailand's establishment tries to secure its privileged politically position, but it also hinders the people living in the

country to look for viable paths of political development that would lead to a more inclusive, egalitarian, and sustainable political order, which would reflect the socio-economic and political changes that have taken place over the past five decades. I will now turn to consider the ideological issues.⁵²

First, the monarchy and the actions of the royal family are strictly removed from any public debate, even if such actions and the monarchy as an institution are politically significant. Citizens in a liberal democracy, one would like to think, should have a legitimate right to express opinions about such issues that do not conform to the officially propagated ideology (“The sovereign power belongs to the Thai people,” declares Section 3 of the 2007 Thai constitution). This right, of course, would not cover personal insults directed at individual members of the royal household. The elite-conceived overriding importance of the monarchy was expressed in an official biography of King Bhumiphol published in 1971.

The King and the People become one. The Throne and the Nation become one, and a profound meaning is thus given to the Thai Throne. It becomes the personification of the Thai nationhood, the symbol of the Nation’s unity and independence, the invariable constant above the inconstancies of politics, indeed, as it is written to be, the repository of the sacred trust of the whole nation. (Office of His Majesty’s Private Secretariat 1971:26)

As critical Thai historian Thongchai Winichakul stated, this situation “means that most of the time when we study and talk about politics, a most crucial piece is not allowed to be put into place” (Thongchai 2008:19). Earlier, Duncan McCargo had referred to the “existence of a whole sub-text of Thai politics—the real or imagined relationships between the monarchy and other political actors—which is completely off-limits for the press” (McCargo 2000:28).⁵³ The Democrat-led conservative coalition government, dubiously installed in December 2008, did not give hope for a more liberal-democratic approach to the public observation of the monarchy. On the contrary, the first of its “principle [policy] directions” was, “Protect and uphold the monarchy so that it is stable in being the emotional center of the people in the nation, and preserve their unity ... Seriously use every means to prevent any violation of the king’s power” (*Matichon*, December 25, 2008).⁵⁴ In addition, the Democrats’ minister of justice expressly condoned the limitation of the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech. According to him, “In Thailand, the monarchy is not only a symbolic institution. It is the pillar of national security. Whatever is deemed as affecting the monar-

chy must be treated as a threat to national security” (*Reuters*, January 17, 2009).⁵⁵ Later, the Abhisit government even adopted the PAD’s position by claiming that it had “uncovered a plot [by the UDD] to overthrow the monarchy” (*Bangkok Post*, April 27, 2010:1). Moreover, the new Army Commander General Prayuth Chan-ocha, generally seen as a hard-line royalist, was quoted as having said

All people, from their grandparents’ generation down, have been blessed by the royal institution. From past to present, Thailand has existed thanks to the royal institution and the royal institution still exists. So no matter what the political expression, do not involve the royal institution. ... The world community was aware of the King’s devotion to the country and might wonder what was going on in Thailand with local movements working against the royal institution. ... government officials would not tolerate threats to the monarchy. (Thaipoliticalprisoners 2010).

Wassana Nanuam, the *Bangkok Post*’s well-known reporter specializing on military affairs, noted that the army might well become “a real pillar of the throne,” because Prayuth is “very protective of the monarchy” (Wassana 2010).⁵⁶

Ironically, the current (until June 2011) high-profile application of *lèse majesté* (Article 112 of the Criminal Code, partly combined with the Computer-related Crimes Act; tens of thousands of web sites have also been blocked for allegedly posting comments critical of the monarchy) should be particularly worrying for the monarchists themselves. As anthropologist Grant Evans pointed out two years ago already,

Instead of purifying the monarchy it [the political use of the *lèse majesté* law] pollutes it with everyday politics. With each charge of lese majeste people are being asked to chose between monarchy and democracy and ultimately this will work against the former’s stature. ... vigilante monarchists seem to be the main threat to the monarchy’s longevity. (Evans 2009)⁵⁷

After he became prime minister in December 2008, Abhisit Vejjajiva had sent a few signals about changing the application of *lèse majesté*. However, given the strength of opposing forces, the high sensitivity of the issue, and the Democrats’ royalist orientation, it could be doubted whether key issues would be tackled. They included the transfer of the right to initiate complaints, a significant reduction of penalties, the permission of academic and journalistic analysis, and the dissociation of *lèse majesté* from the issue of national security. In late March 2011, the *Bangkok Post* published a brief article headlined, “Lese majeste law up for a review,” saying

Human rights campaigners, scholars, and artists yesterday launched the ‘Article 112: Awareness Campaign’ to awaken people to the lese majesté law which they said had affected public expression of opinion and been employed as a new weapon by politicians. ... Between 2005 and 2006, lese majesté-related cases jumped to 547. Before 2005, there was an annual average of 10 cases. They are ‘very high numbers which have never before happened in Thai history’, the campaigners said. (*Bangkok Post*, March 28, 2011)

Among the prominent campaigners were Sulak Sivaraksa, Thongchai Winichakul, Ubonrat Siriyuvasak, and Apichatpong Weerasethakul. At the same time, a small group of critical legal scholars (leading members were Worachet Phakhirat and Piyabut Saengkanokkun) at Thammasat University’s faculty of law unveiled their detailed proposals for amending Article 112 along the lines mentioned above.⁵⁸ After army chief Prayuth and the Department for Special Investigations went on the offensive by taking steps to use *lèse majesté* accusations against around twenty UDD leaders, even the conservative *Bangkok Post* got cold feet and published an editorial headlined, “Politicking and the monarchy.” The editorial concluded,

To safeguard the monarchy as all Thais must, and to prevent the institution from being abused for self-serving purposes, it is high time that the lese majeste law itself (specifically Article 112) be critically discussed and debated by all parties concerned, to determine whether any part of the law needs redefining or amending. (*Bangkok Post*, April 21, 2011:8)

A few weeks later, the same paper apparently felt the need to publish another editorial on the subject, headlined, “A surge in lese majeste cases.”⁵⁹ It concluded by stating,

The surge in lese majeste cases in recent years has caused alarm among local and international human rights groups and free expression advocacy groups, who fear the offence has been misused as a tool by some elements to silence or intimidate their political rivals. These are clear violations of the people’s rights to freedom of expression. With an election around the corner, it becomes even more important for the free flow of information and for critical voices to be heard. (*Bangkok Post*, May 12, 2011:8)⁶⁰

Going beyond this Thailand-centric view of *lèse majesté*, the regional representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for South-east Asia, Homayoun Alizadeh (he has been stationed in Bangkok for a number of

years), employed universal criteria regarding the freedom of expression in comparing the state-people relationships in Thailand and Vietnam. In a contribution to the *Bangkok Post* (May 3, 2011:10), he pointed out,

States should not be imprisoning their own people for the peaceful expression of views and opinions on state institutions. Yet this is what is happening in Southeast Asia. For instance, in Thailand last March, website administrator Thanthawut Taweewarodomkul, was sentenced to 13 years in prison for expressing views that were critical of state institutions. And last month in Vietnam, human rights defender Cu Huy Vu was sentenced to 7 years jail for ‘conducting propaganda against the state’ by calling for an end to one-party rule and the establishment of a multi-party system. (Alizadeh 2011)⁶¹

One can well imagine that Thai royalists will angrily reject the notion, contained in this quote, that the Thai monarchy and the Vietnamese communist party are both simply “state institutions,” and can therefore equally be subjected to an examination as to the degree to which their relationships with their people comply with universal norms of human rights and freedom of expression.⁶² (NOTE: This paper was finished in August 2011. Therefore, the debate on *lèse majesté* that has developed since about November 2011, including the infamous Ah Kong case in November and the announcement of an anti-Article 112 campaign by the Nitirat group in December 2011, could not be covered in the present paper.)

Second, as briefly touched upon above already, the official elite state ideology of “nation, religion, monarchy” (NRM, *chart satsana phramahakasat*) (Murashima 1988) sees people as conformist subjects, not as independently thinking citizens.⁶³ According to this trinity, the Thai state depends in its existence on the functioning of these three “institutions,” or “pillars,” not on the democratic capacity of its citizenry.⁶⁴ The people are seen “as a homogenous mass which is child-like relative to its leaders; thus the populace is clearly in need of the moral guidance of monarchs, elders, officials, and monks lest they stray aimlessly in the wilderness” (Mulder 2000:111).⁶⁵ However, this view has an important political consequence. That is, the Thai people uncritically and uniformly must submit to the leading trinity in order to demonstrate a high degree of national identity and unity. It is then assumed that this would secure the survival of the Thai nation by dissuading Thailand’s imagined numerous enemies from invading and destroying the country. A recent publication depicts the collectivist model as follows.

The national identity that is at the core of national security means the institutions of nation, religion, and monarchy. In the promotion of national identity, every person and every sector must have loyalty to all three institutions and join hands in promoting the security of these three institutions. (Somphon ([2008]:73)

Another author puts the importance of NRM as follows.

The Kingdom of Thailand has had stability and has been able to maintain its independence for a long time because it has had three supporting pillars, namely the institutions of nation, Buddhist religion, and the monarchy. When these institutions are stable and strong, our country will certainly continue to be stable and secure. In addition to the people, who have to help protect these institutions with their lives already, the state officials, in particular the armed forces, must be many times more aware [of this task]. (Phinit 2010:4)

The “deep truth” that all Thais will always have to keep in their minds is that the three elements of NRM must never be separated, because they must operate together to be effective. If one of it fails, the others will also fail. Moreover, if “all three institutions fail, the Thai territory or being a Thai society will disappear as well” (Phinit 2010:42). The Thai nation in this context is not understood as merely the aggregated interests, needs, and preferences of the sovereign people living within the boundaries of a country called Thailand. Rather, the nation (or country) is conceptualized as an abstract and eternal entity that possesses its own inherent and superior interests—as defined by its self-appointed guardians, the social, cultural, and political establishment.⁶⁶ Many state organizations (government offices, local authorities, schools) promote this idea of national identity and unity as defined by an adherence to NRM.

