“MY EYES ARE OPEN BUT MY LIPS ARE WHISPERING”:
LINGUISTIC AND SYMBOLIC FORMS OF RESISTANCE IN
THAILAND DURING 2006-2016

Khorapin Phuaphansawat
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“MY EYES ARE OPEN BUT MY LIPS ARE WHISPERING”: LINGUISTIC AND SYMBOLIC FORMS OF RESISTANCE IN THAILAND DURING 2006-2016

A Dissertation Presented

by

KHORAPIN PHUAPHANSAWAT

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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May 2017

Political Science
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ABSTRACT

“MY EYES ARE OPEN BUT MY LIPS ARE WHISPERING”: LINGUISTIC AND SYMBOLIC FORMS OF RESISTANCE IN THAILAND DURING 2006-2016

MAY 2017

KHORAPIN PHUAPHANSAWAT, B.A., CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY

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Today, resistance and popular movements are rarely concerned with the traditional institution of monarchy, especially constitutional monarchies. Against this backdrop, the exceptional political power of the present monarchy in Thailand provides an excellent portrayal of how the divinity, perpetuality, and inviolability of royal authority become gradually undermined. Through discursive analyses of formal and informal texts, interviews, and ethnographic fieldwork, I argue that resistance against the monarchy has become central not only to the emergence and development of the massive political “Redshirt” movement, but also to Thailand’s political transition.

Four points make my case: First, recent anti-royalism has emerged from existing royalist beliefs, entailing disappointment and betrayal. Second, instead of static homogenous voices of dissent, anti-royalism has evolved to feature various forms of resistance. Furthermore, anti-royalism is co-constituted through interactions among diverse groups within the Redshirt movement: leaders, sympathetic intellectuals, radical factions, and ordinary protestors. Third, anti-royalism has resulted from the direct experiences of violence perpetrated against Redshirts. Fourth, Thailand’s current conflict is characterized by contestations over meanings rather than armed struggle.
Focusing on proximate historical events, I present five crucial moments of transition which have shaped the anti-royalist trend: 1. The emergence of the anti-coup/Redshirt movement (September 2006 - 2008) 2. The development of ideological contradictions within the movement (October 2008 - 2010) 3. The period of extensive “eye-opening” (May 2010 – July 2011) 4. The period of “eyes opening but lips whispering” (July 2011 - 2014) 5. Military suppression (May 2014 - 2016). Hobbled by a severely restrictive political and legal environment, anti-royalists have hidden behind metaphorical ambiguity, jokes, anonymous vulgar curses, and parody. Before the fifth period, these “hidden transcripts” were reproduced through popular channels which tended to escape state surveillance: protest songs, poetry, speeches, symbols in both on- and off-line worlds, and academic seminars. The fifth period, of military suppression, has seen a clamp-down in which resistance seems to be nearly totally suppressed.

Redshirt anti-royalism is resistance within political hegemony comprised of elements both of accommodation to and rejection of power. It also represents conflicts over sovereignty, manifested through vernacular discursive practices against the monarchy.

KEYWORDS: Thailand, Redshirt movement, anti-royalism, Thai monarchy, resistance, hidden transcripts
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All translations, of both printed material, interview transcripts, songs, and poems, are mine unless otherwise noted. Since this dissertation pays close attention to language and its ambiguous subversive meaning, in certain instances, I have included Thai spellings in parentheses or footnotes. In both footnotes and bibliography, I have included both the original Thai-language and an English translation for names and references of Thai-language materials.

I have transcribed Thai words in according to the Royal Institute's guideline for the transliteration of Thai characters into Latin characters (1999), with the exception of proper names, words, and titles that have commonly used English spellings already, such as Nattawut Saikua, Ratchaprasong, prachatai. Again, for words or phrases which I emphasized as highly politicized, I have included both its English transliteration in italics as well as original Thai spelling in parentheses after the word or phrase.
A NOTE ON REDACTION

At the request of my committee and given the current uncertain political situations in Thailand, I redacted some information regarding places where I conducted fieldwork. The redaction further protects specific locations and identities in the dissertation without compromising the persuasiveness of its arguments. It is my sincere hope that the full unredacted version of the dissertation can be released soon.
INTRODUCTION

This time, the cross-eyed bastard (*ai le*) and the blind bastard (*ai bot*) have joined together to successfully stage the coup – rebellion. If the cross-eyed bastard had done it alone, he would have been executed. Thai people continue getting pleasure from the 8 p.m. news ... The blind father has been sitting in the wheelchair like a pickled vegetable for more than 10 years. So pathetic. [He] has a five thousand million USD deposit in his account in Switzerland ([This is] the “self-sufficiency economy”). Thai people keep on crawling, prostrating themselves at [his] feet, and calling themselves dust underneath his feet!1

Uncle O (pseudonym) is a 67-year-old Thai man fond of English language and music. Thanks to his linguistic and musical passions, Uncle O had traveled abroad for work while occasionally playing guitar in a professional rock band. In his sixties, Uncle O is now retired. He has spent more time catching up with Thai politics, listening, watching, and reading the news. The coup d’état on May 22, 2014 infuriated this ordinary senior citizen. Uncle O vented his anger by writing his political dissent on restroom doors at a Bangkok department store. He was caught and arrested in October 2014.2 The Thai military court ruled that his graffiti constituted a grave crime, a defamatory crime against the Thai monarchy. The epigraph above costed him three years of imprisonment.

Behind bars, Uncle O composed a song on a piece of paper reflecting not only on his unfortunate life but also on the current regime. He handed the paper to his lawyer. Dreaming of freedom unrealized shortly, Uncle O was determined to play his song right after being released. The song title is “Status-quo.” In English, a language in which Uncle O is competent, the song started, “Children say whatever they see, unlike me who couldn’t be such free.” Uncle O then expressed his humbleness with the following verse; “I’m not saying any words of wisdom. Neither

---

1 Thailand, Military Court of Bangkok prosecutors, ข้อหา (Charge Sheet), Black Case No. 197 Kor./2558, July 7, 2015, 1-2. English translation is mine.
singing any verses of freedom.” Then, he moved on to the central part of his piece; “Keep silent, you'll be distant from jail. Keep saying, you'll be threatened like hell.”

My dissertation begins with Uncle O’s story for two reasons. First, his graffiti is an excellent example of what James C. Scott called “weapons of the weak” or “hidden transcripts.” Uncle O is not a revolutionary leader let alone a movement protester. Yet, under the strict surveillance of the military regime in 2014, he managed to find a somewhat free space where he could “speak his mind.” Far from being “words of wisdom,” Uncle O’s graffiti or song contained no big political terms such as democracy, sovereignty, or rights. According to Scott, hidden transcripts include acts of resistance made by subordinate groups who cannot afford a direct open confrontation with the powerful. As indirect resistance, hidden transcripts usually feature two types of distance: physical and symbolic. That is, they take place out of earshot of the powerful and/or take on disguised forms involving ambiguity and codification.

Uncle O first transformed the secluded, concealed, and small space of restroom into a political site. Additionally, his graffiti were composed of no names. Uncle O’s use of indirect references illustrates how he was familiar with and fluent in disguised rhetoric. However, in the end, his double hidden transcripts did not escape the eye of power. The Thai state has expanded its monitoring apparatus as well as developed its decoding skills. Nonetheless, the importance of hidden transcripts should not be focused entirely on their accomplishments in relation to the ruling power. The main emphasis here should be on “persistence and inventiveness.” Uncle O’s action symbolized how an individual in a powerless position struggles to create political space where they can creatively and mundanely resist domination.

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5 James C. Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts, 120.
The second point goes beyond Uncle O as an individual dissenter. Uncle O is indeed not an impulsive angry man. His writing on restroom doors does not entirely derive from Uncle O’s spontaneity. These writings, far from being ephemeral, are parts of an anti-royalist subculture which have emerged, developed, and been widely shared over the past decade.

I argue that Uncle O’s bathroom graffiti is representative of how Thai commoners perform a critique of power as well as reflects a particular set of subversive ideas against the Thai royalist establishment. Prime Minister General Prayuth Chan-ocha, the coup maker, was called “the cross-eyed bastard.” This insult is well-known to all Thais and so far, no one has been jailed for giving Prayuth this dirty nickname. However, Uncle O’s graffiti mentioned someone else besides the junta. The Thai King, Bhumibol Adulyadej, Rama IX, was derogatively referred as the “blind bastard” and the “blind father in the wheelchair.” The graffiti criticized the King for conspiring to stage the latest military coup d’état and exposed his countless wealth. Put briefly, Uncle O’s graffiti portrayed the King as a wealthy sick old man who “rebeled” against his people. Thus, the monarchy became an illegitimate ruler, a tyrant, standing against his subjects. Furthermore, going beyond individual attack, Uncle O condemned Thailand’s submissive culture and state-sponsored royalist propaganda. He sarcastically wrote about 8 p.m.: the daily time when every public television channel in Thailand broadcasts news about the royal family. Finally, Uncle O problematized the acts of kneeling and prostration. Treated as inferior and undignified subjects, in his view, Thai people were no different from worthless dust underneath the King’s feet.

This dissertation shows that Thai commoners like Uncle O and ambiguous codified speech/actions like his graffiti are central to Thailand’s political conflict. Examining how these
people and their language and symbols emerged as resistant actors who created an anti-royalist subculture enables us to capture not only the on-going contestation of power in Thailand today but also the manifestation of popular sovereignty that is happening on the ground. Written during 2015 - 2016, this dissertation claims that the Thai monarchy is encountering a crisis of legitimacy. Thai royalist nationalism, nationalism in which the monarchy stands at the center, has lost its hegemonic position.\(^8\) Uncle O’s case demonstrates this ideological crisis well. Despite his prosecuted and incarceration for his “discursive crime,”\(^9\) Uncle O persisted in writing subversive texts. Showing no remorse, his song tells us that he was put in a hellish jail simply because he refused to shut his mouth. Nor did Uncle O ask for forgiveness for having insulted the King. In other words, the dominant power fails to restore His Majesty’s public ideal image. Thailand’s political regime and its law can only punish its political dissidents without invoking repentance. This is, as Scott puts it, “a sign that domination is nothing more than tyranny.”\(^10\)

It is important to note here that on October 13, 2016, King Bhumibol passed away at the age of 89. This marked the end of his 70-year reign. Although Thailand is still under the ruling the military dictatorship, it has entered a new era of political instability. I wrote this dissertation during this transitional period and had already completed all data collections before the death of the King. This research thus mainly focuses on power and resistance under the reign of King Bhumibol.


Monarchies, Resistance, and Popular Sovereignty in Political Theory

Nowadays, resistance as a political concept is rarely germane to monarchies. The concept usually appears in studies of social movements and of people belonging to a marginalized and oppressed class.

For contemporary Marxists, global capitalism is the regime to be resisted if not overthrown. Slavoj Žižek, for instance, argues that local, microphysical, and horizontal forms of resistance hardly effect real political change. As a result, substantive change requires “a strong body” ready to impose and realize a new order “against the global capitalist disorder.”

At the same time, theorists from “radical democracy” traditions attempt to “deepen and expand” existing plural and liberal democracy. Going beyond economics, political struggles, they suggest, must include “the multiplicity of social relations” and unite “women, blacks, workers, gays, lesbians, environmentalists” as “radical democratic citizens.”

For these critical thinkers, the monarchy seems to be an irrelevant subject for their political projects. This trend makes sense if we look at today’s statistics. Among 193 members of the United Nations, monarchies survive only in 27 countries, in either constitutional or absolute monarchical form. However, in spite of this “neglect,” as this section will show, the roots of resistance in political theory is inseparable from ideas of monarchical power and popular sovereignty. To some extent, these critiques of monarchy can be read as theoretical grounds or points of reference for Thailand's current anti-royalist movement. In turn, Thailand can provide

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13 Ibid., 161.
an exemplary case of not only regime transition but also conflict over sovereignty manifested in vernacular discursive practices against the monarchy.