To give an example, on January 26, 2011, the government department of the ministry of the interior informed the public via an advertisement in *Matichon* (headlined, “The state of division/disunity in Thailand, and the task of the monarchy protection volunteers”) that it had been pursuing a countrywide project for the recruitment of “monarchy protection volunteers” (*asasamak pokpong sathaban*). Four million people had already joined this project (this would mean that each of Thailand’s about 75,000 villages had 53 such volunteers). The advertisement gave the impression that a major propaganda effort had been under way, with the potential to narrow the people’s political space at the local level, especially if they happened to belong to the op-

posing camp, the UDD. The advertisement had similar points of ideological reference as the previous quotes from Somphon and Phinit, saying that Thailand had always been a united, secure, and peaceful country, “because we have had stable principal state institutions, namely nation, religion, and monarchy.” Democratization, however, had made the country clearly be divided into different camps of thought. Therefore, besides protecting the monarchy, a vital task of the volunteers was to reestablish unity (*khwamsamakkhi*) (ibid.).⁶⁷

One might well ask whether this kind of ideological subjection performed by the state should at all exist in a liberal democracy. It seems to collide with the democratic idea of a majoritarian will as formed in a pluralistic discourse among free and equal citizens, who are “equally capable of autonomy with respect to citizenship—that is, conscious self-determination” (Urbinati and Warren 2008:395).⁶⁸ Normally, state-created ideological products such as “nation, religion, monarchy” (including a personality cult) are key tools for generating (the appearance of) support for authoritarian regimes. Nevertheless, Thailand’s supposedly democratic constitution, in its first article in the paternalist chapter IV on “Duties of the Thai people,” declares, “Every person has the duty to protect Nation, Religion, and the Monarchy.” Only in its second part, this article 70 adds, “and the democratic system of government which has the king as Head of State under this constitution.”⁶⁹ However, even this addition is double-edged, because a person who dares referring only to “democracy”—without “which has the king as Head of State”—subjects himself to the suspicion of being anti-monarchy. In an article headlined “Thai democracy that has been artificially dwarfed,” well-known critical public intellectual Nidhi Eoseewong asked, “Until this day, we are still a ‘democracy which has the king as head of state’ in order to distinguish it from the democracy as understood by the citizens of this world. England, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden, and other countries can be ordinary democracies, although they also have monarchs as head of state” (Nidhi 2010:20). This view may sound perfectly reasonable, but Army Commander Prayuth did probably not share it. A few days before Nidhi published his statement, Prayuth went on record with an affirmation of the official royalist view by saying, “Thailand has the democratic system of government which has the king as head of state. I think that this is the best thing in the world already. It is different from other countries that only have democracy” (*Maitichon*, November 10, 2010:15).⁷⁰ Thailand’s political system as “democracy which has the king as head of state” is even protected by section 68 of the 2007 constitution. It

states, “No person shall exercise the rights and liberties prescribed in the Constitution to overthrow the democratic regime of government with the King as Head of the State” (Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E. 2550 [2007]).⁷¹

Official functions of state personnel are often symbolically legitimized with reference to an ensemble of artifacts representing “nation, religion, monarchy”—the national flag, a Buddha statue placed on a multi-level wooden structure (plus a yellow flag; see the third picture below), and a picture of King Bhumiphol. Conspicuously absent from this setting is the constitution, although the chain of legitimation for any actions taken by the bureaucracy in a democratic polity starts precisely at this document and its declaration of the citizens as the sovereign, who (ideally) directs the administration by electing representatives, who will form the government. Thailand’s state officials thus to a large extent draw on a source of legitimacy for their actions that is non-democratic, meaning not rooted in the will of the people.⁷²

Three variations on “nation, religion, monarchy” from Chachoengsao province

(Pictures two and three show the temporary presence of a symbol for “democracy,” occasioned by public hearings on the 2007 constitution. Pictures by the author.)





As an example, *Matichon* (December 24, 2010:22) printed a picture showing an arrangement like that in the third photo, placed outside the office of an education zone. A group of education officials had assembled in front of it in order to make an oath for being good officials, and pillars of the country. Thus, their ritual enacted a script inherent to NRM, and not to the people's sovereignty, their constitution, and their democracy. Of course, it is open whether these officials believed in the script, and even used it to guide their day-to-day actions (improbable), or whether they merely provided an empty gesture as a reaction on pressure for outward conformity.⁷³ Nevertheless, it would have been interesting to test their reaction by asking them why they did not perform a similar ritual in front of the symbol for constitution and democracy pledging in their oath to teach children to become independently thinking citizens who would not fall easily to the ideological directions issued by the powers that be.

I conclude this point with a quote from former election commissioner Gothom Ariya. He had depicted the alternative in the following way, “In Thailand, the traditional rallying motto is ‘Nation, Religion, King’ and the emerging one is ‘Constitution and Democracy’. The success of Thai monarchy is maybe to show that the two can coexist. They may not be after all that contradictory” (Gothom 2004:14).⁷⁴

Third, since the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932, the latent conflict between monarchism and democracy has not been resolved. When the civilian leader of the revolution, Pridi Banomyong, had to leave Thailand for good after his failed anti-military “Grand Palace Rebellion” of February 26, 1949, much of the political potential for a more citizen-oriented conception of democracy was also lost. Thailand’s oldest political party, the Democrats, was founded in 1946 as a royalist-aristocratic defense of monarchist values against incipient citizens’ politics symbolized by Pridi.⁷⁵ During the protests of the “People’s Alliance for Democracy” (PAD) in 2006 and 2008, which were heavily framed by royalist symbolism,⁷⁶ the Democrats chose the side of the PAD. Political forces that rejected the coup of September 2006, the 2007 constitution, and a political role of the king’s Privy Council—whose chairperson, former army commander Prem Tinsulanonda, was widely rumored to have engineered or supported the coup against Thaksin—confronted both. They called themselves “United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship” (UDD) and expressed their stance by dressing in red shirts, symbolically countering the royalist yellow shirts worn by the PAD.⁷⁷

One key element of this conflict concerns the question of who is the sovereign of the Thai polity. A royalist line of thought insists that, in 1932, the king merely granted the people his original right of sovereignty. Thus, the PAD during its first rounds of protests to oust then-Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in 2006 coined the slogan “*thawai khuen phraratchaamnat*” (“return the royal power”). The idea was that since the king had granted the people sovereignty, they could temporarily return it to him so that he could use it to appoint a new prime minister to the PAD’s liking. From this perspective, the king remained above the constitution. The contrary view is that, in 1932, the old political order, in which the king was the sovereign, was entirely abolished. In the new constitutional political order, the Thai people had replaced the monarch as the genuine owners of sovereignty, making it their inalienable property. Therefore, any monarch can operate solely within the confines of the constitution. In this respect, critical public-law lecturer Piyabut Saengkanokkun stated,

Naturally, in a democratic system a monarch is an adulteration. However, if a liberal-democratic state agrees to preserve the monarchy for some reason, be it to preserve its custom or to have it as the [symbolic] center of the nation, then this state creates a way to combine the ‘monarchy’ with ‘democracy’ by making the king the head of state without him having any political power. It can thus be said that, in a democratic system, it is ‘democracy’ that allows the king to be head [of state]; it is not the king who is the head [of state] with ‘democracy’ as a supplement. (Piyabut 2010)⁷⁸

In fact, section three of the Thai constitution seems to be rather ambivalent about the issue of who actually is the sovereign of the Thai polity. It says

The sovereign power belongs to the Thai people. The King as Head of the State shall exercise such power through the National Assembly, the Council of Ministers and the Courts in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution.⁷⁹

Does this mean that the article accords sovereignty to the people in its first sentence, and takes it away from them in the second? Until today, important sectors of the civil and military bureaucracy reject the superior role of politicians elected by the supposed sovereign by claiming that they are merely temporary office holders while the members of the state apparatus permanently serve under the monarch. They have to be loyal to him (the Thai term for public servant is *kharatchakan*, which approximately translates as “servants of the king,” or “servants of royal works”). When the chairperson of the king’s Privy Council, Prem Tinsulanonda, in the lead-up to the coup of September 2006, likened Thai prime ministers to mere “jockeys” who did not own the horse (Nelson 2007a:7), he meant that the military’s and the bureaucracy’s main loyalty was with the king as their “owner,” and not with the constitutional sovereign of the Thai political order, the Thai people.⁸⁰ This view corresponds to the relationship between the state apparatus and the people in NRM as shown in Chart 2, above. Thus, the sovereign’s representatives heading the executive branch can only have limited commanding powers.

This fundamental tension between the structural and cultural (conceptual, ideological) remains of an earlier stratified top-down societal order, in which all political power was invested with the person holding the highest social rank (the king), and the egalitarian and liberal implications of a functionally differentiated (democratic) polity

remains unresolved.⁸¹ More than a quarter-century ago, a well-known Thai political scientist (now in the PAD camp) wrote,

The tensions evident since 1973 are the result of a conflict between two alternative bases of legitimacy: one emanating from traditional hierarchical traditions, the other based on popular sovereignty. (Chai-anan Samudavanija 1982:67)⁸²

As the massive PAD and UDD protests demonstrate, this conflict still exists. Political scientist Panitan Wattanayakorn (after the formation of the Abhisit government in December 2008, he became its acting spokesperson) stated in an interview,

You have to understand that the political powers are now shifting from the so-called aristocracy to electoral politics, which has been active at all levels, from rural administrative organizations up to the national level. This power shift has had a huge impact and has led to attempts to resist it. This is going to continue for years. (*The Nation*, May 7, 2008).

Critical historian Somsak Jeamteerasakul (during the UDD protests in April/May 2010, the military claimed that he was an intellectual resource for an alleged movement to topple the monarchy) joined the perspectives proposed by Chai-anan and Panitan by identifying the key political struggle in this way:

For what is this crisis, if not, at its core, the gigantic contest between two power blocs, one centered on the elective institutions (parliament, political parties, politicians), the other on the non-elective ones, with the monarchy itself at the latter's peak? (Somsak 2011).

It seems that, from right through conservative to left, the idea of a struggle between remnants of the old political order (referring to both the traditional order and its Sarit-induced revival), and new societal groups (students in 1973-1976, middle class in 1992, lower class in 2009/2010), which pursue the establishment of a more inclusive political order, holds compelling validity for Thai commentators.⁸³

The socio-political contestation reflected in the statements listed above has gained additional significance by the imminent issue of succession. Statements by a number of high-profile public figures reflect the changing role of monarchy and traditional legitimacy. A cousin of the king, Bangkok governor Sukhumbhand Paribatra, said, "The consensus in our society broke down and there is no mechanism to put it

back in place right now. This is also because the king is no longer as active as he was before” (*Spiegel Online*, April 20, 2009). Senior citizen, royalist, and social activist Prawase Wasi wrote, “In a pluralistic society, people think differently. There are people who worship the monarchy and those who don’t—it is natural. The key is how to channel the differences towards creative collaboration and output (*Bangkok Post*, April 18, 2009). Critical intellectual Nidhi Eoseewong (*Matichon*, May 18, 2009) argued that Thai society had changed so much that political-administrative leaders had to adjust their approach to political communication. Importantly, they had to switch from “monologue” to “dialogue”: “Everything that is spoken must be open to scrutiny. Nothing is so sacred that it is exempt from criticism. Even religion must be ready to face and respond to criticism (and all religions in the modern world have done so already).” Finally, senior NGO activist Jon Ungphakorn (in the *Bangkok Post*) noted that,

we have to normalise the role of the monarchy as a respected popular institution within a democratic society and which cannot be exploited by any political group for any political purpose whatsoever. To do this, we need to make fundamental changes to the law governing lese majeste to bring it in line with democratic principles, and to allow democratic debate and legitimate expressions of views regarding the institution. (Jon 2011a)⁸⁴

A few weeks later, he followed this up with the statement,

To fully defuse the present explosive situation, there should also be a clear agreement on preserving the monarchy as a constitutional institution completely above politics, with the monarch as head of state having a constitutional mandate to uphold the democratic system. The law regarding lese majeste will need to be amended so as to allow democratic discussion and expression of opinion on the functioning of the monarchy and to prevent the misuse of lese majeste as a political tool. (Jon 2011b; for a similar statement, see Jon 2011c)⁸⁵

Thus, a number of more daring senior Thai commentators indicate that the struggle mentioned above needs to result in a more liberal and pluralistic approach to the monarchy that is in accordance with democratic political arrangements, and the idea that the people are the sovereign of Thailand’s political order. On the other hand, however, as had been said in a much different context, certain groups in Thailand still have the strong “belief that pluralism was somehow unnatural or unhealthy in a society, that it

was a sign of weakness, and that internal division and disharmony could be suppressed and eliminated, to be replaced by the unity of a national community” (Kershaw 2001:75f).⁸⁶

Conclusion

Thailand’s political order as it operates at the national, provincial, and local levels (regarding both politics and public administration) is certainly not the only sphere of the Thai social formation that is seen by many observers (and even by some participants) as lacking capacity, competence, and performance quality. The spheres of justice, education, academia, or the mass media exhibit similar deficiencies.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, even though the conventional idea of politics as being the integrative center of society has become obsolete,⁸⁸ it remains that only the political system can make collectively binding decisions, and thereby influence the conditions under which the other social systems or spheres can follow their respective operational logics. While the political system depends for its functioning on the output of the economy, education, science, law, or the mass media, these systems (and the human beings whose communications reproduce them) in turn depend on the performance of the political system, especially with respect to a stable good-quality policy output and its implementation.