Long before Scott, political theorists attempted to conceptualize resistance. This section examines early theories of resistance made by Stephenus Junius Brutus the Celt, Étienne de La Boétie, and John Locke in relation to the concept of popular sovereignty as opposed to the sovereign power of the king. First, I briefly rehearse Jean Bodin’s and Thomas Hobbes’s theories of sovereignty and their dismissal of any possibility of active popular resistance. According to their paradigms, sovereignty is power to command; the “people” do not exist as political actors but as subjects merely capable of acting in compliance with the law or commands of the sovereign prince. In other words, Bodinian and Hobbesian sovereignty re-affirms continuity, stability, fixity, and supremacy of the existing monarchical power. Second, I describe a “reverse” paradigm which posits the people as the bearer of sovereign power, thus having the right to resist the unjust ruler. Sovereignty, here, is redefined as the power of the people to constitute forms of government or “constituent power.”

Developing from this thesis, Locke goes beyond the monarchical form and allows the people to violently and democratically resist, revolt, and re-constitute any form of government. The following paragraphs elaborate on these two contrasting theories.

In *On Sovereignty*, Bodin defines sovereignty as “the absolute and perpetual power of a commonwealth.” From the beginning, Bodin takes for granted a pre-existing monarchical constitution. He downplays both the importance of the origin of sovereignty and the moment when the commonwealth is constituted. As Bodin compares sovereign power to “a true gift,” the receiver – the sovereign – can use it as freely as he pleases perpetually.

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18 Ibid., 8.
Laws and commands are central to a Bodinian definition of sovereignty. The sovereign is the one who gives commands without himself being commanded.\textsuperscript{19} Thus, Bodinian sovereignty involves unequal and vertical power relations between a superior ruler and the inferior subject. Coercion, suppression, and obedience reinforce in turn the continuity of the existing sovereign power. Bodin continues that sovereign commands are the laws of the commonwealth which subjects must obey regardless of whether they consent to them or not.\textsuperscript{20} The sovereignty of the monarchy is not subject to any alteration, especially by the people.\textsuperscript{21} That the sovereign has to be kept in check and can be challenged is, for Bodin, simply “mistaken” and “absurd” opinion.\textsuperscript{22} Finally, Bodin employs the idea of divinity to affirm the ultimate superiority of the sovereign king. He concludes, the sovereign prince is “the image of God.”\textsuperscript{23}

Unlike Bodin, Hobbes’s sovereignty does not emerge from divine supremacy. Instead, a commonwealth is a product of human construction. His covenant theory proposes that, in order to seek peace and security, men need a “common power” to control themselves using “fear and punishment.” Through the agreement, men submit their wills to “the will of one Man or of one Assembly.”\textsuperscript{24} The Man or Assembly to which individuals submit their wills has sovereign power. Like Bodin, Hobbes defines the sovereign as the one who has a right to command over every subordinate subject. Sovereign commands are “civil laws or laws of the commonwealth.”\textsuperscript{25} Finally and most importantly, through the submission of their wills, subjects have already given up right to resist.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 39,45.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 79.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 73-74.
Similar to Bodin, Hobbes strongly denies the idea that tyranny can be opposed. He reduces any theory regarding tyranny and resistance to tyranny into unconvincing arguments deriving from the subjective feelings of writers. For Hobbes, subjects living under a monarchy are mistaken if they believe that they are enslaved by their king. Indeed, Hobbes pathologizes this fear of the powerful monarch, naming it “Tyrannophobia.”27 At Leviathan’s conclusion, Hobbes makes his strongest claim that tyranny and sovereignty are indistinguishable. Those who attack tyranny attack the commonwealth.28 Thus, Hobbes’s political project aims to reinforce and sustain the instituted sovereign power of the Leviathan. Because elements of command and coercion are central to Hobbesian sovereignty, ideas of popular resistance, tyranny, and tyrannicide are precluded from the commonwealth and represent dangerous and seditious doctrines.

Bodinian absolute sovereignty was not the only model for government in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. On the contrary, many dynamic contestations regarding concepts of sovereignty in relation to intense religious-political conflicts took place during this long period. Four years after the Saint Bartholomew massacre (1572), Bodin wrote The Six Books of the Commonwealth not only to establish a theory of sovereignty but also to support the absoluteness and divinity of the monarch; he thus strove to delegitimize any threat posed to the sovereign prince.

In response to the Bodinian concept of sovereignty as well as to the violent massacre committed by the king, Stephenus Junius Brutus, in Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos (1579), offered an alternative theory of sovereignty. Instead of the divine eternal supreme commander, “KINGS ARE MADE BY THE PEOPLE,” writes Brutus. He further explains:

The people constitutes kings, confers kingdoms, and approves the election by its vote. Indeed, God willed that it should be received in this way, so that whatever authority and power they have, should be received from the people after Him;

28 Ibid., 722.
and that thus they should apply all their care, thought, and effort to the welfare of the people. 

On the one hand, as with Bodin, Brutus both assumes and theologizes monarchy. On the other hand, though, for Brutus, the people, not the prince, are the ones who possess sovereign power, understood as the power to constitute. Brutus insists that since the king is constituted by the people, the latter are superior to the former. In other words, Brutus uses the idea of “constituent popular sovereignty” to justify the superiority of the people. As I show below, Brutus’s paradigm of sovereignty is more egalitarian and democratic.

Brutus deprives the king of divine power and equalizes him with other men. As he argues, “They [kings] should remember that they are born entirely by the same lot as other men, and that they are elevated from the ground to their [kingly] position by the votes.” 

Thus, despite the monarchical form, a kingdom’s founding inevitably involves democratic principles such as voting or deliberations among equals. Moreover, the “elevated” position of the king by the people, means that the king’s entire strength and power rely solely upon the people. Without the people’s support, the king who “once seemed sharp-eyed and sharp-eared, mighty and active, will begin to go blind and deaf, and will suddenly fall down.”

In this connection, the similarity between Brutus and the early French thinker, Étienne de la Boétie (1530-1563) is important. According to the latter, since the king’s power derives from the consent and support of the people, it cannot exist without the people. Therefore, to resist the tyrant, de la Boétie writes:

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29 Stephanus Junius Brutus, the Celt, *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos: or, concerning the legitimate power of a prince over the people, and of the people over a prince*, ed. George Garnett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 68.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., 76.
There is no need of fighting to overcome this single tyrant, for he is automatically defeated if the country refused consent to its own enslavement: it is not necessary to deprive him of anything, but simply to give nothing.\textsuperscript{32} De la Boétie maintains that if the people withdraw their support, the king will have “only two eyes, only two hands, only one body, no more than is possessed by the least man among the infinite numbers dwelling in your cities.”\textsuperscript{33} Nonetheless, as we shall see later, Brutus’s idea of resistance goes beyond de la Boétie’s non-violent disobedience approach described above.

While Bodin and Hobbes rule out the distinction between a king and a tyrant, Brutus uses his logic of constituent sovereignty to develop a systematic theory of tyranny and resistance. He first categorizes tyranny into two types; a tyrant without title and a tyrant by practice. The former was not constituted by the people but “usurped command by force and deception”; the latter is one who, despite being constituted by the people, governs “contrary to the laws and contracts.”\textsuperscript{34}

Tyrant without title and tyrant by practice are resisted differently. Since the former never gain the people’s consent, that person is never a king in the first place. Hence, this type of tyrant can be resisted or killed by any private person. Indeed, it is a duty for everybody to act against this kind of tyrant.\textsuperscript{35} The case of the tyrant by practice is different and requires more restricted and cautious procedures. Violent resistance must be the last resort. Brutus warns, “Try all remedies before arms.” If arms are called for, the request must be initiated by the officers of the kingdom – the representative body of the people.\textsuperscript{36} If the tyrant refuses to be cured, these political elites have to call a general assembly and ask for authorization to depose the unlawful king. If the tyrant resists, “Then it will obviously be lawful for them to call the people to arms, to conscript an


\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 118.

\textsuperscript{34} Stephanus Junius Brutus, the Celt, \textit{Vindiciae, contra tyrannos}, 140.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 150-1.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 155.
army, and to move against him with force.”37 In short, after all other means have been used, popular resistance led by the people’s representative body is allowed and must be done. This active and violent popular resistance is possible only when we understand the sovereign power as the power of the people to constitute and de-constitute, not the power of the ruler to command.

Finally, John Locke employs the idea of contract to justify the right to resistance and revolution. Locke’s main thesis is that any political association is constituted by the agreement of the people – a collective body of equal and free men. Opposing Hobbes and similar to Brutus, Locke argues that the people retain their right to alter or abolish any form of government. Furthermore, Lockean resistance does not have to be led by political elites as Brutus suggests.

The Lockean contract has a clear starting point and procedure. It begins when a group of men consents to make up one body of community and act collectively. Then, every man “puts himself under an obligation, to every one of the society, to submit to the determination of the majority.”38 Based on the principle of majority rule, forms of government are decided upon. Unlike Bodin and Brutus, Locke does not presuppose a monarchical form of government.

Emphasizing the act of consent, Locke maintains that no one can be put under political power and obey the law without his consent.39 More importantly, while Hobbes assumes that supreme power has irrevocably transferred to the sovereign ruler, Locke writes, “There remains still in the people a supreme power to remove or alter the legislative, when they find the legislative act contrary to the trust reposed in them.”40

37 Stephanus Junius Brutus, the Celt, Vindiciae, contra tyrannos, 156.
39 Ibid., 52.
40 Ibid., 77- 78.
Thus, for Locke, the people can violently resist the unjust ruler. As he maintains, “Force is to be opposed to nothing, but to unjust and unlawful force.”\textsuperscript{41} When the ruler becomes arbitrary – “governing without settled standing laws,”\textsuperscript{42} people can intervene, appeal, disobey, or resist. However, revolution and violent confrontation are rare for Locke. Similar to Brutus, Locke maintains that violence must be the last resort and “revolutions happen not upon every little mismanagement in public affairs.”\textsuperscript{43} Furthermore, “People are not so easily got out of their old forms, as some are apt to suggest.”\textsuperscript{44} In other words, normally men desire no change. Nonetheless, if a “long train of abuses” exist and the victim is the majority, they have the right to rebel.\textsuperscript{45}

Going beyond Brutus’s popular resistance led by elites, Locke argues that we are all equal in a tyrant regime. Since the king “ceases to be a king,” you do not have to fight him with respect and without a sword.\textsuperscript{46} Under this democratic exception, unlike Brutus, Locke does not give political elites the right to decide when to resist. “Who shall be judge?” Locke answers, “the body of the people” should be the judge.\textsuperscript{47} That is, the original body that constitutes the political power. Resistance and revolution are possible within the Lockean commonwealth because the people or the community united in the original contract retains the ultimate power to (re)constitution.

Despite several limitations, Brutus’s and Locke’s concept of constituent popular sovereignty preserves a radical politics of the people. On the contrary, a radial popular politics is impossible in the Bodinian and Hobbesian paradigms. Brutus and Locke not only pave the way for contractual theories of governance, but also for resistance against the monarchy as well as other

\textsuperscript{41}John Locke, \textit{Second Treatise of Government}, 103.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 72.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 113.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 119-121.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 123.
forms of government. For Brutus and Locke, resistance justifies violent acts of the people to overthrow the tyrant. Today, since monarchies have become extinct in the majority of countries, this aspect of resistance – which is critical to the monarchy – is likely to be ignored. Critique of the monarchy’s divinity appears outdated. However, in Thailand, where the monarchy retains exceptional political power, resistance, as this dissertation shows, reminds us of these early theories.

**Research Arguments: Thailand’s Political Transition, Redshirts, and Anti-royalism**

Although Thailand underwent a change from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy in 1932, the monarchy is symbolically and politically sacrosanct. Since the rise of the military dictatorship in 1957, monarchical power has gradually been strengthened: politically, economically, and ideologically (see chapter two). Many Thai people came to worship King Bhumibol Adulyadej as if he were a god. As the world’s longest reigning monarch (1946 - 2016), Bhumibol is depicted as a divine Hindu *deva* king, a righteous Buddhist ruler, a supporter of democracy and development, and the beloved Father of the nation. Above all, the monarchy, in particular the King, and its/his power can neither be debated nor criticized publicly due to the draconian lèse-majesté law. Article 112 of the Criminal Code states “whoever defames, insults, or

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threatens the King, the Queen, the Heir apparent or the Regent shall be punished with imprisonment of three years to fifteen years.”

Nonetheless, in the past decade starting from 2006, Thailand not only has suffered from political turmoil, street violence, and two military coups (in 2006 and 2014) but also from a deeply divisive ideological clash regarding the monarchy. Political tension has become manifest between the two poles of a mass political movement.

Largely composed of the affluent Bangkok middle class, royalists, and Democrat Party supporters from southern provinces, the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD, 2005 - present) and the People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC, 2013 - present) have protested against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006). In their views, Thaksin and “Thaksin’s regime” represent the “tyranny of the majority” and are corrupt, populist, and anti-monarchist. Utilizing royal symbols such as King Bhumibol’s yellow color or the slogan “People of the King,” these royalist-nationalist protesters distrust elected politicians, seek royal intervention, and call for political reform made by the appointed body of “moral” people to eradicate Thaksin’s influence. No doubt most PAD or the Yellowshirts and PDRC participants showed no opposition to, and indeed actively welcomed, the 2006 coup which toppled the Thaksin’s government and the 2014 coup which deposed Yingluck Shinawatra’s (Thaksin’s sister’s) government. They precipitated these two coups, which were staged after royalist protesters rallied against the elected government, rejected electoral means, and ushered in national deadlocks. In opposition to these royalist/anti-electoral forces, another mass political movement, formally known as the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD, August 2007 - present), informally known as

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51 prachachon khong phraracha – ประชาชนของพระราชา.
Redshirts, have mobilized to support Thaksin and insisted that popular election should be the only legitimate way to acquire power. They oppose unconstitutional attempts, especially by the judiciary and military, to overthrow the elected government. Demographically, statistics show that Redshirt protesters have relatively lower income than their royalist anti-Thaksin opponents. A vast portion comes from Thailand’s North and Northeastern provinces where Thaksin’s party dominated. Rejecting extra-constitutional power and chanting “One Man One Vote,” Redshirts value the principle of popular sovereignty, majority rule, and elected representation.

As this dissertation demonstrates, Thailand’s chronic political instability has led to drastic shifts in attitude and beliefs regarding the monarchy. Circulated through mass media and informal channels ranging from everyday conversations, magazines, radio programs, Youtube, and Facebook, ambiguous, creative, satirical language and symbols, such as those expressed by Uncle O, can be interpreted as disguised political acts against traditional power structures. On the one hand, these subversive texts imply the principle of anti-monarchism addressed by political theorists above. The King is no longer the embodiment of a divine god gifted with exceptional political power. Nor is the monarchy a natural perpetual institution. On the other hand, people have expressed their own creative ways to convey their thoughts. For instance, rather than Brutus’s straightforward remark “KINGS ARE MADE BY THE PEOPLE,” Thai commoners seek

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diverse metaphors in order to deliver the idea; “One bead of sweat cannot build nation,” depicts one Redshirt protest song or “We feed the deva (god),” declared one Redshirt leader. These anti-royalist subculture and sentiments have been widely shared among members of the Redshirt movement.

My research aims to overcome the Thai royalist stereotype against the Redshirts. Royalists assert that well-organized networks within the so-called Redshirt mass movement scheme to “abolish” the monarchy. Figure I shows the so-called “Anti-Monarchist Network Diagram,” issued by the Centre for Resolution of Emergency Situation in April 2010. The diagram illustrates how Thai royalists imagine the threat against the monarchy. Names are all connected systematically. Thaksin’s name is in the middle of this diagram. Implicitly, he is seen as behind all anti-monarchist activities. His name is surrounded by movement leaders and politicians. Intellectuals and ordinary men and women who have criticized the monarchy or been charged with lèse-majesté are located in the peripheral orbits of the network.

Figure I: The anti-monarchist network diagram (Source: Voices News Website http://news.voicetv.co.th/thailand/11541.html)
This diagram fabricates a particular vision of the truth. It highlights the interconnectedness and legibility of all the actors as well as the roles of powerful politicians, businessmen, intellectuals, and activists. This truth, propagated by the Thai state run by royalists, does not include ordinary men and women such as Uncle O. For the royalist elite, ordinary Redshirt participants are uneducated, violence-prone, and merely the gullible tools of corrupt politicians. This dissertation intends to counter-argue these claims and reverse this diagram.

Today, no one can argue against the proposition that anti-royalist sentiments exist in Thai society. But these discontents must not be framed and understood as portrayed by this diagram. Instead of Thaksin or movement leaders, I put the experiences and narratives of participants in less visible positions at the center.

In this thesis, I show that anti-royalist sentiments and expressions are central not only to the development of the Redshirt movement but also to Thailand’s moment of political transition. However, we cannot reduce these sentiments to mere products of brainwashing (especially by politicians or movement leaders) or underground republican groups striving to overthrow the institution as royalists allege. Put alternatively, this dissertation aims to contrast the superficial state-fabricated anti-monarchist network diagram seen above with experience-based stories enriched with emotions, contradiction, non-linear development, and complex webs of meanings. Unless we take these anti-royalist sentiments and expressions into account, we fail to understand why the Thai monarchy is now in grave danger of losing its hegemonic power, which it has striven to re-establish since the 1932 revolution. Here, I claim that the Thai monarchy, especially King Bhumibol, had uniquely succeeded in establishing the hegemonic power (see chapter two) before it severely encountered crisis of authority in 2006. Hegemony, as Antonio Gramsci describes, refers to a type of domination in which the dominant group expands the use of power beyond
legal apparatus and state coercion, builds alliances with other social groups, and seizes intellectual and moral leadership.\(^{54}\)

As political tensions rose in the wake of the 2006 coup, how could citizens express their feelings and thoughts when they deviated from official royalist narratives? From 2006 through 2016, what forms did the Redshirt politics of resistance to the monarchy take? Can we historicize these anti-royalist hidden transcripts? How did this trend begin? Given the ambiguity, creativity, and repression of the resistance after the 2014 coup, what are the political implications for Thai politics and our understanding of power and resistance?

For example, the term “ta sawang” (eyes open - ตาสว่าง) which appears occasionally in Redshirt songs, poetry, and graffiti merits special attention. Whereas the term can mean an inability to sleep or an exposure to the truth and thus enlightened, for Redshirts, having “eyes open” possibly involves drastic transformations in beliefs about the monarchy after critical moments of rupture or contradiction. This term first appeared in the so-called Same Sky (Fa diew kan) web board, where a handful of intellectual and literati internet users discussed politics in October 2007.\(^{55}\) Subsequently, new political meanings of the term became codified and well-known among ordinary Redshirt protesters so that October 13 is now “National Eye-Opening Day.”\(^{56}\) Then, during 2010-2012, the term appeared in one protest song: “My eyes have already opened. [I know] who is the real owner of the stable. They shine brightly, [since I know] who

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ordered the killing of the people.” Having “eyes open” is one among many accounts this research examines, since it exemplifies an on-going contestation with the rhetorical and symbolic power of traditional royal institutions.

This study examines language and symbols on T-shirts, stickers, signs, songs, and in cyberspace, especially among participants of Redshirt movements from 2006 through 2016. It explores the meanings of these messages, how they were and are used by various speakers and constitute political acts against the monarchy. I set out my main arguments below.

First, I argue that unlike contemporary anti-monarchist movements seen in other constitutional monarchies, such as Great Britain and Japan, recent anti-royalism in Thailand is neither a well-planned scheme nor driven by Marxist and republican ideologies. Rather, anti-royalism emerged from and worked within the royalist hegemony. Moreover, anti-royalist ideas and expressions have shifted dynamically as Thai society has become increasingly polarized.

Second, instead of static, homogenous, unified voices of dissent, anti-royalism features various forms of resistance. This resistance is co-constituted through interactions among diverse groups within the Redshirt movement. In this thesis, I divide Redshirts into four groups: movement leaders and media (UDD), sympathetic intellectuals, semi-autonomous splinter groups, and ordinary participants. While ordinary protesters articulate discontents which are emotionally embedded and ideologically attached to royalism, Thai intellectuals offer systematic institutional critiques of the monarchy. Occasionally, the former and the latter become alienated from each other. However, formal leaders tend not only to lag behind the masses and intellectuals but also attempt to circumscribe anti-royalist diffusion.

Third, I show that while the emergence of the Redshirts as a mass political movement can be explained by a long history of socio-economic change, anti-royalism rather resulted from direct experiences of injustice and violence by Redshirts after the 2006 coup. In other words, the anti-

Finally, this thesis shows that contestations over meanings overwhelmingly characterize Thailand's current conflict rather than armed struggle. In a restricted political and legal context, those who wish to challenge royal power hide beneath metaphorical ambiguity, jokes, vulgarity, folktales, and parody on a daily basis. Anti-royalist popularization during the third and fourth periods becomes possible because of the existing socio-cultural foundations formed in earlier periods. Before they were almost completely quelled in the fifth period, these arts of resistance were reproduced through popular channels which tended to escape state surveillance, for instance, protest songs, poetry, chats at gathering sites, formal and informal speeches, symbols in both on and offline worlds, and academic seminars.

**Studies of the Thai Monarchy and the Redshirts**

I situate my research in two broad bodies of literature: studies of the Thai monarchy and studies of the Redshirts. This literature provides the rich historical background necessary to understand the research topic. However, studies published to date are insufficient. Studies of the Thai monarchy neglect or minimize the role of the people as active agents which might contest the official narratives of the royal elites. Furthermore, they fail to show how, even within royalist hegemony, robust movements of resistance to monarchical power can emerge. Studies of popular
movements, especially of the Redshirts, focus on long historical and organizational developments as well as pay attention to the explicit self-identification of Redshirts strictly as fighters for equality, democracy, and local rights. From this perspective, the language and symbols in which I am interested and which are vitally important might be seen as too “marginal,” “vague,” or “short-lived.” As a result, these works fail to explain the root and characteristics of ongoing conflicts. Nor can they make sense of Thailand’s authoritarian regime in the post-2014-coup era when ordinary people such as Uncle O are arrested for anti-royalist graffiti and the number of lèse-majesté prisoners, mostly Redshirt supporters, continues to surge.

Through archival historical study and discursive, linguistic, and visual analyses, several scholars provide alternative perspectives and explanations critical of the power and status of the Thai monarchy.\(^{57}\) However, while the monarchy is problematized as a political institution or actor with obscene hidden historical legacies, interests, and manipulative strategies, these works barely discuss how the institution has been challenged. Most importantly, the target of the monarch’s domination – the people – is portrayed as passive indoctrinated subjects. Although these studies might be able to explain Thailand during 1990s – 2000s, they need to be revisited to account for the recent decline of royal legitimacy and its growing discontents.

For example, in *Network Monarchy and Legitimacy Crises in Thailand*, Duncan McCargo points out that Thai politics should be understood in a framework of “political networks,” of which

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the center is “the palace.” McCargo suggests that the network monarchy is composed of a wide range of elitist institutions including the Privy Council and “liberal royalist” intellectuals. Rather than relying on a strictly hierarchical mode of governing, the palace, McCargo maintains, uses network-based strategies to gain legitimacy and secure power. After Thaksin’s electoral victory in 2001, this network monarchy was “challenged.” According to McCargo, Thaksin disrupted the pre-existing networks, tried to replace them with new ones, and consequently was in the process of undermining monarchical power. McCargo sees that the most crucial problem of current Thai politics is an ongoing clash between networks of the old establishment and the new populist group of elites. In this network-based politics, the people, however, are portrayed as passive supporters of the two oppositional elitist networks.