For this reason, the formal and informal institutional arrangements (including their modes of operation), and the struggles for power and inclusion by groups of actors in the political sphere become so important. In this respect, the transfer of a new set of formal political institutions to Thailand in 1932 has led to a perennial process of adaptations and struggles. The number of military coups, constitutions, elections, and governments provide rough indicators of the prolonged political “transition” to a more settled political order Thailand has been experiencing. During the same time span, the environment of the political system, in reaction to domestic and foreign policy decisions, has undergone tremendous changes. Notably, they concern the transformation of the economy, a huge increase in population figures and urbanization, the enormous expansions of education and means of communication, an almost irreversible internationalization of all spheres of life, and the adoption of a thoroughly consumerist lifestyle.

All these changes translate into new systemic and popular policy performance demands posed to the political system and its main players. It is difficult to keep a

modernizing country and people within the confines of old structural and ideological restrictions. Certainly, the system of representative governance, political parties, politicians, and voters need upgrading (as do the practices of protest movements). Yet, one wonders whether the operational logic of Thailand's political system can provide significant incentives for such an exercise.⁸⁹ At the same time, the people's politicization has dramatically increased (compared with two or three decades earlier), a fact that puts additional pressure on the old national-level power arrangements, including the political claims of the military, which had cast the people in a passive and obedient role.

Most importantly, Thailand has been slowly moving through the twilight of King Bhumiphol's long reign that began in 1946 when he was only 18 years old. The coronation took place in 1950. His far-reaching conception and practice of the monarchy developed (supported by royalist intellectuals) with military dictator Sarit Thanarat giving the monarchy, "a new lease of life by allowing the rebuilding of its semi-sacred and splendid image" (Anonymous 2008 [1974]:48). At that time, Thailand was a sleepy country where the great majority of its 30 million inhabitants lived in relatively isolated rural villages, worked in agriculture, and had only the most basic education. More than half a century later, the challenges posed to Thailand's political system thus do not only include improvements in the workings of its policy-generating formal institutions, and the accommodation of new strata of the population aiming to gain access to politics at the expense of the old establishment. Crucially, these challenges include, as a PAD columnist put it, "an adjustment of the monarchy according to the societal dynamics so that it may continue to co-exist with Thai society always" (Surawit 2011).

In political day-to-day practice, these structural issues, and their behavioral and ideological consequences (be it with confirmatory or critical intentions) meet with the diverse consequences and conflicting perceptions of the turbulent political events, processes, and struggles of the last more than six years.⁹⁰ This general assessment leaves little room for the assumption that, in the near future, Thailand's politics will become a case of consolidated democratic routine proceedings. Rather, we are inclined to expect a period of further conflicts and struggles about the shape of the country's political order and the way it works.

Endnotes

1 See Nelson (2004) for the reasons why the more usual expression “Thai society” is avoided in this context.

2 On political hybridity and the question of how to classify the respective systems, see Bogaards (2009), Møller and Skaaning (2010), Morlino (2009), and Wigell (2008). The word “hybrid” has recently even been used to denote elements of the Thai political system, such as “hybrid voting,” or “hybrid model of electioneering” (Anyarat 2010), to say that these elements include traditional as well as modern approaches.

3 For Thailand, Tamada (2008) features sections on “The transition phase in Thai democratization” (p. 17ff), and the “Consolidation phase” (p. 25f). The latter section starts with the statement, “Although the 1991 coup caused a disruption, Thai democratization moved into a consolidation phase in the 1990s.” By 2003 (when Tamada’s original Japanese-language book appeared), Thailand is said to have become a “Stable conservative democracy” (ibid.:259). In his “Postscript: democratization and the 2006 coup,” Tamada does not return to the transition/consolidation sequence but notes that, “as far as the opponents or antagonists to democracy are powerful, conciliation is inevitable. This coup [of 2006] attests to the importance of the opponents” (ibid.:265). Writing at roughly the same time as Tamada, Albritton and Thawilwadee (2003:21) were also confident enough to conclude that their survey-research efforts, “indicate a society well on its way to democratic consolidation to a degree that compares favorably with more established democracies throughout the world.” Marco Bünte’s assessment of the state of democracy in Thailand, made at about the same time as the other authors, was considerably more cautious: “If democratic consolidation is defined as the challenge of making new democracies secure—immune to authoritarian regression and eventual reverse waves—then it is clear that it has not yet been achieved in Thailand” (Bünte 2002:211). While Bünte’s assessment was based on Merkel’s multi-level conceptualization of democratization (Merkel 1998), this conceptual model was neither referred to in Tamada nor in Albritton and Thawilwadee. Moreover, they did not seem to have employed any other means of measurement.

4 This author currently works on the development of Thailand’s representative institution, especially concerning the constitution drafting processes in 1997 and 2007; see Nelson (2010a, 2011a).

5 This claim includes direct and indirect influence on state projects and policies. Article 83 of the 2007 constitution, for example, forces any elected government to “promote and support the implementation of the self-sufficiency [sic] economy philosophy.” This “philosophy” was devised by the king and had been propagated by his followers. Consequently, the supposed sovereign of the Thai constitutional order (according to article 3 of the 2007 constitution), namely the Thai people, were not even permitted to openly discuss this most “fundamental [economic] state policy,” unless they were prepared to spend many years in prison for *lèse majesté*. The UNDP’s 2007 report on Thailand’s human development celebrated the “sufficiency economy” and erroneously claimed that, “these ideas have been widely and intensively discussed within Thailand in recent years” (preface; United Nations Development Programme 2007). For critical assessments of the king’s approach, see Isager and Ivarsson (2010), and Walker (2010). A major push for propagating the sufficiency economy approach had been under way in Thailand’s state schools. The director-general of the Crown Property Bureau, Chirayu Isarangkul na Ayutthaya, said that by the end of 2011, “the number of schools serving as learning centres of Sufficiency Economy in Education

would reach 9,999. ... Eventually, he expects the philosophy to be taught effectively in all of Thailand's 40,000 schools" (Achara Deboonme 2011).

6 See Handley (2006, 2008), and McCargo (2005), who coined the popular phrase "network monarchy" (without using network theory or analysis, though). Earlier, Wright (1991:194) had already observed that, since the early 1950ies, "the king strengthened his network of influential clients and forged a mass following..." The monarchy's status was decisively increased during the years of military dictator Sarit Thanarat (prime minister from 1959 until his death in 1963. He wanted to lend legitimacy to his dictatorship, while the monarch wanted to reclaim ground lost after 1932, especially during the Phibun Songkhrum years. The standard academic work on this period is Thak (1979/2007).

7 A senior member of this social stratum, and former political scientist affiliated with the yellow shirts, found it distressing to know that there were experts who had studied problems such as land reform, agriculture, labor, and education, and could go about to solve them systematically. Unfortunately, the politicians were only interested in populist policies and big projects with corruption potential, while some sectors of the population still sold their votes. Consequently, people would have to continue being patient with the "costs of democracy." In conclusion, he asked, "Is this [situation] worth or not that we are called a democracy, but have this kind of rotten politics (*kanmueang namnao*)?" (Chai-anan 2011b).

8 Riggs (1966) produced the classic work on a time when the military and the bureaucracy dominated the Thai political order. He labeled it "bureaucratic polity." On the same period, Siffin (1966:vii) noted, "policies are made in the Thai government, and the policy makers have usually emerged out of bureaucratic seedbeds. There is no other place in the society from which they might come." The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) had brought the words *ammatt* and *ammattayathipattai* to the attention of a broader public as one of the main points of attack in their protests, and thus these words had become identified with this movement. In fact, however, the Royal Institute had translated Riggs' "bureaucratic polity" and the word "bureaucracy" as *amatayathipattai* (see Photchananukrom 2009:41, and Sap Ratthasat 1993:22). The word "bureaucracy" is alternatively rendered as *rabop kharatchakan pracham* (system of permanent officials) in the second source, or *rabop ratchakan* (bureaucratic system) in the first source (both *ibid.*).

9 For a brief overview, see Nelson (2011b). More detailed reports are International Crisis Group (2010), and especially Human Rights Watch (2011). Thaksin's international lawyer also produced a report (Amsterdam and Peroff 2010).

10 By May 2011, the PAD had become a small sectarian movement that had adopted a hard-line moralistic position toward the elections set for July 3, and urged voters to "Vote No" in order to demonstrate their principal rejection of Thailand's current political system, and especially its politicians. The PAD's *ASTV Phuchatkan Sutsapda* journal (May 14-20, 2011) showed a picture of a politician on its front page in which the human head was replaced by that of a lizard. The headline read, "Do not allow animals to get into the House [of Representatives]." The PAD's main billboard at Makkawan Bridge added heads of a buffalo, a tiger, a dog, and a monkey. The PAD's political party, the New Politics party, was quasi ordered by Sonthi Limthongkul on March 23, 2011, from the stage at Makkawan Bridge not to participate in the elections.

11 This point of reference was well, and somewhat threateningly, expressed in January 2010 by Gen. Prayuth Chan-ocha, who later succeeded Army Chief Anupong Paochinda, when he said, “Why should I bother with saying will there be a coup or not? I will only insist that I will do my duty to the best of my abilities for the country. I wish everybody, every political faction, would think of the national interest and put the country first. Can’t we do that?” (Wassana 2010). One might remember in this context that, “Sarit [Thanarat; military dictator from 1959-1963] and his successors sought to promote the idea that the military had a special role in leading the nation as protectors of the religion and the monarchy” (Keyes 1987:202). Which theme takes precedence within this frame of legitimation depends on the political situation. For example, McCargo (2002) distinguished security, development, and political participation as successive main themes. Since 2006, the fight against the “Thaksin regime,” coupled with the protection of the monarchy, seem to have taken precedence.

12 Anek thus envisages the Thai political order to be a mixture of patrimonial rule, rule by the best, and rule by the people.