Complementing McCargo’s idea of power network, Thongchai Winichakul’s series of papers show the discursive dimensions of the Thai monarch’s power. Thongchai reveals how the monarchy ideologically dominates Thai politics. He argues that the politics of monarchy rests upon three discourses: “being sacred, popular, and democratic.” Democracy, from the monarchy’s and the monarchist’s perspective, means “clean politics” in which the monarchy possesses “moral authority ‘above’...the normal political institutions.” This discourse is compatible with and reinforces a belief that politicians are corrupt and buy votes from the rural poor. Although Thongchai’s early works rarely touched on arguments against these hegemonic discourses, his subsequent writings add more voices of dissent. He recognizes the so-called “eye-opening (ta

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59 Ibid., 503.
60 Ibid., 500.
62 Ibid., 24.
63 Ibid., 26-7.
sawang)" phenomenon among the Redshirt participants as an example of “anti-monarchy” feelings. Thongchai now argues that after the bloody crackdown in 2010, the “eye-opening” trend has spread widely. He further asserts that a dominant monarchism “breeds” its own enemy. Yet, besides a few popular slogans, he does not provide further accounts regarding the origin of this trend, its dynamism, and various forms of articulation.

Saying the Unsayable: Monarchy and Democracy in Thailand (2011), unlike the two former trends, is a collection of essays focusing on cultural aspects or everyday uses of language and practice, reproducing and strengthening the monarchy’s power. Each author unpacks cultural, ideological, and legal foundations that help construct and maintain these perfect naturalized images of the King. Peter Jackson shows that the king’s divinity is rooted in Hinduism and Thevadara Buddhism and can co-exist with contemporary neo-liberalism. Sarun Krittikarn examines the current royal power through various types of “royal gazes” such as scientific gaze, panoptic gaze, and warm protective gaze. For him, mass media and popular channels play an important role in shaping “entertainment nationalism” in which the King is also gazed by his subjects and becomes “a logo” for the “pleasure-seeking commoner.” Sarun recognizes the private existence of rumors, tales, and gossip regarding the monarchy. However, these depoliticized acts of entertainment, which have no political impact, might even “magnify” the King’s glory.

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65 Ibid.
66 Ibid., 92.
In addition to political networks, and ideological and cultural dimensions, royal power has been protected and sustained by the lèse-majesté law. In *Truth on Trial in Thailand: Defamation, Treason, and Lèse-Majesté*, David Streckfuss calls Thailand a “defamation regime,” in which, for centuries, the population has been living under the Agambenian state of exception. 70 For him, the “public sphere,” where freedom of thought and expression could have flourished, has been subsumed into “sacred” and “official” spheres. 71 Defamatory crimes against the monarchy were unprovable and subject to arbitrary decisions made by the court and the morally superior class at the top of the social hierarchy. Court records and legal evidence lead Streckfuss to this conclusion. Although Streckfuss’s work offers rich historical data regarding lèse-majesté cases in the past, it lacks a bottom-up approach which goes beyond official and state-based accounts.

Published in 2016, a decade after the conflict broke out, Serhat Ünaldi’s *Working Towards the Monarchy: Politics of Space in Downtown Bangkok* develops systematic theoretical explanations not only regarding the Thai monarchy but also its discontents. Using Weber’s concept of charisma, Ünaldi argues that the Thai king possesses extraordinary power, based on Buddhist and Brahmanic cosmologies. Thailand can be read as a “charismatic community” of which members, the royal followers, seek to benefit from royal charisma. 72 Benefits resulting from this “working towards the monarchy” include social recognition, higher status, and material gains. Adding the spatial dimension to his study, Ünaldi points out that the capital’s Siam-Ratchaprasong area represents the center of this charismatic royal orbit. It attracts Bangkokians and capitalists to become part of the royal aura whether through rituals or participation in royally-led development and education. Here, rather than top-down manipulation, the monarchical power

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71 Ibid., 31.
derives from a “symbiotic relationship” between the King and his followers. For Ünaldi, Thaksin emerged as an alternative rival charismatic leader vis-à-vis Bhumibol and thus against those whose status-quo had been secured by working toward the monarchy. In other words, we tend to understand Thailand’s ongoing conflict as a clash between the two charismatic communities. Although Ünaldi takes into account the Redshirts as new emerging forces working against the monarchy, his work, despite its brilliant analysis of royal power, over-emphasizes how charisma, superstitious worship, and personal cult operate among the Redshirts.

In short, others have investigated symbolic, discursive, visual, spatial, and legal aspects of the Thai monarchy. The studies mainly explain how power operates from above and take for granted the relative success of the monarchy in establishing superior authority. Other than Ünaldi’s work, these studies have missed the point that the monarchy’s divinity, networks, “democratic” popular power, and lèse-majesté law can become a double-edged sword in the context of political instability and the rise of mass movements. My research explores street politics as well as mass gatherings, both of which can produce alternative discourses and meanings that deviate from, or even disrupt, the idealized narratives and images of this royal institution. This anti-royalist dimension is insufficiently addressed in existing studies of the current political movement.

While several authors have examined the emergence, development, and power structure of the Redshirt movement since 2006, they have often treated them as a homogenous group whose political agenda is to oppose the 2006 coup and demand democratic elections. Few ethnographic accounts have investigated the new kinds of language and symbols that have surfaced on shirts, speeches, songs, signs, and cyberspace. More importantly, most studies do not

73 Serhat Ünaldi, Working towards the Monarchy: The Politics of Space in Downtown Bangkok, 51.
74 Ibid., 84.
provide adequate explanations regarding the antagonistic relationship between the Redshirts and the monarchy.

Several scholars have connected the Redshirts to Thailand’s political and socio-economic transformations and alienation between the regions and central power since the late 1980s. Despite different emphases, most of them share the same idea that the Redshirts are the unintended products of Thailand’s structural changes. The main focus of these studies is on the long historical development before the recent wave of conflict broke out. Due to economic development, modernization, and democratization, a large section of the Thai population, which later joined the Redshirt movement, had been moving upward on both the social and economic ladders as well as become more active in political participation.\textsuperscript{75} Statistics show that increasing numbers of people worked in non-agricultural sectors.\textsuperscript{76} James Glassman notes poignantly that an idealized image of a Thai village as “a place of a natural, peaceful and slow-paced life” no longer exists.\textsuperscript{77} Rather than living on a subsistence economy, these villagers have been integrated into a national and global economy. They embrace new worldviews. As capitalism, education, new ways of communication, and consumerism expand and diffuse, the boundaries between urban and rural, upper and lower classes become blurred.

Accordingly, descriptions of the Redshirts often feature novel, transformational, and trans-territorial dimensions. For instance, Apichart Satitniramai and others use the term “emerging new middle class.”\textsuperscript{78} For them, the Redshirts, unlike the old middle-class, includes those who do not have a secure and stable income, work as a commercial agriculturalist, small-

\textsuperscript{75} Pinkaew Luangaramsri, \textit{Becoming Red: กำเนิดและพัฒนาการเสื้อแดงในเชียงใหม่ (Becoming Red: Emergence and Development of the Redshirts in Chiang Mai)}, 7-10.
\textsuperscript{76} Apichart Satitniramai, Yuki Mukdawijitra, and Niti Pawakapan, \textit{โครงการวิจัย ทบทวนภูมิทัศน์การเมืองไทย (Re-examining the Political Landscape of Thailand)}, 17-18.
\textsuperscript{78} Apichart Satitniramai et al., \textit{โครงการวิจัย ทบทวนภูมิทัศน์การเมืองไทย (Re-examining the Political Landscape of Thailand)}, 46.
scale trader/entrepreneur, and are self-employed. At the same time, these newly emerging groups arm themselves with new “needs and aspirations” which remain unfulfilled and can be realized by engaging in electoral politics. Claudio Sopranzetti specifically defines “Red desires” as new aspirations for capitalist consumption.

Emphasizing Northeastern villagers’ transformative worldviews, Charles Keyes notes that villagers become more “cosmopolitan.” Resulting from their experiences as migrant workers in both Bangkok and overseas, these cosmopolitan villagers possess “sophisticated understandings of rights and justice.” In a similar vein, Duncan McCargo and Naruemon Thabchumpon describe Redshirts as “urbanized villagers.” These insights lead to Glassman’s conclusion that the Redshirts are resistant actors initially emerging within “royally-sponsored capitalist development.” The Redshirts represent the contradiction and incompleteness of such development. As Glassman further explains, they “have already tasted the capitalist consumer modernity they were promised as the payoff for working hard and supporting capitalist development under the rule of royalist elites. They want more of that modernity and will vote against pro-royalist parties to get it, if needs be.”

Amidst this uneven development, Thaksin’s policies stood out as the more attractive model when compared to the royally-sponsored one since these policies were more inclusive and distributive for these voters. Winning national elections twice, Thaksin was able to put initiatives

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79 Apichart Satitniramai et al., โครงการวิจัย ทบทวนภูมิทัศน์การเมืองไทย (Re-examining the Political Landscape of Thailand), 100. See also Claudio Sopranzetti, “Burning Red Desires: Isan Migrants and the Politics of Desire in Contemporary Thailand,” South East Asia Research 20, no. 3 (2012): 361-379.


82 Charles Keyes, Finding Their Voice: Northeastern Villagers and the Thai State, 184.


84 Ibid., 42.

85 See Kevin Hewison, “Class, Inequality, and Politics” in Bangkok May 2010: Perspectives on a Divided Thailand, 141-160.
such as universal health care, local entrepreneurial empowerment, and bureaucratic reform in effect and impressed his constituencies. In other words, under Thaksin’s premierships, the desires of the “rural masses and the urban poor” were “unleashed.” For the first time, a vast sector of Thai population became aware that their voting rights mattered and could contribute to concrete outcomes. The culture of elections has drastically changed from “voting as a matter of indifference” to “voting because of favored policies.” As a consequence, the Redshirts started working “against” the monarchy instead.

Another group of scholars downplays historical factors and tries to explore who Redshirt participants claim to be and what they fight for. Emphasizing the political aspect, these scholars reject the idea that narrow class analysis should frame the Redshirts. On the one hand, it is true that Redshirt protesters has relatively lower income than their oppositional royalist protesters do. Moreover, their self-description as “phrai (serf or commoner - ไพร่)” signifies a lower felt socio-economic status (see chapter three). On the other hand, their movement did not emerge from nor was it driven by economic grievances. The authors of Red Why? (2010) and Bangkok May 2010 (2012) agree that Redshirts and their supporters are not peasants and do not come from the

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87 Apichart Satitniramai et al., โครงการวิจัย ทบทวนภูมิทัศน์การเมืองไทย (Re-examining the Political Landscape of Thailand), 114.
88 Pinkaew Luangaramsri, Becoming Red: เกิดและพัฒนาการเคลื่อนไหวในเชียงใหม่(Becoming Red: Emergence and Development of the Redshirts in Chiang Mai), 45.
89 Serhat Ünaldi, Working towards the Monarchy: The Politics of Space in Downtown Bangkok, 84.
90 Phrai is an archaic term to describe a commoner who used to work for feudal lords as an unpaid labour in ancient Siam.
lowest income sector. Indeed, the movement actually draws people from various classes ranging from peasants and working laborers to capitalists.

Above all, the Redshirt movement came into existence after the 2006 coup. In other words, the Redshirts evolved as a mass movement triggered by political events and striving for political causes. Defending the electoral system and their voting rights are the movement’s primary goals. Through a survey of 400 samples, Prapart Pintobtang finds that 80.7% of the Redshirts describe themselves as democracy supporters, 17.3% as Thaksin supporters, and 2% as protectors of the Thai nation. McCargo and Naruemon further explain that the Redshirts’ main political demands were limited to procedural electoral democracy “rather than radical notions of substantive popular empowerment.” Unlike McCargo and Naruemon, several scholars expand Redshirt political aspirations into a broader domain. They see the movement as a struggle for citizenship entitled to equal rights to participate in politics without being guided or intervened in by the elite. As Thongchai indicates, Redshirts struggle to reject “royalist democracy” and call for “electoral democracy” contributing to “edible” benefits and better self-empowerment.

Cultural and anthropological aspects of the Redshirt movement which challenge the dominant culture of Bangkok’s upper-middle class have also been highlighted. Nithi Aeowsriwong maintains that the use of local dialects for communication between the protest leaders and

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participants and among the protesters themselves reflects less hierarchical relations and the desire to resist imperialist, colonizing Thai culture. Studying Redshirt protest music, James Mitchell offers various instances of Thai folk songs (*lukthung*) and traditional Lao folk music (*molam*) adapted and appropriated by Redshirt protesters as cultural weapons against the hegemonic tradition. These two musical genres represent music from the working class and a wide group of people from the countryside.

At the same time, an increasing number of works mention the hostility between the Redshirts and “traditional” elites, especially the monarchy. All these works stress the importance of the “eye-opening” element in Redshirt struggles. According to them, the Redshirts’ self-perception as eye-opened people or “orphans” indicates their political frustration which then transformed their attitudes towards the monarchy. Moreover, in contrast to the royalists’ well-formed republican anti-monarchist network, this resentment is not directed or driven by Redshirt leaders but by the rank-and-file and is inseparable from their struggles for democracy, popular sovereignty, equality, justice, and inclusion. However, since most of these works are

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98 James Mitchell, “Red and Yellow Songs: a Historical Analysis of the Use of Music by the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) and the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD) in Thailand,” in *South East Asia Research* 19, 3 (2011): 593.
written in Thai, scholars admit that, due to legal restrictions, it is impossible to know how and in what forms such anti-royal politics operate.\textsuperscript{101}

Written in languages other than Thai and thus having less at stake,\textsuperscript{102} Eugenie Mérieau, Serhat Ünaldi, and Andrew Marshall explicitly engage with Redshirts’ anti-royalist language and symbols. Mérieau states, “The more a person in question is considered as having ‘eyes open,’ the more she is critical of the monarchy.”\textsuperscript{103} She writes that having conversational partners whose “eyes are open” determines “what point that the conversation regarding the critique of the monarchy can go.”\textsuperscript{104} More specific than Mérieau, Ünaldi pays attention to “anti-royal graffiti in downtown Bangkok” on September 19, 2010 when the Redshirts gathered to commemorate the bloody May 2010 crackdown. Examining 63 pieces of graffiti, Ünaldi finds that graffiti artists use terms like “sky,” “blind animal” (\textit{sat bot}), and “monitor lizard” (\textit{ai hia}) to insult the King.\textsuperscript{105} Ünaldi describes this gathering on September 19 as the “first open strike against the sacred charisma of the Thai monarchy.”\textsuperscript{106} For Marshall, these graffiti “were part of a coded semi-secret language that had developed among opponents of the monarchy, who called themselves \textit{taa sawang} – meaning their eyes had been opened.”\textsuperscript{107}

In his latest work, Ünaldi shows how the Redshirt occupation of the Ratchaprasong area in 2010 can be seen as a form of “urban resistance” against the monarchy and those who worked

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\textsuperscript{101} Apichart Satitniramai et al., โครงการวิจัย ทบทวนภูมิทัศน์การเมืองไทย (Re-examining the Political Landscape of Thailand), 123.  
\textsuperscript{102} While the case record shows that academic works, written in Thai by Thai author, can be deemed violating Article 112 (For example, Giles Ungpakorn’s \textit{A Coup for the Rich} published in 2007), no charge has yet been made against foreign intellectuals. Above all, several foreign intellectuals who produce critical works on the Thai monarchy, do not reside nor work in Thailand and have institutional bases abroad. They are thus in less risky position than Thai academics who mostly teach in Thailand’s universities.  
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 377.  
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towards the monarchy. Through thick ethnographic description, Redshirts were portrayed as “intruders” of the Bangkok life-style and royalty-led capitalism. Located at the furthest position from the royal charismatic orbit, Redshirts began to realize that they gained the least from the existing order.\textsuperscript{108} As Ünaldi defines it, “\textit{ta sawang}” signifies the capability to “see things and recognize conditions that had remained hidden to them for a long time.”\textsuperscript{109}

Nonetheless, as stated above, Ünaldi views current conflicts as the clash between two charismatic leaders, King Bhumibol, on the one hand, and Thaksin, on the other. He writes, “the Thai political crisis appears as a tale of two demigods and their worshippers.”\textsuperscript{110} No doubt, these two rival figures do not share the same source of legitimacy. The former relies on birthright and religious beliefs while the latter was popularly elected. In a sense, for Ünaldi, Thailand’s political turmoil seems inevitable due to the incompatibility of these two charismatic models.

As opposed to this insight into the conflict, I argue that Redshirt discontent towards the monarchy dynamically changed and was heavily shaped by cascading events after the 2006 coup. In other words, proximate critical junctures and gradual shifts in attitude are my main focus. Rather than rejecting Ünaldi’s assertion, this dissertation shows that there was a period when Redshirt supports for the monarchy and Thaksin could co-exist. Redshirt anger did not entirely derive from their long time underprivileged position, but was rather triggered by violence and killings. Moreover, Ünaldi’s accounts overemphasize superstition and pre-modern rationalization among the Redshirts to the point that they are equivalent to those of the monarch’s followers. This thesis does not deny spiritual, emotional, and superstitious aspects of the Redshirt political expression. They exist and occasionally play important roles in shaping anti-royalist language and symbols. That said however, current anti-royalism cannot be reduced to merely a result of the

\textsuperscript{108} Serhat Ünaldi, \textit{Working towards the Monarchy: The Politics of Space in Downtown Bangkok}, 56.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 197.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 56.
competition between two “demigods.” Indeed, looking closely at Redshirt texts, one can hardly find religious terms such as boon (merits) or “barami” (charisma) employed to explain or justify their political struggles.

To conclude, these last group of works on the Redshirts provide instances of anti-royalist accounts that spill over into the public spheres during exceptional times. Yet, they do not explain where they came from. When were the term “sky” or “blind” initially used in political gatherings? Have they always carried the same meanings? Most importantly, who made these anonymous anti-royalist arts? How did they describe their resentment articulated through these means? Songs, T-shirts, and DVDs that routinely circulated and constituted Redshirt anti-royalist subculture have been left unexplained. In other words, it is necessary to examine the historical origins, meaning-making processes, mundane functions, and the variety of interpretations of anti-royalist sentiments and forms of expressions. Otherwise, Thailand’s political conflicts will be at risk of being perceived as either intra-elite clashes or ideological antagonism expressed through two mass political movements without adequate voices from below. Analysis of the rise and fall of Bhumibol as well as the Redshirt movement must include political experiences of those ordinary men and women involved in the conflict. Particularly, now the royalist military regime attempts to erase these anti-royalist accounts from public consciousness.

**Ideological Struggles and Resistance**

While, as the earlier section discusses, the study of anti-royalism in Thailand can help to elucidate early theories of popular sovereignty, it also engages with the contemporary scholarship of social movement, domination, resistance, and political transition. In addition to revealing the diverse forms of anti-royalism from below, this research captures moments of ideological shift and when a “hidden transcript” transgresses into public spheres. To elaborate, this research reconciles a conceptual gap between, on the one hand, ideological accommodation and, on the
other, ideological rejection. Also, it hopes to blur the line separating between everyday resistance which renders no “significant” shift in power relations and open collective uprising against the powers-that-be. Scholars on power and resistance are often trapped within clear-cut divisions between a) active resistance and passive subjugation, b) ideologically dominated and living with no illusion, c) public and hidden transcripts. Altogether these viewpoints are incapable of explaining change. They offer only conceptual tools to explain static conditions in which power functions, rather than offering frameworks for understanding and analyzing moments of political transformation. Using Thailand at a watershed, Redshirt anti-royalism can be seen as resistance within political hegemony comprising both elements of accommodation and rejection of power. Sabotaging from inside, this kind of resistance can also become powerful when actors play a politics of disguise while transgressing into public spheres and soliciting responses from the oppositional power. In other words, the Redshirt example does not only provide a conceptual tool but also shows that change is possible even though it is made by the underprivileged group accommodating the dominant ideology.

At the beginning of this introduction, I mentioned Scott’s ideas of weapons of the weak and hidden transcripts as characteristics of the current trend of anti-royalism in Thailand.

On the one hand, Scott’s approach to resistance enables us to go beyond the “contentious politics” perspective of the Redshirts as a political movement.111 The main objective of contentious politics is to identify “causal mechanisms” of social movements instead of understanding the meanings and semantic shifts of contentious acts. These latter are the primary objective of my research. Scott expands what counts as politics beyond organized large-scale

111 See Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
resistance movements with clear banners displaying the names of enemies.\textsuperscript{112} Taking into account symbolic insubordination such as folktales, gossip, rumors, songs, and euphemisms, Scott’s approach better informs my study topic.\textsuperscript{113} While exploring the “political opportunity,” “mobilizing structure,” and “framing process” of the Redshirts as a socio-political movement is important, I look beyond that, to the movement’s “radical” aspects that are risky, less visible, marginalized, or difficult to understand. I hold that these aspects have the potential to lead to substantive change.

For instance, as opposed to an explicit declaration that the King is no different from any other human being, I observe several accounts that exaggerate the King’s power to a laughable point. In one Facebook account, the King was praised as a master of the “shooting gun,” “tying one’s shoelace,” and “playing kite” (\textit{chak wao}, Thai slang for masturbation). Humor and satirical tonality are essential to the latest form of anti-royalism. My study shows that concepts of resistance cannot be limited to open physical confrontation with powerholders. The possible modalities of resistance can be expanded to acts of exaggeration, de-contextualization, and self-parody.

On the other hand, Scott’s framework has two weak points. The first weak point is that a clear distinction between public and hidden transcripts over-emphasizes the importance of locations where acts of resistance occur and of their “fugitive” forms. Scott maintains that hidden transcripts can accumulatively constitute an “infrapolitics” of subordinate groups and finally surface directly before the eyes of the powerful. However, these “moments of political electricity” are rare.\textsuperscript{114} However, overall, Scott’s works confirm the continuation of the status-quo where acts of resistance remain either hidden or disguised. This weak point does not offer adequate

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\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 2.
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explanations regarding the dynamic transformations of both the acts themselves and power relations.

Scott’s second weak point is that he repetitively argues against notions of hegemony, false consciousness, and ideological domination. For him, the members of the powerless class do not live in an illusionary world; there are always autonomous spaces for defiant thoughts and practices. When they hail or submissively appeal to the king, they, according to Scott, pretend to be naïve monarchists. Subordinate groups are always capable of having revolutionary thoughts. This position is weak because it seems to contradict Scott’s less outstanding remark that resistance can also derive from “taking the values of ruling elites seriously.”

Regarding the above two weak points, Timothy Mitchell’s *Everyday Metaphors of Power* contends that Scott’s problematic distinction between physical coercion and ideological persuasion leads to his narrow misunderstanding of hegemonic domination. Scott rules out the notion that obedience can stem from a consensual acceptance of the ruling ideology. That is, the dominant group can only use force to invoke public compliance. This power to make people obey does not work in private sites or in the realm of people’s consciousness. Mitchell argues that Scott presupposes the existence of “a place where the play of power does not penetrate” and where the “authentic voice of the subordinate” is present.” However, this approach overlooks several dimensions of modern power under a political regime in less severe conditions. In Mitchell’s view, the background of village politics, its givens or customary values, plays an important role in shaping dissident thoughts and forms of resistance. Through the process of “enframing,”

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120 Ibid., 563.
domination thus takes in forms of neutral law-like order, discipline, and surveillance; for instance, legal regulations and infrastructure. They serve as the existing parameters of social reality which determine what is realistic, possible, or alternative to the system. Mitchell maintains that “power in fact becomes most internal, most integral, and continuously at work within social and economic practices.”