13 Viengrat Nethipo also proposed a model with three elements, arranged in a triangle. She distinguished monarchical power (which was supported by various elements of the official state ideology), bureaucratic power (*ammatayanuphap*) or the establishment (which relied on the ideological resources of the first group; for some reason, politicians were included here), and the power of influence. In this latter component, the previously subordinated people were turning into citizens, and informal influence was being turned into formalized structures (Viengrat 2010:111-117). Moving away from authors with a university background to an example about the issue of political equality that is taken directly from the struggle, here is a quote from a speech given by probably the most popular red-shirt leader (and certainly the most powerful orator amongst them), Natthawut Saikuea, on December 30, 2008. “What’s most important for us all to remember, brothers and sisters, is that we are the salt of the earth. We are the people with no privileges. We were born on the land. We grew up on the land. Each step that we take is on this same land. We stand, with our two feet planted here, so far away from the sky. Tilting our heads fully upwards, we gaze at the sky, and we realize how far away that sky is. Standing on this land, we only have to look down to realize that we are worth no more than a handful of earth. But I believe in the power of the red shirts. I believe our number is growing day-by-day, minute-by-minute. Even though we stand on this land, and we speak out from our place among the earth, our voice will rise to the sky. Of this I have no doubt. The voice we’re making now – our cries and shouts – is the voice of people who are worth only a handful of earth. But it is the voice of the people who were born and grew up on this land, and it will rise to the level of the sky. We, the red shirts, want to say to the land and sky that we too have heart and soul. We, the red shirts, want to remind the land and sky that we too are the Thai people. We, the red shirts, want to ask the land and sky whether we have been condemned to seek, by ourselves, a rightful place to plant our feet here” (Ingawani 2010; for a video clip of this speech, see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Ck_8hCeWC0&feature=related). Again, from this perspective, Thailand has been undergoing a conflict about the question of who is the principal sovereign of the polity—a challenge to the royalist-elite order and ideology that had not existed since the demise of Pridi Phanomyong’s more citizen-oriented conception of Thai democracy in 1949.

14 Merkel (2004) calls this situation “domain democracy.” Such a democracy is characterized by the fact that it does not have full political power over certain groups in the country, typically the military, and the bureaucracy. Moreover, these groups can operate as veto actors, that is, they can deny the democratically elected representatives their right to exercise effective government. The military coup of September 2006 and the events after the elections of December 2007 are typical examples. When army commander Prayuth was criticized by three MPs of the Democrat party for his lack of achievements in fighting the insurgency in Thailand’s Malay-Muslim South, an important “young-turk” commander, Apirat Kongsompong (son of 1991-coup leader Sunthorn), came out to say, “I can’t sit idly if the army chief is criticized by politicians. I have to protect Gen Prayuth because he is a soldier loyal to the monarchy who does everything for the sake of the country and the army. I cannot leave him alone and let his reputation be damaged by these people. It’s my duty to protect him” (Wassana 2011). A short time later, Apirat led a “Show of strength to protect the monarchy” (*Bangkok Post*, April 20, 2011:3; afterwards, there were at least two other such demonstrations of military might), after Prayuth had been criticized for bringing lese-majesté charges against UDD co-leader Jatuporn Prompan.

15 Insofar as royalists are concerned, one might find an ideological distinction between the imported idea of a written constitution, and the “natural” constitution of Thai culture and custom that places the monarch above the former (see Thongchai 2005:148f.). Later, Thongchai noted that the monarchy acted like a morally superior supervisor of “normal politics.” It was located in “the upper realm of the political system, ‘above’ the political but no longer outside the system” (Thongchai 2008:20, 21).

16 Although the goals in the two rounds of constitution drafting were different—“rationalized parliament” in favor of a strong executive/effective government in 1997 (thereby expressing “an elite notion of democracy that sought to limit the powers of elected representatives,” Callahan 2005:105) against preventing another “parliamentary dictatorship” by the strongly “abusive” “Thaksin regime” in 2007—, it was still the upper level trying to regulate the political opportunities of the lower level. However, in 1997, this lower level had been included in the constitution drafting (the Constitution Drafting Assembly included 76 “elected” provincial representatives). One result was the creation of an elected but “non-political” Senate, which the exclusive elite outfit of 2007 promptly tried to undo, though their attempt was only half-successful because of widespread criticism (Nelson 2010a:125-135).

17 The earlier academic literature on politics and administration in rural Thailand supported this view. Typical statements include, “it has proved impossible to abolish the traditional primordial sentiments of the people, especially of the rural citizens. Thus in the case of Thailand, it is reasonable to expect a low degree of [political] authenticity among citizens” (Titaya 1973:23); “the Thai remain an immobilized people only slightly aware of their government. Very few make a connection between their perceived needs and the capacity of the central government to meet them” (Neher 1974:70); “Like other villagers elsewhere, Ban Chang villagers felt that national politics was not their business” (Chayan 1980:12).

18 Politicization is not the same as participation. Recently, Allen Hicken argued for, “the nascent development of partisan identities among Thai voters over the past decade” (Hicken 2010:2). His point of reference are Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai, People’s Power, and Phuea Thai parties. Yet, in addition to using the word “nascent,” Hicken

sounds another note of caution when he says, “It is too soon to definitely judge whether what we have observed in recent elections represents a sea change, or just a temporary personalized polarization of politics” (ibid.:20). An earlier attempt to introduce the concept of party identification to voting behavior in Thailand was Napisa (2005). For the situation in Songkhla province, one of the southern Thai strongholds of the Democrat party, Marc Askew identified two main elements that determine voting behavior, namely political party identification, and a range of social relationships (*phuak*, patronage, and family) (Askew 2008). Perhaps, there should be a distinction between party preferences and party identification.

19 They also have a paternalist (and politically naïve) tendency in trying to apply elements of their normative political order to the newly politicized people. For example, *Siam Rath* daily newspaper concluded an editorial by saying, “It has been many years that we have hoped that the awakening of the people’s sector (*phak prachachon*) could build a politics in which honesty (*khwamsucharit*) would dominate. However, it looks as if the forces of dishonesty (*khwamtucharit*) have progressed, and are stronger now than they used to be. The striving for personal benefits by the politicians has spread widely at all levels. The increased attention of the people’s sector to politics, instead of developing into unity (*khwamsamakkhi*) amongst the people and opposing corrupt politics, has turned out to stimulate a state of anarchy. People’s groups move in different directions, are seriously divided, and fight with each other. The people’s sector should distinguish between main and secondary problems. It should understand that the principal goal is to push ahead with political change, the main point of which is to make politics honest. As long as the main forces in the people’s sector are like ‘chips’ in the service of politicians, Thai society will certainly continue to remain in the stage of ‘chrysalis’ for a long time to come” (*Siam Rath*, April 28, 2011:2).

20 The following two citations support the need to reconceptualize this traditional but now outdated idea of the Thai voter; see chart 3 in Nelson (2010a:51; 2011).

21 Characteristically, Nick Nostitz subtitled the second volume of his *Red vs. Yellow* “Thailand’s Political Awakening” (Nostitz 2011). Columnist Suchart Srisuwan put it this way, “We know well that an authoritarian government, such as that [some people] have been trying to set up, cannot be a solution for Thailand. It is not only that the world trend would not accept it. Rather, democratic consciousness has widely and deeply been instilled in the minds of the Thai people to an extent that they would hardly accept another system of government” (Suchart 2011).

22 For an interview with Yukti on his research about the red shirts, see Woraphot (2010). For a collection of articles by non-mainstream academics on the red-shirt movement, see Kittiphong (ed., 2010). To right-wing authors, the red-shirt movement is based on “communist ideology or socialist ideology” (Phinit 2010:83). People involved in the UDD “aim to overthrow the principal institutions [NRM] and to change Thailand’s [system of] government” (ibid.). More and more “people who love nation, religion, and monarchy come out seriously to oppose [the red shirts]” (ibid.). The same author adds a racist element by stating, “There is certainly no real Thai who would do such evil, except for the Jews of the Orient [the Chinese or Sino-Thai], who have a dirty frame of mind and aim to destroy Thai society by all means in order to reach their goals of their benefits” (ibid.:86). Similar thoughts can be found in Phichaiyut (2010), which is another tract from the same publisher. Its cover shows a werewolf with red hammer and sickle on his chest. Earlier, the PAD had already ac-

cused the UDD of being a “movement to topple the monarchy” (Kong Bannathikan ASTV 2553). This book, however, strongly emphasizes the supposed role of Thaksin Shinawatra. Its ninth edition also reprints (on p. 226) the chart produced by the Center for the Resolution of Emergency Situation (CRES) during the red-shirt protests in March-May 2010 showing what they claimed was the network of people and organizations aiming to overthrow the monarchy. By the end of May 2011, about two dozen UDD supporters had court cases of *lèse majesté* against them.

23 A few decades earlier, Neher (1970:240) noted that, “Thailand’s post-revolution history suggests the direct relationship between power configurations and the content of the successive constitutions.”

24 Herrera-Lim (2009) of the Eurasia Group, in an analysis for business decision makers, put it this way, “As the past few years have shown, political shifts in Thailand are largely the result of power plays between Thai politicians, the Bangkok-based elite, the military and monarchy, with formal institutions or the constitution having little ability to check these conflicts.” In addition, a Japanese scholar rightly noted that many academics, “make too much of the formal or institutional aspect of Thai politics and pay less attention to its informal aspect” (Tamada 1991:464).

25 This section expands on a brief article that was published in German (Nelson 2009a), which in turn was based on a presentation at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand (FCCT) on May 13, 2009 (subsequently posted on the blog *New Mandala* at <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2009/05/18/political-reform-in-thailand-structural-and-ideological-issues/>).

26 Applying the label “delegative democracy” to Thailand under Thaksin seems to be wrong. “Delegative” in O’Donnell’s (1994) original sense meant that the policies of an elected president did not need to show any “resemblance to the promises of his campaign” (p. 60). Thaksin, besides not being a president, acted in the opposite direction. He demonstrated an increasingly strong sense of responsiveness towards his voters, and thus stressed the fulfillment of his electoral promises, an approach for which he was labeled a “populist” (Anek 2006, Pasuk and Baker 2009). A more accurate characterization for the democratized section of Thailand’s dual polity might be “feckless pluralism” (Carothers 2002:10). Such a system includes the existence of “significant amounts of political freedom, regular elections, and alternation of power between genuinely different political groupings.” However, “the whole class of political elites, though plural and competitive, are profoundly cut off from the citizenry, rendering political life an ultimately hollow, unproductive exercise.” Thailand might be a case where, “the alternation of power occurs between constantly shifting political groupings, short-lived parties led by charismatic individuals or temporary alliances in search of a political identity” (ibid.). Since cabinets have a high turnover rate and often comprise incompetent ministers, resulting in a lack of political leadership (certainly not under Thaksin, though it might apply to Abhisit), “successive governments are unable to make headway on most of the major problems facing the country, from crime and corruption to health, education, and public welfare generally.” From the perspective of the public, “politics is widely seen as a stale, corrupt, elite-dominated domain that delivers little good to the country and commands equally little respect” (ibid.:11).

27 Michael Connors altogether avoided references to democracy in this context. He used expressions such as “liberalizing bureaucratic-authoritarian” (1978-88), “emer-

gent liberal-conservative regimes” (1988-91, 1992-2000), and “electoral plutopopulist” (2001-06: Thaksin Shinawatra) (Connors 2009).

28 He unexpectedly died in early May 2011.

29 Merkel (2004), using an analogy to durable consumer goods, would call Thailand’s political system a “defective” democracy (for the use of a medical analogy, that sees the current Thai political system as a body afflicted with a number of serious diseases that need to be cured, see Montesano 2010). This is an unfortunately condescending and Eurocentric expression. For a defensive reaction by “postcolonial” academics who do not want to be labeled “defective,” see Koelble and LiPuma (2008).

30 For recent information on the political significance of the military, see Chambers (2009, 2010). When the emergency decree was lifted and replaced by the internal security law, *Matichon* (December 24, 2010:3) concluded a comment with the words, “All this shows that the government of Abhisit Vejjajiva really is under the protection of the Army.” Even at that time, the government-appointed committee to find out the truth about the violent dispersal of the UDD protests in May 2010 had been unable to obtain the army’s plans of their operations, and the official military-government line remained that soldiers did not kill a single protester.

31 From October 2010 through May 2011, talk about a possible coup was rife, coupled with the feeling that, given changed political circumstances (including a change in the position of army commander), this would probably not be another “softie” coup. PAD intellectual Chai-anan Samudavanija stated that since the monarchy was being challenged, and society lacked the ideal of trusting other people, the military would assume a greater role in creating social stability. Political parties and the democratic system lacked this capacity. Therefore, the people would put more trust into the leaders of the armed forces. As a result, the importance of political parties and politicians would decline. There was a high probability that, in the next ten years, the country would return to a semi-democratic system. A military coup, however, could lead to violent actions by those who opposed it (Chai-anan 2011a).

32 For example, concerning his role after the coup of September 2006, the secretary of the constitution drafting committee, legal technocrat Somkit Lertpaithoon (then dean of Thammasat University’s faculty of law, and now the rector of this university) rejected an interviewer’s suggestion that he had joined dictators. If he had not joined in drafting a new constitution, then others would have done so instead (*Matichon*, September 27, 2009; see Somkit’s chapter on the “origin and spirit” of the 2007 constitution in Somkit 2008).

33 One might well ask what this situation tells us about the political culture of the Thai establishment (whether it is called *aphichon* or *ammart*). They might combine their willingness to be used by military coup plotters with a principal rejection of coups and support for democracy. As a typical *aphichon* member on the CDC/CDA, Phairote Phromsan, noted in a meeting of the CDA on June 21, 2007, “What we need most is a democratic government that in the near future can securely develop politics and government, and that this constitution can be used for a sufficiently long period, without being changed every three or five years” (Sapha rang rathathammanun 2011: 145). Members of the red shirts, naturally, held less charitable views of the charter and, by implication, of their drafters. The UDD called it “*rathathammanun ammata-yathipattai*” (the constitution of the aristocracy/bureaucracy). It wanted it abolished

and replaced by an amended version of the 1997 constitution (Naewruam prachathipattai 2011:8; thanks to Nick Nostitz for providing me with this document). More drastically, in a critical political cabaret show performed at the UDD headquarters in the Imperial shopping mall in Lat Phrao, well-known anti-establishment activist Sombat Boonngarm-anong, “likened the coup-makers to bandits and the post-coup charter to their faeces. ‘They robbed our house and they left their excrement in the middle of the house. Then they forced the house owners to take good care of their waste,’ he said, prompting loud laughter from the audience” (*The Nation*, December 7, 2010). Somkit Lertpaithoon, mentioned in the previous endnote, and Sombat Boonngarm-anong (and the UDD activists more generally) represented two opposite poles in the contestation about Thailand’s political order, in both normative and practical terms. In political—and perhaps even more so in cultural—respects, they could not be farther apart. This is the context for the demand “to build a culture of democracy. Any reforms involving the drafting of constitutions and laws will again be superficial without an effective strategy to instill the core values of democracy in the public mind” (Suranand 2011).

34 A conservative former professor of political science, Khien Theeravit, sees this quite differently stating, “If the soldiers and the ‘*ammatt*’ supported Abhisit to become prime minister, it is the individual right of every Thai to do so. In fact, it is the duty of every Thai to promote good people who have virtue to become leaders of the country, and to prevent cheaters from governing the country. Isn’t this true?” (Khien 2011; the same author had earlier offered an apologetic account of the Suchinda government in 1992; see Khien 1997). This statement reproduces an advice of the king, which is often repeated by bureaucrats. It approximately says that one cannot make every person a good one, but one can promote good people to assume governing positions and prevent bad people from gaining positions of power. As for the army under Prayuth Chan-ocha, it has acquired a new field of activity for itself, namely bringing charges of *lèse majesté* against political dissidents (see below). During the protests in 2010, Prime Minister Abhisit sent a rather ambiguous message to the public by holing up in a military camp, ostensibly for security reasons.

35 For some intellectual history of “Thainess,” see Saichol (2002, and N.d.).

36 In the concluding sentence of their first announcement, the coup plotters of 1991 stated, “To maintain the security of the three institutions—the Nation, Religion and Monarchy—the three armed forces, police and civilians together had to seize power” (Announcement No. 1, 1991). When the leader of the 2006 coup, Sonthi Boonyaratkalin prepared for the election of July 3, 2011, in his new role as the chairperson of the Matubhum party, he said in an interview, “On the day I staged the coup, I was the one who protected the constitutional monarchy. If I had ruined democracy, people would not have handed roses [to soldiers] on Sept 20, 2006” (King-oua 2011). Talking with a foreign reporter, Sonthi chose a different angle saying, “I’m glad we did it. If we hadn’t, Thailand might no longer be a democracy” (Marshall 2011).

37 Pakorn also produced a 176-page Thai-language “research report” on the subject (Pakorn 2008).

38 Since the transfer of the concept of “planning” to Thailand in the earlier 1970ies, national, regional/provincial, and local authorities must prepare all sorts of documents that carry the name “plan” on their front pages. Alas, this does not mean that such

documents are the outcome of any planning processes. Mainly, they are exercises in bureaucracy.

39 It is worth noting that Sriracha made this statement *after* the Thaksin government, since 2001, had conquered the hearts and minds of the Thai voters by devising and implementing policies that the people saw as “directly concerning and affecting” them.

40 Criticism of political parties in the West often targets their nature as formal organizations (Luhmann 2000:233f.), which goes back to the work on party oligarchies and functionaries by Robert Michels at the beginning of the 20th century, or “the dominance of the party-state principle at the cost of other concepts of representative or participatory democracy” (Petersen 2010:290). In Thailand, however, perennial criticism is directed at the lack of organization, ideological identity, and policy orientation. The connection of this issue with the quality of democracy is sketched in the concluding sentences of a book that analyzes the institutionalization and performance of political parties in transitional democracies of Eastern Europe and Latin America. The editors write, “Democracy is most appreciated and best consolidated in those places where party politics is most institutionalized. Wherever party politics is more weakly institutionalized, political inequality tends to be greater, commitment to pluralism less certain, clientelism and corruption more pronounced, and populist demagoguery a greater temptation. In essence, without party, democracy’s hold is more tenuous” (Webb and White 2009:369). Importantly, in the analysis of democratization in Europe between the 1830s to the 1970s, political parties “emerge as crucial actors” (Capoccia and Ziblatt 2010:949). One wonders what the role of Thai-style political parties in the active development and promotion of democratic institutions during the past few decades might have been. The persistent criticism of political parties, factions, cliques, candidates, MPs, and politicians claims that these actors undermine rather than support the proper functioning of democratic institutions. One does not need to be a hard-line anti-politician moralist in the PAD camp to find more than a grain of truth in the following statement, “The politicians’ and their cliques’ short-term interests are what really destroys democracy, because this is not merely an accusation by the authoritarian side used to destroy the faith in democracy. It also creates legitimacy for those groups that do not respect the decisions of the people” (Suchart 2011). Still, it is a personalized view of Thai politics that does not look at the structural conditions that make the complained-about actions rational from the perspective of the actors. Standard references to Thai political parties are Kramol 1982, McCargo 1997, Ockey 2003, and Siripan 2006).

41 In the run-off to the 2011 general election, *Khao Sot* daily newspaper published an article pointing out that most of the well-known political parties running in the contest were what it called “provincial parties” (*phak changwat*). Such parties were only strong in one particular province and some areas in their vicinity. However, they were unable to expand even to the regional level, not to mention the national level. The paper listed the following parties (that are usually integrated by a single leader or a small coalition of leaders): Phak Phalang Chon (Chonburi, Sonthaya Khunpluem), Phak Bhumjaithai (Buriram, Newin Chidchob), Phak Pracharaj (Sakaew, Sanoh Thienthong), Phak Chart Thai Pattana (Suphanburi, Banharn Silapa-archa), Phak Chart Pattana Phuea Phaendin (Nakorn Ratchasima, Suwat Lipapanlop), Phak Matuphum (Malay-Muslim provinces in the South, Sondhi Boobyaratkalin), and the Social Action party (Khon Kaen, Suwit Khunkitti) (*Khao Sot*, May 9, 2011:6). Even though the

Democrat and Phuea Thai parties were much bigger than their provincial-level competition, one could not really say that they exhibited, “equal strength across various geographic units within a nation.” After all, the Democrats had their undisputed stronghold in the South, while Phuea Thai dominated the Northeast.

42 Even if most established democracies have developed a well educated stock of professional and expert politicians, the “growing complexity of issues” puts the representatives’ technical-political competence under heavy stress, and thus potentially limits the MPs’ “capacities to stand for and act on the interests of those they represent” (Urbinati and Warren 2008:390). Thailand’s House of Representative does have many standing committees. However, they mainly serve as “petition committees.” In addition, Thai MPs must for reasons of electoral success be more interested in constituency work, while acting as legislators in deliberating the details of draft laws will not be rewarded (or even noticed) by votes from their constituents (Stern 2006:75). If parliamentary standing committees in principle facilitate, “specialization and the development of expertise,” and if, “The extent to which legislatures become repositories of policy expertise ... varies enormously” (Carey 2006:432, 433), then the ordinary Thai MPs and their House might well be ranked more to the bottom of the range. One would like to see empirical work that builds on Stern (as well as on the much older work of Kanok 1987, and the broad survey by Rüländ et al. 2005) but provides deeper information on the actual work and perceptions of Thai MPs, both in the House and in their constituencies (along the lines of Schöne 2010). A nearly commonsensical statement bears repeating, “There are two master contexts in which all legislative politicians work—home and the capital city. They can be observed in both places” (Fenno 1986:4). Richard Fenno is the author of the landmark study *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*, which appeared in 1978.

43 It seems that the kind of constitutional policy-making mentioned above, the great weight of bureaucrats and technocrats in this area, and Thaksin’s “populist” policy-making style (which has also been adopted by the Democrat party under Abhisit) all result from the absence of a stable parliamentary system featuring nationalized and institutionalized political parties, and thus a regularized and inclusive process of producing public policy options and proposing them to the public.

44 On the issue of political recruitment, see Rahat (2007, 2009).

45 In Nelson (2009c:123, fn. 82), I had by way of a trial suggested that, regarding the type of representatives that we primarily find here, Thailand might be seen as a case of the “clique delegate model.” This suggestion was informed by Pippa Norris’ distinction of the “party government model” and the “district delegate model” (Norris 1996:184f.). From this perspective, the theoretical (collective, national-level) sovereignty of the Thai people is not only limited by the factually superior role of the *aphichon*, but also by the rather limited election-based representation of the Thai people in the state through parliament.

46 The qualifying words are references to the Democrat party, which exhibits a mix of formal and *phuak* politics in some southern provinces. For a case study of Songkhla, see Askew (2008).

47 The first general issue across time and space concerns the reaction of pre-existing socio-economic and political structures on emerging formal democratic institutions, such as political parties or elections. Regarding Southeast Asia, Jayasuriya and Rodan

(2007:777) state that informal structures, such as patronage, money politics, and corruption, “cannot be separated from the formal institutions,” because they have “captured” them. For nineteenth-century Germany, Ziblatt (2009:18) notes that “preexisting social power” had tried to make newly introduced elections “endogenous” to themselves. The second general issue is how formal institutions eventually gain the upper hand in this struggle.