Scott’s and Mitchell’s views on power and resistance are not completely incompatible; they can supplement each other. Using Thailand as a case study, this dissertation expands Scott’s concept of hidden transcripts by incorporating Mitchell’s critique. It shows that Redshirt resistance against the Thai monarchy can be seen as a vital instance of hidden transcripts; however, its emergence, development, and dynamism must be explained by taking into account the power effects of existing royalist ideology and its hegemonic domination, down to the level of village and household.

My arguments are drawn from what Glassman proposes in *Cracking Hegemony in Thailand: The Dialectics of Rebellion*. Similar to Mitchell, Glassman maintains that Redshirt resistance did not emerge outside of the existing hegemonic regime. Rather, the resistance came from “crack(s)” within the system, largely as by-products of capitalist development. While Glassman focuses on class analysis, this dissertation explores the hegemonic contradiction of royalist ideology, its network power, and countervailing democratic popular discourses. I argue that the monarchy occupied a dominant position in Thai society until moments of rupture arrived, gradually turning royalist true believers into resistant actors, or in local language, “person(s) who ‘used to’ love (*khon khoei rak* - คนเคยรัก).”

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Instead of autonomy from hegemonic belief or cynical disbelief,\textsuperscript{123} common Redshirt slogans, such as “having eyes open,” “a person who used to love,” or “no more love,” connote strong convictions in the past followed by a dramatic shift. These rhetorical and symbolic challenges do not come from an empty political space. The operation of hegemonic power and dominant belief likely played important roles in shaping its own opposition.

Furthermore, existing royalist rhetoric and symbols could be easily turned into subversive repertoires against the monarchy itself. Phrases such as “Long Live the King,” “Dust underneath the feet,” or “Father” constantly appear in Redshirt texts with meanings that no longer serve to enhance royal authority. Sometimes they are seriously taken to heart. Sometimes, these phrases are exaggerated and even satirized. This kind of resistance is similar to what Michel De Certeau understands as “tactic” or “making do.” As he explains in \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life}, mechanisms of power and rules imposed from above can be turned into weapons of the weak. The weak, de Certeau points out, “made something out of them [the laws]; they subvert them from within...They metaphorized the dominant order: they made it function in another register...They diverted it without leaving it.”\textsuperscript{124}

Thus, this dissertation not only examines various anti-royalist forms of resistance through language and symbols in use by diverse resistant actors but also reveals their gradual development as well as dynamic semantic shifts. It shows how the most recent anti-royalism in Thailand is both deeply embedded in and undermines, and thus dethrones, the royalist ideology.


Methodology

Reliance on state accounts, legal documents, and multiple-choice questionnaires makes comprehension of the ambivalent, creative, and dynamic aspects of speech-acts emerging from the bottom impossible.

Thus, political ethnography is my methodology. It is mindful of the lived experience and various interpretations of meanings on the ground in association with power relations. As Edward Schatz explains, ethnographic immersion not only “requires ‘sensibility’ to the meanings attributed by those observed to their political reality” but also “expands the boundary of the ‘political’.”

Focusing on a meaning-centered approach, I understand political ethnography from an interpretivist, not a positivist perspective. Rather than seeking the truth or causal laws that underpin signs, songs, or code words, I am interested in the diversity of meanings that people assign to them and the ways in which the construction and contestation of meanings play important roles in power struggles.

Therefore, political ethnography is not solely limited to participant-observation of particular communities. Rather, it is “a sensibility” which entails a “close familiarity with” and analysis of “collection of human artifacts.”

Discursive analysis, interviews, and ethnographic fieldwork were the three main procedures in my study. First, investigating material and linguistic artifacts, I looked into Redshirt ephemera, slogans, and symbols widely circulated in public gatherings from 2006 to 2016. I mainly collected and examined messages on T-shirts, archived political speeches, protest songs, poems, and street graffiti. Several Redshirt informants gave or let me see their collections of protest ephemera. Some accounts were also available in publicized memoirs, newspapers, photo
galleries, video clips posted online, and academic writings. Print sources included *Sanam Luang lai phadetkan* (*Sanam Luang Against Dictator*) newspaper, *Voice of Taksin* magazine, *Red Power* magazine, *Mahaprapachachon* (*The Great People*) newspaper, *Same Sky* journal, and *Read* journal. Online sources were *Prachatai* online newspaper, “Ruthless,” “Voices of Siam,” “The People’s Army Overthrowing Thaksin’s Regime,” and “Ultra-royalism” Facebook accounts.

Next, I conducted ordinary language interviews with people who had participated in the Redshirt movement during September 2006 – May 21, 2014. Thirty interviewees were selected from diverse backgrounds, occupations, and statuses such as songwriters, poets, salespeople, university professors, formal and informal Redshirt leaders, and ordinary Redshirt participants. While informants were asked to talk about their experiences in the movement and their opinions regarding the ongoing conflicts, an ordinary language approach was employed to help reveal meanings of particular words on the ground. For instance, most Redshirt informants mentioned the term “eye-opening,” which signifies resentments against the monarchy. Uncovering its meaning in everyday use, my questions included when they had their eyes open; what kind of feeling and emotion the eye-opening experience caused; what is the difference between those who have eyes open and those who have not.

In fact, after letting the interviewees provide examples to clarify their eye-opening experiences, I found out that the eye-opening experience consisted of more than one moment. Then I further asked whether this eye-opening experience was different from previous one; if it was, how, and what they did after having their eyes opened. Going beyond interviewing, I also show how and why anti-royalist language and symbols were used in songs, newspapers, speeches, and daily conversations.

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Finally, ethnographic accounts derived from my immersion in a Redshirt community in Bangkok from June 2014 – June 2015 added to my material. Unable to gather and protest publicly, a group of Redshirts routinely met and socialized in a [redacted] at a Bangkok [redacted]. I spent approximately six hours per week in these informal gatherings, engaged in conversations and political debates. Occasionally, when anti-coup activists organized small gatherings, seminars, or concerts, I joined the event with Redshirt participants. For informants’ safety, names of all ordinary protesters provided in this paper are pseudonyms. Also, names of individuals who are involved in accounts which touch upon sensitive issues regarding the monarchy, including those of public figures, will not be revealed. All translations from Thai are my own unless stated otherwise.

It is important to note that my fieldwork was conducted mainly in Bangkok. It can be argued that Redshirt voices presented here cannot be generalized as those belonging to the entire movement. I recognize that the Redshirt movement is national in scope and that it is difficult to take into account the full diversity of voices. However, accounts from Redshirt informants in this study cannot be reduced to being purely “Bangkok-centric.” Despite living in Bangkok, several informants are migrant workers and entrepreneurs from the North and Northeastern regions. Echoing Keyes’s description of “cosmopolitan villagers,” hometowns of Redshirt informants included Chiang Mai, Phrae, Nan, Khon Kaen, Surin, and Nakhon Ratchasima. On the one hand, analyzing the organizational structure, resource mobilization, and decision-making process, studies of the movement on a nation-wide basis might contribute to better understanding of various factors causing movement’s failures and successes. On the other hand, focusing on

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129 I traveled to Laos twice. The first visit was a trip organized by the Redshirts. The second one was when I met and interviewed Redshirt activists who sought asylum there.
language, symbols, and narratives provided by ordinary participants, this thesis reveals voices of the unheard as well as contestation over meanings in relation to regime transition.

**Dissertation Structure**

I divide this dissertation into three parts. Part one (chapters one and two) introduces the two main actors of this study: The Redshirts and the Thai monarchy. Chapter one portrays everyday Redshirt politics and Redshirt attitudes toward the monarchy after the coup d’État in 2014. Despite the military’s purge and suppression, ordinary Redshirts struggle to reclaim political life and resist the royalist elite through existing informal networks, daily conversations, complaints, and rumors. Ethnographic accounts enable us to see beyond open protests against the junta organized by a handful of urbanite and student activists. While on public surfaces, dissent voices are directed at the military government, on less visible sites such as small meetings and the cyber-world, the monarchy is the main target of verbal attacks and humorous ridicule. Chapter one aims to describe anti-royalism at its latest stage before the ailing King Bhumibol eventually passed away on October 13, 2016.

Chapter two takes readers back to the era before “the [royalist] walls crumbling down.” It discusses a brief history of the Thai monarchy and its various aspects of power. From 1957 to mid-2000s, the Thai monarchy and King Bhumibol had gradually elevated into a hegemonic position in Thai society. Politically, the monarchy became at the center of Thai nationalism. The King retained extraordinary power to criticize the elected government, intervene in Thai politics and “rescue” the nation. He was the role model for a righteous moral ruler. Economically, the Thai King was praised for his philosophy of “sufficiency economy,” although he was at the pinnacle of the world’s richest monarchs. Culturally, the royal power penetrated everyday life of Thai people

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through popular channels and commodities. Lastly, the lèse-majesté law functioned as a final resort to ensure royal power. Since the 2006 coup d’état, these idealized images and manipulative forms of power of the monarchy have been gradually undermined.

Part two (chapters three through six) chronologically depicts the emergence and development of the Redshirt movement as well as anti-royalist sentiments. First, the 2006 coup overthrowing the Thaksin government took anti-coup protesters into the street. Most participants were both royalist and Thaksin supporters who opposed the coup and the head of the Privy Council, General Prem Tinsulanond (chapter three). Second came the first ideological rupture in October 2008, when the Queen presided over a funeral of one Yellowshirt, the Redshirts’ nemesis. Despite growing resentment, Redshirt disappointment turned into a collective appeal to “the Sky” or the King (chapter four). Beginning the third transitional moment, the May 2010 Redshirt massacre sparked the “eye-opening” realization that the monarchy, particularly the King, had not only ignored the people’s sufferings, but also was their enemy. Linguistic and symbolic weapons shared in previous periods went through a significant semantic shift, enabling Redshirts to multiply and sustain various modalities of anti-royalism while avoiding legal charges with the draconian lèse-majesté law (chapter five). Fourth and finally, after Yingluck Shinawatra, Thaksin’s sister, won an election and formed a government in July 2011, anti-royalist acts of resistance became more institutionalized and popularized as they became locally understood as “having [one’s] eyes opened but lips whispering” (chapter six).

The third and final part of the dissertation (chapter seven) explores how the Redshirts locate themselves in Thailand’s political history. Expanding political struggles into the realm of memory, this part of the dissertation selects particular historical events and figures that Redshirts re-collected, re-invented, and turned into powerful political symbols against the monarchy. The three major historical narratives which are famously re-interpreted by the Redshirts include: The
ancient King Taksin and his death, the People’s Party and their 1932 revolution, and the mysterious death of King Ananda, Bhumibol’s older brother.

I wrote this dissertation during the period of which Thai junta and royalist camps not only successfully suppressed the anti-royalist dissent voices but also halted if not reversed Thailand’s democratic development. Situations became more looming and unpredictable in the wake of King Bhumibol’s passing. If insulting the great benevolent Father King was once considered a grave crime, insulting the dead one now constitutes even more blasphemous evil deeds. One week after Thailand lost King Bhumibol, several Thais were slapped, kicked, and harassed by royalist vigilantes only because they did not shed enough tear of sorrow, wear black (both in public and private), or glorify Bhumibol’s lifetime achievement.131

This dissertation cannot predict how this conflict will end, and does not aim to do so. My goal in writing it is instead to relay experiences and stories of anti-royalism that might otherwise remain in oblivion. The findings, I also hope to show, have theoretical value. They help us see a more expansive realm of resistance under harsh conditions than previous works on the subject recognized as possible.