48 On an earlier period (the mid-70ies to 1982) Andrew Turton used a class-analytical approach by distinguishing a local upper class (civil servants, traders, village elite: 5-9 percent) and the lower class (medium-level farmers, small-scale peasants, landless laborers: 92-95 percent). The upper class was said to constitute a power bloc that monopolized all positions in local political-administrative institutions, and at the same time suppressed the poor masses. In the absence of political parties, ideological domination and intimidation stifled the self-organization of the poor. However, Turton also saw signs of beginning self-organization, mostly supported by external forces, such as NGOs (Turton 1989).

49 This is the voters’ equivalent of political party nationalization as defined by Kasuya and Moenius (2008) above.

50 For a not entirely successful academic attempt to grapple with the various meanings of “populism,” see Mizuno and Pasuk (eds., 2009).

51 After the events of May 1992, Anek Laothamatas wrote an article with the title, “Sleeping Giant Awakens? The Middle Class in Thai Politics” (Anek 1993). It seems that, with the red-shirts/UDD, the much bigger “sleeping giant” of the lower classes has now been awakened. After the 2005 elections, well-known commentator Chang Noi had this to say on Thaksin and TRT, “They have found a sleeping tiger and stirred it awake. Some may not like what Thaksin is doing with this tiger. But there are two important things to learn. You can’t make a deal with a tiger in a smoky backroom, and there’s no point giving a tiger a lecture” (Chang Noi 2005).

52 What follows here can be seen as a contribution to what Prawase Wasi called for, namely a comparative study of democratic countries that retain monarchs, such as the United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Japan. Prawase notes that in these countries, unlike in Thailand, the monarchies are not issues of political contention. He suggests studying the relationships of the monarchs with the respective political systems, the legal situations, and the political customs (*Lok wann*, June 3, 2011:06A). Arguably, the most important component of Prawase’s research proposal should be a systematic analysis of the situation in Thailand in order to compare it with the situations in the countries he mentioned. Unfortunately, Prawase did not say how such a study could be done in Thailand given the *lèse majesté* articles and the Computer Crime Act. Coincidentally, the mass circulation *Thai Rath* published a column on the problems of European monarchies just one day after Prawase’s statements were printed. The column was headlined, “The movement to undermine the dynasties” (*Thai Rath*, June 4, 2011:2). The main subject of the column was Sweden’s King Carl XVI Gustaf, whose family has “Close Royal Relations” with the Thai royal family (quoted from “National Day of Sweden,” special advertising supplement, *Bangkok Post*, June 6, 2011:B6). On June 11, *Thai Rath* used a special report produced by the Associated Press to write about the fate of Cambodia’s King Narodom Simuni. The article was headlined “Prisoner in the royal palace” (*Thai Rath*, June 11, 2011:2).

53 A recent modestly critical book on the monarchy, edited by two foreign academics and published in Denmark, is Ivarsson and Isager (2010). This publication adds to Paul Handley's well-known critical biography of King Bhumiphol (Handley 2006). While Handley's book is banned in Thailand (but circulates underground, both in English and in a Thai translation), Ivarsson and Isager's book was on sale, at least in branches of Asia Books, though not at Kinokuniya. On May 26, 2011, a man with dual Thai-US citizenship was arrested and detained on *lèse majesté* charges, reportedly because he had posted "a link on his blog four years ago to a banned book about His Majesty the King" (*Bangkok Post*, May 28, 2011:2; see also Pravit 2011c), that is, Handley's biography.

54 PM Abhisit did announce that more caution would be applied to *lèse majesté* cases. Yet, "Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva has done little to implement his fist-year pledge to review 'over enthusiastic' applications of lese majeste law" (Achara 2011a).

55 The PAD Senator Khamnun Sitthisaman also noted with respect to *lèse majesté* that, "Article 112 of the Criminal Code is a stipulation concerning national security" (Khamnun 2011). This view goes back to the "revitalization of the monarchy under Sarit Thanarat" (Streckfuss 1995:472). People who happen not to be absorbed in royalist security ideology—be they Thai or foreign—might find it quite incomprehensible in which way those individuals who had peacefully expressed opinions that "earned" them accusations of or long-term jail sentences for *lèse majesté* could possibly have "threatened national security."

56 On April 4, 2011, Prayuth proved his reputation by initiating *lèse majesté* charges against UDD leaders Jatuporn Prompan (Phuea Thai party-list MP), Wichian Khaokham (Phuea Thai MP from Udon Thani), and Suporn Atthawong ("Rambo Isarn," former MP from Nakorn Ratchasima) for statements made in their speeches on the occasion of a red-shirt mass demonstration at the Democracy Monument commemorating the first anniversary of the crackdown of April 2010 (*Bangkok Post*, April 13, 2011:3). Prayuth was reported as having said that the 60 million Thais who revered (*thoethun*) the monarchy should come out and "oppose this group that had harmed the country and the institution [monarchy] so that it would not do so again" (*Post Today*, April 13, 2011:A5). Tharit Pengdit, head of the Department of Special Investigation, dutifully broadened the scope of Prayuth's allegations by stating, "Since other UDD leaders and supporters did not protest against Mr Jatuporn while he was speaking, this behaviour may be considered as an act of collusion" (*Bangkok Post*, April 13, 2011:3). This issue was also a topic in assessing the situation after the elections of July 2011. A conservative commentator in the *Bangkok Post* noted, "The loyalty or disloyalty problem will continue to haunt the Pheu Thai Party and Thaksin himself during the electioneering period and also after the election. Unless this question is resolved *to the satisfaction of the establishment, the military in particular*, there is a slim chance that Phue Thai will be able to form the government even if it wins the election. Or even if it manages to win more than half of the House seats and form a single-party government, it may have to start a countdown from Day One in the office" (Veera 2011a; italics added). According to a pink-colored newspaper advertisement placed by the army, three days after Prayuth had initiated the *lèse majesté* charges mentioned above, he presided over the opening of a project called "National Love Song" (*botphlaeng rak haeng phaendin*). It aimed to glorify (*chaloemphrakiat*) the king for the completion of his seventh cycle on December 5, 2011. Another goal of this project was, "to give every Thai person the opportunity to express their loyalty to

the institutions of the nation, religion, and monarchy, which are the center of unity of the Thai people. It is hoped that the project will create love and unity amongst people of all quarters” (*Khom Chat Luek*, June 8, 2011:16). This project even had a web site—<http://www.thetreeofloves.com/main.aspx>. Finally, the *Bangkok Post*’s front-page headline on June 15 read, “Gen Prayuth urges voters to back the ‘good people.’” The subheading was, “Lèse majeste ‘rampant’, claims military leader.” Prayuth’s attempt to intervene in the elections of July 3, 2011, was broadcast on TV channels 5 and 7.

57 In a long and touching statement going far beyond the issue of *lèse majesté*, a Thai social activist put what Evans said this way, “From the day I was born the Royal Family had my love, but slowly they have been losing that love. If the Palace makes me choose between loving the Royal Family and loving the Thai people, I can only choose the latter. Nothing and nobody can compete with my love for the people of Thailand” (Yunya 2010). Regarding *lèse majesté* being counterproductive, Streckfuss (2007) quoted the king as having said in his 2005 birthday address, “If you rule out all criticism as a violation, the damage is done to the King.” Borwornsak Uwanno ([2009]), a well-known academic member of the royalist technocratic establishment (*aphichon*), and secretary-general of the supposedly democracy-promoting King Prajhipok’s Institute, defended *lèse majesté* as a “distinctive character of Thai democracy,” but the *ajarn* also quoted the entire relevant passage from the king’s speech used by Streckfuss. Meanwhile, the latter has published a book-length treatment and another article on this topic (Streckfuss 2010a, 2010b). Nidhi Eoseewong, in his well-known article on “The Thai Cultural Constitution” of 1991, noted, “If the section in the constitution on the king were totally removed, it would not shake the Thai monarchy at all, because this section is securely in the cultural constitution already” (Nidhi 2003:4). He added, “the ‘sacredness’ of the Thai monarchy still persists in the thinking of most Thai people. ... In this respect the Thai monarchy is secure because this is laid down clearly in the Thai cultural constitution” (*ibid.*:5). Twenty years later, such an assertion would seem unrealistic, for which the number of *lèse majesté* cases, state repression of critical mass media, and the reportedly widespread change of political attitudes among UDD members are indicators. Nidhi himself, in an article published sixteen years after his “cultural constitution,” also recognized this decline in respect for the monarchy, and/or a change in the way people in the Northeast and the North would be loyal to the monarchy—Thaksin Shinawatra had entered the picture, even from the perspective of the coup plotters (Nidhi 2007:n.p.; in this paper, Nidhi also responded on Anek’s idea of a balance between monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy). It came as no surprise then that, when giving a speech at a public hearing about the 2012-2016 national security plan, the former secretary-general of the National Security Council, Gen. Charan Kullavanijaya, demanded, “The NSC and the government must draw up a public relations campaign to counter anti-monarchy propaganda and internet smear campaigns” (*Bangkok Post*, July 30, 2011:3). Sounding like a cold-war warrior, he claimed that the various red-shirt groups, especially upcountry and including the UDD’s political training school and the foundation of politically disqualified former TRT executive board members, were all “subverting [the monarchy] domestically, while being linked to subversion from abroad. They use an information war to conduct propaganda and agitation” (*Matichon*, July 31, 2011:2). Charan was also a deputy speaker of the “National Legislative Assembly” appointed by the military coup plotters of 2006.

58 For articles on their proposals, see *Lok wann* daily (March 28 and 31, 2011), and *Lok wann* *wansuk* (no. 305, April 2-8, 2011; this issue features *Ajarn* Worachet on its front page). *Nation sudsapta* (vol. 19, number 986, April 2011:8) featured a fair full-page article on the initiative of this group. The “official” texts can be downloaded from the group’s web site, www.enlightened-jurists.com (see Nitirat 2011, and Bantuek 2011). Members on the opposite side of the political spectrum certainly detest the activities of this group. The staunchly royalist *Post Today* (the Thai-language sister publication of the *Bangkok Post*) printed a column in which the right-leaning author referred to Worachet and colleagues as “a group of false/fake academics” (*nak-wichakan chomplom*) (Phumrat 2011a). After the Phuea Thai Party won the elections of July 3, 2011, the same author (a previous director of the National Intelligence Bureau) published a column listing important things that Yingluck Shinawatra must not do when prime minister. Among these issues were that she must not support any attempts to derail pending cases of *lèse majesté*. Rather, she had to apply the law resolutely. In addition, she had to refrain from amending the *lèse majesté* article 112 of the Criminal Code (Phumrat 2011c). What to western observers, who are not emotionally and ideologically involved in the royalist discourse, might appear to be reasonable and obvious suggestions for a democratizing reform of *lèse majesté*, authors such as Phumrat (not to mention Prayuth, the PAD, or the Democrat party) perceive as serious threats to the inviolability of the monarch, and thus to national security. They counter this perceived threat with considerable emotional, ideological, and legal zeal. Of course, the struggle between these groups does not take place on the level playing field of deliberative and democratic discourses in the public sphere. After all, the second group has the state’s means of intimidation, enforcement, and punishment on their side, and they use them liberally.

59 In early 2009, the present author published a brief German-language article on *lèse majesté* that concluded, “The foreseeable increase of the number of Thais and foreigners sentenced to long prison terms for *lèse majesté* can only harm Thailand’s recognition as a democracy” (Nelson 2009b:41).