131 See for example, “คนภูเก็ตรวมตัวกลางดึกหน้าร้านน้้าเต้าหู้ ไม่พอใจโพสต์เฟซบุ๊ก สลายตัวหลังแจ้งความคดี 112” “(Phuket people gathered in front of a soymilk shop, got mad at the owner’s Facebook posting, and later dispersed after the charge was pressed),” Prachatai, October 15, 2016, accessed November 24, 2016, http://www.prachatai.org/journal/2016/10/68370; “ตร.ยันเป็นคนวิกลจริต คลิปป้าหมิ่นเบื้องสูงบนรถเมล์ถูกตบหน้า” “(The police confirmed that she was mentally ill. Clip of the aunt who defamed the King on the bus and then got her face slapped),” Thairath online, October 18, 2016, accessed November 24, 2016, http://www.thairath.co.th/content/757316; “ประชาทัณฑ์คนงานวัยรุ่นชลบุรี ถูกกล่าวหาโพสต์หมิ่นฯ” “(A Chonburi teenage worker was assaulted by a mob due to his alleged lèse-majesté Facebook posting),” Prachatai, October 18, 2016, accessed November 24, 2016, http://www.prachatai.org/journal/2016/10/68417.
CHAPTER 1

UNWRITTEN STORIES OF ORDINARY REDSHIRTS, THEIR POLITICAL LIFE, AND ANTI-ROYALISM AFTER THE 2014 COUP D’ÉTAT

1.1 Introduction

Based on ethnographic accounts and informal interviews, this chapter depicts how contestations of power occurred at the level of everyday life after the 2014 coup d’etat. It aims to uncover not only socio-political tensions underneath Thailand’s authoritarian society but also the shallowness of royalist ideology propagated by the junta. While most attention is paid to public spheres where a handful groups of urbanite and student activists openly protest against the military government, the main resistance actors in this chapter, as well as the whole dissertation, are ordinary participants in the Redshirt movement. Despite a lack of formal organizational structure and access to public spaces, these ordinary men and women struggle to maintain both political life and identity. Furthermore, this chapter presents diverse dissident anti-royalist voices that circulate in semi-public and private spheres. They, I argue, are crucial for our understanding of Thailand’s chronic political conflicts, this transitional period, and the twilight era of the Thai monarchy.

As many scholars point out, for almost a decade, Thai society has been divided by two polarized ideologies of which latest consequences include the 2014 military coup and the rise of military dictatorship. On the one hand, the royalist establishment propagates the notion that legitimate ruling power should be put in the hands of few unelected “moral” men. According to this conservative paradigm, politicians are corrupt because the electoral system is rigged and the Thai masses, especially those in the rural and lower class, are uneducated and subject to vote-buying. The monarchy, the most superior moral figure, stands at the top of the hierarchy. This set
of ideas can be called “hyper-royalism,”132 “royalist democracy,”133 “ultra-royalism,”134 “Thai-style democracy”135 or “elite democracy.”136 As mentioned in the introduction, the Thailand monarchy, despite being a constitutional monarchy, retains quite exceptional political power (see the next chapter for its historical development and various aspects of power).

On the other hand, another set of political notions contends that legitimate power derives from electoral competition and that men and women, regardless of perceived moral or socio-economic status, are entitled to equal rights to participate in politics. It emphasizes a “highly majoritarian form of ‘popular democracy’.”137 Under this paradigm, democracy is less about moral rule than a political system which concretely serves the electorate.

Inevitably, those who hold one or the other of these two contrasting perspectives perceive the monarchy differently. Voices of resistance in the post 2014-coup era were therefore not limited to those who merely opposed the military dictatorship but were extended to include anti-royalists. While the former voices belonged explicitly to anti-coup activists, the latter voices whispered softly yet were widespread by men and women who identified themselves as Redshirts. Exploring the latest stage of anti-royalism through James C. Scott’s concept of “weapons of the weak,” this chapter takes readers into the world of “rumor, gossip, disguises, linguistic tricks, metaphors, euphemisms, folktales, ritual gestures, [and] anonymity.”138

137 Ibid.
I divides the chapter into four sections. The first section describes the 2014 authoritarian regime, both at the micro and macro levels. This brief description introduces the political background and atmosphere in which my research was conducted. The second section introduces my primary research field site, a [ ], in a Bangkok [ ], and two secondary sites which included universities and political gatherings on the street. This section presents the texture of ordinary Redshirts’ everyday interactions and activities as well as their ways of coping with their anger at political opponents and the military’s harassment. The third section focuses on the key actors of my study, the Redshirts. In this section, three major characteristics of this political movement are revealed: economic, geographic, and ideological diversity; political antagonism and tensions within the movement; and most importantly, their anti-royalist attitudes. The last section introduces the main topic of my research, various anti-royalist modalities. Examples of the arts of resistance – rumors, conspiracy theories, ambiguous songs, metaphorical poems, and satirical visual graphics – are adduced in this section to show how weapons of the weak were created, applied, and reproduced in the political context of the 2014 authoritarian regime. These descriptions of Redshirts and the characteristics of anti-royalist arts of resistance are indispensable since they set the stage for the subsequent chapters which trace the origin, development, and rise of the Redshirt massive national political movement with subversive ideologies.

1.2 The Authoritarian Regime: Life of a Dissident and Oppression by the Junta

This section introduces the political atmosphere I encountered when I began my research: Thailand under the junta’s rule, at both the micro and the macro levels. For the micro level, I use the story of a remarkable Redshirt woman, Nong, whom I met during fieldwork. Nong suffered
from the authoritarian regime and eventually left her home country. At the macro level, I provide
a brief background of the coup and the tactics of the coup makers to oppress political dissidents.

1.2.1 Life of a Dissident: Nong’s Story and Her Last Night in Thailand

One dark night on May 2015, Nong, a woman in her forties, and I were sitting together. She was about to spend her last few hours under the Thai sky before beginning a new chapter in her life as a fugitive in a foreign country. Nong and I had just met that day. She was a friend of Redshirt participants with whom I had spent almost one year doing “ethnographic fieldwork” at the [redacted]. They told me that Nong wished to live in exile and wondered if I knew anyone who could help her. I had never before met Nong since she worked as a [redacted] vendor at another [redacted]. Yet, I had heard of her stubborn and bold reputation from Redshirt friends.

For almost two weeks, a right-wing royalist group called “The Homeland Trash Collection Organization (องค์กรเก็บขยะแผ่นดิน)” had been witch-hunting Nong and threatening to file a lèse-majesté charge against her because of Nong’s Facebook postings which they deemed insulting to their beloved monarch. In other words, this cyber vigilante organization aimed to silence Nong, who, they held, had turned into another piece of “trash.” Her workplace address was exposed online. Nong was fired today. Although her boss was uninterested in Nong’s political stance, the last thing he wanted was his small shop turned into an ugly fight scene between royalist visitors and his anti-royalist employee. Before social ostracism turned into formal legal prosecution, Nong decided to leave Thailand. She fortunately found someone who could help her and offer temporary shelter before departure. While waiting for her ex-boyfriend to pick up several things at her place, Nong began to recall how she came to this point.
Joining the anti-coup movement at Sanam Luang\textsuperscript{139} since 2006, Nong had been an active Redshirt protester. After witnessing the deaths of many of her Redshirt comrades during the 2010 crackdown, she became close to “radical” fractions of the movement. After the 2014 coup d’état, Nong tried to continue her normal life selling retail cloth. This lean and small woman usually earned 400 baht (10 US Dollars) per day, which enabled her to live on a day-by-day basis. As her close Redshirt friends left Thailand and became asylum seekers, she found herself isolated. Thus she turned to the cyber world as the main channel to vent her political frustrations. Nong took out a touch screen Samsung Galaxy which she claimed was hers, although she also admitted to finding it by chance in a public toilet several months earlier. Showing me a contact list on her cell phone, Nong murmured, “Look, I don’t have anyone to call...They are all gone.” The names included the Faiyen band members,\textsuperscript{140} Redshirt artists whose songs were famous for anti-royalism. On her Facebook page, Nong wrote poems, short essays, and shared video links of contents critical of the Thai monarchy and Thai royalists. Despite her non-literary background, Nong had poetic skills. She wrote:

\begin{quote}
Who had malicious thoughts of taking others’ lives?
Who irrationally and wrongly made commands?
Who intentionally killed others while seeing with only one eye?
Who would possibly love someone with such an evil mind?
\end{quote}

While this writing would have gone unnoticed under a civilian government, it appeared outstandingly provocative under the authoritarian regime. In the wake of the 2014 coup, the junta criminalized any references to “one eye” or “blindness.” Among 68 lèse-majesté cases that resulted from the junta’s rampant abuse of the law during 2014-2016, ambiguous phrases such as “a one-eyed human,” “a blind uncle on a wheelchair,” and even “a car with one headlight” were

\textsuperscript{139} Sanam Luang or the “royal field” nearby the Temple of the Emerald Buddha and the Grand Palace in Bangkok is a well-known rally site.

\textsuperscript{140} The band was officially founded in late 2011 and played at Redshirt rally sites.
interpreted by the military court as defamatory remarks against the King. This reference possibly derives from the belief that King Bhumibol’s right eye is blind.  

Far from spontaneous speech-acts done by an impulsive angry woman, Nong’s language was embedded in a particular web of meanings widely shared among Redshirt participants. More important, it conveyed collective attitudes and beliefs toward the monarchy which deviated from the dominant official narrative. Although Nong’s poem was in the form of a question, the term “who” in the first three lines stood for someone she already knew. As her poem implicitly indicated, the King, who had one eye, was complicit in wrongdoings and murder; therefore, it was impossible for her to love him.

“The problem all comes down to whether to love or not to love (ทั้งหมดของปัญหามันก็อยู่รักกับไมรักนั่นแหละ),” Nong commented in a soft calm voice. She continued with a sad smile, “I loved him very much.” “It was like being heartbroken. You got it?” Nong tried to explain her feelings toward the monarch. Nong’s remarks showed that she had not always been critical of the monarchy. She “used to love” it. During her years of political participation, she followed the Faiyen band around the country and admired Surachai Saedan, a leader of the radical Redshirt group “Red Siam” and formerly convicted of the crime of lèse-majesté. As a Surachai follower, Nong asserted with confidence, “Surachai does not aim to abolish the monarchy. He demands the monarchy have a less political role.” In a sense, Nong’s position toward the monarchy concerned less about the abolition of the institution per se than its regime of “love” as well as excessive political influences.

Although the 2014 coup makers had launched countless “Return Happiness” campaigns, Nong could neither pretend to be “happy” nor suppress her resentment against not only the military dictatorship but also royalist propaganda. She recalled that one day, when she came

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141 On October 4 1948, King Bhumibol was seriously injured from a car accident in Switzerland and suffered from loss of vision. See Nicholas Grossman and Dominic Faulder, eds., *King Bhumibol Adulyadej: A Life’s Work*, (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2012), 89.
across someone wearing a royalist yellowshirt,\textsuperscript{142} she yelled, “buffalo bastard (\textit{ai khwai} - ไอ้ควาย) at him.” Now Nong could not tolerate any expression of love for the monarchy. Alienated from society, she wondered if she had mental problems. “I know I have to stop. But I cannot control myself. I am afraid that one day I will kill someone,” admitted Nong. She even went to see a psychiatrist, but her mental test results were normal. Nong did not have much to lose by the time she left. She had neither a job nor a bank account. Her personal property included her two bags of clothes, an old beat-up laptop, a smartphone, and 1,500 Baht cash (46 US Dollars).\textsuperscript{143} The next day Nong managed to cross the border to Thailand’s neighbor country and became one among at least 200 political fugitives who had fled Thailand after the 2014 coup.\textsuperscript{144}

Nong’s story illustrates how one’s life could be turned upside down as a result of being a Redshirt and anti-royalist after Thailand’s 2014 coup. As the famous proverb reads, “In the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king,” Nong refused to be blinded but instead declared that she had her two eyes wide open. Hence, the society which loved and worshipped the one-eyed monarch no longer provided a place for her.

Nong’s departure from Thailand was a political act which is worth considering in two ways. On the one hand, by refusing to cede her political life to the authoritarian regime, Nong’s defiance can be characterized as passive resistance or exodus. As several covenant theorists point out, resistance does not necessarily feature a popular uprising against the tyrant, but can include acts of withdrawal from the political community to avoid obeying an unjust law.\textsuperscript{145} This approach

\textsuperscript{142} Yellow was King Bhumibol’s official color since he was born on Monday. According to an astrological rule, each day is assigned a color and yellow is Monday’s color.