60 In the same edition, the paper summarized responses by Thammasat University historian Assoc. Prof. Dr. Somsak Jeamteerasakul on him reporting to Nang Loeng police station, after the army had brought *lèse majesté* charges against him. One of his statements read, “Article 112 is being used indiscriminately like a blanket, against anyone who refers to the monarchy, without any attempt to look at what was actually said, or the purpose of those discussions” (Achara 2011b). Again, some weeks later, one of *Bangkok Post*’s regular columnists noted that, “The sharp increase in lese majeste cases—over 547 cases between 2005 and 2009—speaks volumes about the widespread abuse” (of article 112). He concluded his column with the words, “The pressure for an open debate on the law and possibly a legal review, is bound to increase in the face of mounting abuses of this law. And sooner rather than later would be better for our revered institution” (Veera 2011b).

61 In March 2011, Thanthawut Taweewarodomkul was sentenced to 10 years in prison based on the *lèse majesté* article 112 of the Criminal Code, and an additional three years based on the Computer Crimes Act. On May 18, 2011, Thailand’s very own National Human Rights Commission, in its subcommittee on civil and political rights, held a discussion on *lèse majesté* (*Prachatai*, May 21, 2011; see also Achara 2011c, and Pavin 2011b). After the *Bangkok Post* had published quite a number of articles critical of *lèse majesté*, the paper seemed to have felt the need to counter any doubts

as to its “loyalty” by publishing an editorial that reproduced the official narrative, headlined, “King of hearts, beloved of all” (*Bangkok Post*, May 26, 2011:10). Reiterating the themes of unity and selflessness against the bad politicians, the editorial concluded, “For most of us, the King has always been a source of inspiration and our symbol of unity. On countless occasions he has reminded the Thai people of the merit of being united. Sadly, his well-intentioned advice has often fallen on the deaf ears of many politicians, who are more interested in their self-serving agendas. ... his advice concerning unity and selflessness must be taken seriously if we want to see our nation healed of its worst political divide and progress forward in peace, harmony and prosperity.” In an implicit response, Pravit Rojanaphruk stated that, “when most mass media keep on making a simplistic and fictitious portrayal of the current state of Thai society and politics, especially regarding facts and the issue of people’s relationship to the monarchy, they are doing a disservice to society and only hindering Thailand from ever maturing” (Pravit 2011d).

62 It is understood that representatives of the Vietnamese communist party will also come up with justifications of why their case is too special to have universal norms be applied to their country. Regarding the situation in Thailand, former senator Jon Ungphakorn noted, “Big Brother thinks we (the Thai people as a whole) are too fragile to be exposed to the world of freedom of thought and free expression of political views. I am sure Big Brother believes we’re not ready for democracy, either. Sad” (Jon 2011a).

63 Regarding NRM’s general function, one might use a comparative perspective and say that this ideology “reflected the power of patrimonial elites and the corporatist state to shape public discourse and stymie autonomous organizing in civil society” (Baiocchi 2006:286). NRM can be seen as indicating the existence of “powerful residues of a nonliberal political culture” (ibid.:288), and of reflecting pre-democratic forms of government in Thailand—absolute monarchy, and military dictatorship. Niels Mulder spoke of “the ‘dominant mentality’, at least as seen and interpreted by government and bureaucracy” (Mulder 2000:110), and he analyzed how this political-cultural model was reflected in school textbooks that aimed to make the next generation internalize it (see also Mulder 1997). Thus, this “conception has the potential of terrorizing the individual subjects of the state” (Mulder 2000:113), especially, one might add, since “in Thai classrooms, students learn to operate as one, as a compliant unit, all uncritically following teacher and text” (Wallace 2003:25). Sanitsuda Ekachai observed that, “Differences ... are viewed as threats to be subdued in a culture that values uniformity, obedience and social hierarchy” (Sanitsuda has had a number of columns in *Bangkok Post* over the past years bemoaning how difficult it was to fight against the state school system’s sustained efforts to “brainwash” her little daughter). Instead of being agents for change, schools had become the institution that passes on traditional values that endorse inequality and submission from one generation to another” (Sanitsuda 2010). A few months later, Sanitsuda added that Thailand suffered from “fierce authoritarianism that permeates every atom of our society, including ourselves ... Thinking differently is not only discouraged, it is condemned as a challenge to authority. ... [School is] where militarism is drilled into our psyche since childhood. The same for the deeply entrenched belief that we have to conform, to be part of the group, in order to survive and succeed” (Sanitsuda 2011). Michael Connors mirrored Mulder’s view, though he used the vocabulary of a different theoretical tradition, stating that this trinity (which he saw as an essential part of “Thai [royalist]

liberalism”) served as a “disciplinary ideology that promotes the production of a citizen-body committed to elite constructions of nation, king and religion” (sic) (Connors 2008:145). Besides apparent pressure for changes from below, since the NRM ideology was “self-consciously forged to buttress Sarit’s autocracy” (Anderson 1977:22), an obvious question for the *aphichon* should be whether it was not obsolete in a democratizing political order.

64 If democratic ideals, “secure their essential character from confidence in the ability of ordinary men and women to govern themselves and shape their futures” (March and Olsen 1995:2), then such confidence certainly had been in short supply as far as the Thai establishment was concerned.

65 In this context, it is interesting to hear reports about households in northern and northeastern provinces removing pictures of the king and the queen, which were long thought to be obligatory gestures of support for NRM. In a report, the International Crisis Group noted, “It appears that anti-monarchy sentiment has become more pronounced among the Red Shirts. In the North and the North East, a few Red Shirts admitted they no longer had the pictures of the King and the Queen displayed in their houses. Public expression of resentment against the widely revered monarchy has become more explicit, though still expressed in coded language” (International Crisis Group 2011:2f). Moreover, a research team from Thammasat University collecting data on the red-shirt movement in Chiang Mai province noted, “After the events of April-May 2010, there has been a frightening change. The red shirts have stopped scolding the Democrat party and PM Abhisit Vejjajiva, because they felt that both were merely puppets. They now instead scold the people behind [what had happened]” (Arin and Phongphiphat 2011). After the quote, the authors mentioned a key code word that had also been heard at many UDD protest rallies, and was even used by speakers on stage, namely “*ta sawang*” (approximately meaning that the events of April and May 2010 had “enlightened” the people—made their eyes wide open—about the country’s political realities).

66 As one result of this point of view, the electoral interplay between politicians and voters can lead to “populist” policies (whether as Thaksin’s *prachaniyom* or in the form of Abhisit’s *prachawiwat*) that might be responsive to the voters’ needs and interests, as it should be in a democracy, but harm the “country’s interests.” In this case, the establishment might feel the need to enact their role as guardians against the “unprincipled” behavior of democratic actors, and their bad effects on the higher good of the nation. In the case of policies, these guardians’ solution is the *rat sawatikan* (welfare state), part of which they imposed on elected governments as a mandate when they had the post-coup opportunity to push their policy agenda via drafting the 2007 constitution.

67 On May 6, 2011, the *Bangkok Post* printed a big picture on its front page showing “monarchy protection volunteers,” mostly women, all dressed in pink shirts with scout-style ties, many holding pictures of king and queen, or waving small national and royal paper flags. The ministry of interior had mobilized them at the district levels of three provinces, and bussed them to the main stadium at Thammasat University’s Rangsit campus. The caption speaks of 35,000 participants. A smaller picture in *Post Today* (May 6, 2011:A6) showed a sign saying, “joining the forces of unity” (*ruam phalang samakkhi*), while the caption said that this event was a “ceremony for the joining of the forces of unity.” May 5 was Coronation Day, and so massive compul-

sory mobilizations of state-sector personnel, under the leadership of the respective governors, were supposed to take place in all provinces. One might keep in mind in this context that the interior ministry was the fiefdom of Newin Chidchob and his Bhumjaithai party. Having those volunteers would come in handy during election campaign times. In the period prior to the dissolution of the House, Newin started another campaign with full-page color advertisements in newspapers (*Post Today* and *Bangkok Post*, April 6, 2011). The theme was “Our house loves His Majesty the King” (*ban chan rak phrachaoyuhua*). People were asked to show their “loyalty” (*khwamchongrakphakdi*) to the monarch by adorning their houses with a picture of the king of which the party had produced 1.5 million copies for countrywide distribution. Political observers were justified to look at this as a particularly gross way of instrumentalizing the king for the political-electoral benefit of the Bhumjaithai party. Newin seemed to have sensed this reaction, because he came out and rejected the idea that, “this activity was drawing the monarchy into playing politics” (*ASTV Phuchatkan*, April 6, 2011:11; similar *Matichon*, April 8, 2011:14).

68 This political-philosophical principle, however, should not be pushed toward a normative idealism that would collide with the empirical citizen. Such normative idealism, as evident in the discourse of the Thai *aphichon*, will never become reality (not even in the statements of members of the *aphichon* about political issues), because it is impossible. Lau and Redlawsk note that, “five decades of behavioral research in political science have left no doubt that only a tiny minority of the citizens in any democracy actually live up to these ideals. Interest in politics is generally weak, discussion is rare, political knowledge on the average pitifully low, and few people actively participate in politics beyond voting” (Lau and Redlawsk 2006:72). Yet, the authors do not doubt that Western democracies are truly democratic. Rather, they argue that, “Such standards are unrealistically high and ... not necessary for the average citizen” (ibid.:73). More than four decades earlier, Almond and Verba had already noted that a lack of active citizens did not so much indicate a failure of democracy in the West than it reflected the fact that “the standards have been set unreasonably high. Given the complexity of political affairs, given the other demands made upon an individual’s time, and given the difficulty of obtaining information necessary for making rational political decisions, it is no wonder that the ordinary citizen is not the ideal citizen” (Almond and Verba 1963:475). These long-standing insights (however, see Somin 2004 for a critical perspective) should prompt the Thai establishment to reconsider their defensive argument that the people were not mature enough for democracy, especially after national-level political interests and politicization have increased tremendously in the past decade. “Political maturity” should not be confused with making the people share the elite’s views.

69 One could thus say that the sovereignty of the Thai people and their democracy, which ideally was expressed in the constitution, was sandwiched between a pre-democratic nationalist-royalist ideology and the highest office holder in Thailand’s old stratified socio-political order. Only for creating a contrast, one could say that the construction in Thailand was certainly quite different from what the democratic and citizen-based idea of “constitutional patriotism” would suggest (Müller 2007, 2010). From this perspective, protecting the integrity of the democratic constitution—as the guarantee of the people’s political sovereignty, equality, and freedom—should be the most important value for the citizens of a country.

70 Similarly, PAD academic Pramote Nakornthap noted that, “When we have tried to help ourselves and have reached the end of our wisdom and capabilities already, we Thais are luckier than people in other countries, because we still always have a last resort, namely His Majesty the King” (Pramote 2010:3).

71 In September 2009, the UDD paper *Khwanching wan ni* (Truth Today) had published an article headlined, “Creating a new Thai state.” The article also used the phrase, “democracy which has the king as head of state,” but then added a crucial qualification that is unacceptable to the royalists: “in the same way as the United Kingdom and Japan” (*Khwanching wan ni*, 3 [24], September 18-21, 2009:7).

72 Hewison and Kengkij (2010) manage the improbable by writing about the ideological construct of “Thai-style democracy” without even mentioning its supposed key cultural component, namely “nation, religion, monarchy,” which functions as the “official Thai state ideology” (Murashima 1988).

73 The NRM ideology does not only discipline ordinary people, but also the elite and members of the state bureaucracy. In fact, the reproduction of elite identity and the cohesion of the state apparatus might well be the key function of NRM. However, the degree of practical disciplinary effects (motivational impact generated by implementation), or real “commitment,” regarding both the people and the elite, might be rather limited, and a mere show of commitment might mostly suffice; this might also take shape as a “spectacle of loyalty,” or “spectacle of reference” (Askew 2011). Lisa Wedeen, dealing with the Asad cult in Syria, also used the word “disciplinary device,” which worked to generate “a politics of public dissimulation in which citizens acted as if they revered their leader” (Wedeen 2002:723). She expressly rejected the notion that this cultural device had produced legitimacy, charisma, or hegemony (because all three concepts imply that cultural content is implanted as motivations in the people’s minds). Rather, the “insinuation of formulaic rhetoric and self-serving state symbolism into the daily lives of citizens habituated people to perform the gestures and pronounce the slogans constitutive of their obedience” (ibid.). Credible threats to punish non-compliance or resistance played their part (ibid.). This is not to say that NRM has not had tremendous impact on the political orientations and emotions of many Thais, especially on the older generation that has experienced the revitalization of the monarchy since Sarit. Meechai Ruchuphan, a distinguished member of the *aphichon* noted, “Older people like us are wholeheartedly loyal to the institution and realize its contribution to the nation, but younger people can be easily led” (*Bangkok Post*, June 15, 2010:3). However, since deviating views have been suppressed and invisible in public, while NRM is constantly promoted in public, it is not easy to gauge its substantive spread and depth, including changes.

74 Much earlier, Erik Cohen had noted that, “The relationship between the constitution, as an express symbol of the people’s sovereignty, and the three ‘pillars,’ as the basic symbols of Thai collective identity, thus remained unexplicated” (Cohen 1991: 33). During the run-up to the election of July 3, 2011, the editorial of a royalist Thai-language newspaper put its understanding of this co-existence as follows, “The election process should promote the stability of the country’s three main institutions, namely nation, religion, and the monarchy. If there are any election candidates who destroy the stability of nation, religion, monarchy, those people are unsuitable of being representatives of the people” (*Siam Rath*, May 20, 2011:2). This was an obvious call not to vote for the Pheu Thai party. A royalist columnist in *Post Today*, Phumrat

Thaksatiphong, expressed another election-related concern about this relationship. He expanded the scope of his mistrust to all elected politicians, writing, “The people do not trust that the politicians can protect the nation. If this is so, who then will fulfill the duty to protect nation, religion, and monarchy, which combine to make the country exist safely, strongly, with honor, and dignity? Today, the future of the country lies in your [the voters] hands. Do not make us have to sit together grieving and crying afterwards” (Phumrat 2011b).

75 This was the only “cleavage” that had been clearly translated into a political-party organization, without having matured into a nationwide category, though. Much later, the PAD’s “New Politics Party” was also decidedly pro-monarchist but added a strong opposition to the “Thaksin regime” and to the Thai electoral structures and their consequences more broadly (Nelson 2010b).

76 See Supalak (2006), and Nelson (2007b).

77 The UDD was aligned with the Phuea Thai party, which arose to collect the remnants of the People’s Power party after the Constitutional Court had dissolved it in late 2008. The PPP had succeeded Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai party after the coup-appointed Constitutional Tribunal had disbanded it in 2007. While the UDD strongly opposed the Democrats, the PAD, and “*amatayathipattai*” (which translates as “bureaucracy” but more broadly refers to the exercise of power by the Bangkok-based establishment without submitting to democratic accountability), its main selling and rallying point had been Thaksin. It remained to be seen whether the Phuea Thai party and the UDD could develop into a collective political organization on the other side of the cleavage. In putting together its party list for the 2011 election, the Phuea Thai party placed many red-shirt leaders in promising positions, which prompted *The Nation* newspaper to publish an editorial headlined, “Red shirts on Pheu Thai list mocks peace talk. Leading reds are charged with being party to terrorist acts last year; ranking them highly is a provocation” (*The Nation*, May 22, 2011:7a). Surely, the red shirts also saw it as a gross provocation that the Democrats made Abhisit Vejjajiva—after all he had “achieved” in April and May 2010—their candidate for the position of prime minister, though this did not prompt the paper to publish a similar editorial.

78 Piyabut (2010) lists Spain, Belgium, Denmark, and The Netherlands as countries where the king, upon assuming office, must deliver an oath of loyalty to the constitution in parliament (that is, to the representatives of the sovereign—the people). According to Piyabut, the principle of “The king can do no wrong” (that he cannot be held responsible, that he cannot be violated, and that nobody can sue him) only holds as long as the monarch’s actions do not clearly violate the constitution. In such a case, his prerogatives and his protection would cease. It is interesting to note that, in Piyabut’s examples, the monarchs have to be loyal to the people via their constitutions, while in Thailand, the people have to be loyal (*chongrakphakti*) to the monarchy, and NRM.

79 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E. 2550 (2007). The phrasing in the quote was first used in the constitution of 1997. Compare the equivalent stipulation in the German “Basic Law” (Article 20 III), “All public authority emanates from the people. It shall be exercised by the people through elections and referendums and by specific legislative, executive and judicial bodies” (Basic Law 1995:22).

80 It was not as bizarre as one would like to think when Pavin Chachavalpongpun reported, “The Thai ambassador to Singapore ... said in 2006 to diplomats who worked in the embassy, ‘If you criticize me, this can be regarded as you criticising the King, since I am the representative of His Majesty.’ This exemplified how the monarchy can be exploited to preserve the power position of an individual” (Pavin 2011a). It also demonstrated, one may add, a fundamental misunderstanding of constitutional government by a supposedly highly educated person.

81 The distinction between stratified and functional differentiation follows a common typology used in the sociological theory of society (e.g., see Luhmann 1997, volume two, chapter 4).

82 On attempts by some groups of political actors to adapt the monarchy to a democratizing polity (“the emergence of a Thai liberal political settlement”), or to adapt the emerging democratic order to the pre-existing monarchical polity, or to merge these two bases of legitimacy in what he calls “royal liberalism,” see Connors (2008, quote on p. 144).

83 From the perspective of “reconciliation,” one might then say, “Power not shared will be challenged, leading to more violent confrontation. This is the root cause of the ongoing conflict” (Suranand 2011).

84 Similarly, long-time human rights advocate and lecturer, Sriprapha Petchmeesri (Thailand’s representative at the ASEAN human-rights mechanism) also maintained that, “We should make the [monarchy] issue something that can be discussed openly. Anything that is part of society ought to be able to be discussed” (Pravit 2011b).

85 Of the very few concrete proposals to reform the Thai monarchy, those by Thammasat University historian Somsak Jeamteerasakul were certainly the most far-reaching. The mainstream media (as far as I could see) ignored his eight-point proposal, made in January 2010. However, right-wing PAD senator Khamnun Sitthisaman was quick to criticize them in *Manager Online*. Interestingly, he also listed Somsak’s eight proposals, and concluded, “Today, the majority of Thais cannot accept [them] for sure” (Khamnun 2010). Since Somsak aimed at making the Thai monarchy more similar to the constitutional monarchies of Europe, Khamnun added, “Europe is Europe, Thai is Thai, China is China. Why do we have to make them be all the same?” (ibid.). In early May 2011, the Thai army filed *lèse majesté* charges against *ajarn* Somsak. “This is the most recent case of attack on freedom of expression on Thai scholar and activist” (*Prachatai*, May 9, 2011; see also *Bangkok Post*, May 10, 2011:2). The possibility of becoming a political prisoner will be a *déjà vu* to Somsak. He was a student leader in October 1976, and detained for two years after the assault by right-wing forces and police on the students assembled in Thammasat University, the subsequent coup, and the coming-to-power of an extreme right-wing government under Thanin Kraivichien (currently the number two on the king’s Privy Council). Pravit Rojanaphruk noted, “For a man who was irrevocably touched by the lynching of his friends back in 1976, in the name of defeating the ‘communist’ students, it is understandable why the issue of the monarchy institution has become an obsession” (Pravit 2011a). Touching on a point of fundamental importance, *The Nation Weekend* (Vol. 19, Issue No. 989, May 13, 2011:5) concluded its article on Somsak’s case with the words, “Even though there is no conclusion yet as to whether this *ajarn* [lecturer] has violated article 112 [of the Criminal Code, concerning *lèse majesté*] or not, but given that everybody can bring a complaint accusing [a person] according to article

112, this allegation thus becomes a tool that undeniably makes people with deviating political views and academic freedom avoid the public stage.”

86 To mention an example that went in this direction, “The people must take off their colored shirts and return to do their duties as good citizens so that the Thai nation can move forward” (editorial in *Post Today*, May 22, 2011:2). At the other end of the political spectrum, Suranand Vejjajiva suggested that, “what we as a nation must agree on is the diversity that exists; dissent and differences must be tolerated and cohesiveness can come about only through building a viable, pluralistic democracy” (Suranand 2011). Beyond the reluctance of the traditional establishment to give up powers that it had long cherished, their ideological outlook also seemed to make it difficult for them to understand that political cohesiveness did not need the concepts of community or of a national symbol, but could be anchored in the acceptance of the constitutionally stipulated norms of a political order that allowed pluralism to exist, be expressed, and processed.

87 This point needs to be emphasized, because typically people working in these sectors look down on the politicians in the erroneous assumption that their own performance is significantly better.

88 This statement refers to theory (Nelson 2004). Certain societal actors, as has been pointed out in the text, can still carry on with outdated ideologies of national unity, identity, or Thainess that are centered on the state apparatus, and in the final instance on the monarchy or the king.

89 For this reason, critics of Thai politics, if they do not restrict themselves to moralistic condemnation, often place their hope in “political reform” as something that would be imposed on the political system and its actors from the outside.

90 In the run-off to the elections of July 3, 2011, two articles that appeared within two days nicely illustrated the deep divide in perceptions about what had happened in May 2010, and how this should influence voters’ decision-making. Voranai Vanijaka had his column headlined, “Do we remember the burning of Thailand?” (Voranai 2011). One day later, *Matichon*’s page-three column was headlined, “A question that has been carried over from last year: Who ordered the killing of the people? The answer will be given on election day” (*Matichon*, June 13, 2011:3). From Voranai’s *phao ban phao mueang* (“the burning of the country,” the anti-UDD forces’ standard phrase to describe what had happened) perspective, this election-day answer, for Bangkok, should have seen a convincing win for the Democrats, and a crushing defeat for the Pheu Thai Party. After all, the latter was closely connected to the red-shirt “rural hordes” (*Bangkok Post*, March 13, 2010:1) who had “burned our city—Bangkok.” In a desperate move to turn the electoral tide, the Democrats indeed held an election rally at the Rajaprasong Intersection (the key location of the UDD protests) to remind the Bangkokians that PTP and UDD were about “*phao ban phao mueang*.” The *Bangkok Post* (June 24, 2011:1) reported this event with the headline, “Detoxify nation, PM says. Emotional plea for end to Thaksin tyranny.” It might thus have come as a surprise that the Democrats lost four seats over the elections of 2007 (from 27 to 23), while PTP increased by one seat (from 9 to 10). Even more remarkable, on the party list, the Democrats lost 144,754 votes, with their vote share reduced from 53.08 percent in 2007 to 44.64 percent in 2011. On the other hand, the Phue Thai Party increased its votes by 123,636, or 1.74 percent (basic figures for 2011 are from the *Bangkok Pundit* blog, July 7, and 18, 2011).

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