\textsuperscript{143} Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, May 11, 2015.

\textsuperscript{144} From 2014 – 2016, statistics shows that among 200 Thai fugitives, less than 10 were in the process of applying for a refugee status whereas the rest lived in exile without legal protection from host countries. Internet Dialogue on Law Reform, 24 เดือน ถว.: เมื่ออำนาจทหารอยู่เหนือระบบยุติธรรม (24 Months under the NCPO: When the Junta stands above Justice) (Bangkok, 2016), 52.

is passive since not only does it lack physical confrontation, but it also can be done individually and requires no massive mobilization. Therefore, fleeing is regarded as a “weapon of the weak” who cannot afford armed force.\textsuperscript{146}

On the other hand, seeking refuge in a foreign country can be costly in the contemporary world where life is already deeply embedded in existing society. Nong was a lone wolf. Her family disowned her. She did not have strong attachment to her Bangkok Redshirt friends. She had neither job nor saving money here. Unlike Nong, many are forced to endure a tyrant’s abuse of power and prosecution because they rarely have other options. “We cannot afford to live in exile,” said one Bangkokian Redshirt couple.\textsuperscript{147} They had a paralyzed old parent to take care of. Yet, far from passively succumbing to the ruling power, other ordinary Thai, who were both Redshirts and anti-royalists like Nong, lived their insubordinate lives even if they had to remain in Thailand. Nong’s case thus is one among many examples of various acts of defiance against the junta.

\subsection*{1.2.2 The 2014 Coup and Thailand’s Authoritarian Regime: The State-imposed “Happiness” and “Purge”}

You’ve returned happiness. I feel grateful.
You, the absolutely powerful. \textit{“I am very happy.”}
A good patriotic woman, I will be.
But can you spare any...space for the free “soul”?
In the year when rain came so late,
Dreams of those unfortunates were shattered in sorrow.
The genie flew from a lamp with his magic show.
No one knows why guns turned into pretty blooms.

Piangkham Pradapkhwam (At the People’s Party Memorial plaque on June 24, 2014)\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{147} Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, May 9, 2015.
On May 22, 2014, a military group led by General Prayuth Chan-ocha named “National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO)” seized power in coup, overthrew the civilian government elected in 2011, and abrogated the Kingdom’s constitution. Justifying its military rule, the first NCPO announcement asserted that Thailand had recently encountered devastating political violence; thus they were obligated “to return the situation to normal, to have the people in the nation have the same love for unity as in the past and also to reform political, economic, social and other structures.” Above all, the junta pledged loyalty to the monarchy which, they claimed, “is the focus of the heart and minds of the Thai people and which is above all conflict.”

Prior to the coup, Thailand suffered from a deep polarization between two mass movements, resulting in violent clashes and a seven-month insurrection. The royal-nationalist People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) movement protested against the elected Yingluck Shinawatra government. Occupying several landmarks in the capital city, the PDRC initially opposed the amnesty bill enacted by the government since the so-called “blanket” amnesty would have pardoned several politicians, including the ousted former Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, from various charges. However, tensions escalated after Yingluck dissolved parliament and scheduled a general election for February 2, 2014. Whistling and chanting “Reform before Election,” the PDRC not only boycotted the polls but also participated in “electoral violence,” actively obstructing the electoral process, intimidating voters, and vandalizing polling places. Movement leaders demanded the formation of a non-elected “People’s Council” to carry out national reform to cleanse the government of corrupt politicians and their influence. Opposing this anti-electoral force, the Redshirt movement (the United Front for Democracy

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Against Dictatorship - UDD), was mobilized to endorse the Yingluck government. The Redshirts saw normal parliamentary means as viable solutions to Thailand’s political deadlock. They thus rejected any political intervention made by an extra-constitutional body.

No doubt, the resulting 2014 NCPO coup served the political demands of the conservative PDRC rather than those of the UDD. Put it another way, the PDRC’s Bangkok Shutdown demonstration paved the way for the military coup. National elections were suspended indefinitely. The NCPO appointed several bodies, including the National Reform Council. Embracing tough, masculine, and paternalistic characteristics, General Prayuth, a head of the coup makers, turned himself into Thailand’s 29th Prime Minister.

Since then, Thailand’s relapse into authoritarianism and military dictatorship loomed while democratization and freedom of expression were suppressed. As many scholars have pointed out, Thai politics, under the NCPO’s ruling, has entered an era of de-democratization and restriction of basic rights and freedoms. Protection of the monarchy, obedience, and hierarchical rule of “Thai-style democracy” by a few “moral” people are prioritized as legitimate grounds for power as opposed to “Western” constitutionalism, democratic values, and political liberalization. Article 44 of the 2014 interim constitution (adopted by the NCPO to legitimate itself) gave the NCPO absolute power. Under this article, orders are deemed “lawful, constitutional, and final.” Those who committed the following crimes: sedition, lèse-majesté, and public gatherings of more than five people, would be tried by military court.


152 On September 12, 2016, the NCPO issued an order which returned the juridical power over these cases to civilian courts. The order was not applied to those who until then had been tried by the military court.
While Prayuth confidently affirmed that his regime was “99.99 percent democratic,” for two years, the junta has summoned 926 individuals to report themselves to the authority or repeatedly visited their houses or workplaces. Eighty-five have been charged for public assembly. Sixty-eight have been charged for defaming the monarchy. At least 80 public discussions have been cancelled or interrupted. Notably, if a seminar’s title contained any of the following keywords: rights, freedom, human rights, and constitution, it became a target of the junta and was likely to be postponed or canceled.

“I come back at the worst time for public protests and people movements,” I wrote in my fieldnotes three weeks after the military seized power. Having arrived in Bangkok in early June 2014, my original research plan – to observe and participate in Redshirt rallies – was suspended indefinitely. The junta prevented people from showing any kind of expression that could be read as threatening the “unity, peace, and order” of the nation. Green tanks and humvees were stationed at every big junction in Bangkok. As busy urban life went on, Bangkokians became gradually habituated to the presence of soldiers and police officers carrying M16 assault rifles and wearing bullet-proof vests at Skytrain stations, department stores, and public landmarks that could potentially be used as protest sites, as can be seen in Figure 1.1. Protest leaders and other activists were summoned, detained, and forced to sign agreements not to lead or join any political gathering.


154 Internet Dialogue on Law Reform, 24 เดือน คสช.: เมื่ออำนาจทหารอยู่เหนือระบบยุติธรรม (24 Months under the NCPO: When the Junta stands above Justice), 38.
The lèse-majesté law (Article 112) became the junta’s primary tool to silence its opponents. The random and widespread legal prosecution seemed contradictory with the NCPO’s insistence that the Thai monarchy stood above conflict and was a pillar of Thai nation. After the 2014 coup, the implementation of this draconian law has been taken to the extreme in several respects. First, the number of cases has surged. Prior to the coup, only 6 lèse-majesté defendants were behind bars. Two years after the coup, while 68 more individuals faced lèse-majesté charges, the number of detainees rose to 54.\textsuperscript{155}

Second, severe sentences became disproportionate to the acts. Lèse-majesté is a discursive crime usually involving verbal or written forms of criticism, mocking, or insults. Therefore, the lèse-majesté act by its very nature does not involve direct physical harm against

\footnote{\textsuperscript{155} FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights), \textit{36 AND COUNTING Lèse-majesté Imprisonment under Thailand’s Military Junta} (February 2016), 6.}
However, several defendants have been convicted and faced longer prison terms than those people involved in murder cases. Arrested in December 2014, Pongsak, a former tour-guide and Redshirt supporter, was sentenced to 60 years of imprisonment for posting 6 lèse-majesté messages on his Facebook account. Thanks to his guilty plea, the court halved the sentence to 30 years.

Third, the coup maker’s exercise of Foucauldian disciplinary power penetrated semi-private and private sites. Personal online chat or conversations in a taxi no longer escaped the eyes or ears of power. The story of Uncle O and his restroom door graffiti was exemplary (see Introduction). Fourth, what counted as a lèse-majesté crime became so expansive that it included acts of mocking the King’s dog, criticizing past monarchs, and wearing black on the King’s birthday. In other words, the military now criminalized a wide range of speech-actions which used to be hidden-transcripts or fugitive acts of resistance prior to the 2014 coup. Suspicious codenames or gestures could be deemed as damaging the monarchy’s reputation. Even worse, when someone came across a lèse-majesté remark and failed to “condemn” it, he or she could be accused of complicity in lèse-majesté.

Finally, the military was convinced that well-organized and well-funded anti-monarchist groups were scheming against the monarchy. During confinement and interrogation, most detainees were asked which anti-monarchist networks and financial sources endorsed their political activities. In an interview, an anti-coup student activist told me that the soldiers accused him of receiving money from Thaksin’s son. Moreover, during a six-hour interrogation,

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157 FIDH, 36 AND COUNTING Lèse-majesté Imprisonment under Thailand’s Military Junta, 8-9.
he and his friends were asked “What do you think about the monarchy?” or “What kind of political regime is the best in your view?” Pretending to be open-minded, an interrogator kindly said that any answer was acceptable even if it was the republican regime. “I won’t fall into their trap,” recalled the student activist knowing well that the “republican” answer would surely put him to deeper trouble.160

Those at risk of being accused of violating Article 112 included ordinary men and women with no academic backgrounds. They described themselves as Redshirt supporters. Notably, their alleged lèse-majesté crimes featured similar narrative structures and linguistic techniques. For instance, as mentioned above, the King was referred to as a blind man who secretly manipulated the most recent coup. He was also called the richest man on earth in the guise of a self-sufficient good man. “I hate the King. The King is not my father,” read one lèse-majesté Facebook message.161 Rejecting the King’s divine power, some emphasized the King’s vulnerable health and his inevitable upcoming death. “The King is just a man, not an angel,”162 said one taxi driver to a royalist passenger. Afterward, the latter filed lèse-majesté charges against the former. Last but not least, as the King was ailing, conflicts over royal succession among members of royal family were frequently touched upon and constituted lèse-majesté crimes.163

Fearing prosecution for violating Thailand’s lèse-majesté law, Redshirt activists and participants buried or burned their protest shirts and accessories, while Redshirt media sectors erased all video records of Redshirt rallies available online. “Fortunately, I terminated public access to my video clips and transferred all files to new sites accessible only from abroad,” said one independent reporter who had endured one week “voluntary attitude adjustment” at a

160 Sirawit Seritiwat, interview by author, Bangkok, August 1, 2014.
161 Thailand, Military Court of Chiang Mai, Military Court Decision, Black Case no. 15 kor. /2558, August 7, 2015.
162 Thailand, Criminal Court of Bangkok, Court Decision, Black Case no. Or. 2529/2557, August 8, 2014.
163 See the following cases, Khathawut, Chayapa, Pongsak, Ness, Tiansutham, Sasivimol, Yutthasak, Sirapop, and Opas at https://freedom.ilaw.or.th/.
military camp. Mistaking me for an undercover policewoman, the man was terrified when I approached him and asked if he had a video file of one Redshirt event. It took three meals and more than twenty bottles of beer (in total during our three casual meetings) for him to finally trust me enough to share that file with me.

Coercive force and arbitrary exercises of power went hand-in-hand with a bombardment of legitimizing symbols and rhetoric in the public spaces. On traffic billboards, in songs repeatedly played on every television program and radio channel, and in speeches by those in power, the “returning happiness to the Thai people” rhetoric carried a message that the coup makers were politically neutral actors who took power to put an end to violent and anarchical situations. As a song composed by Prayuth cheerfully proclaimed:

The day the nation, the King, and the mass of people live without danger, We offer to guard and protect you with our hearts. This is our promise.\(^\text{164}\)

As a result, in public, antagonistic politics, debates, and public protests were replaced with “happiness spectacles” organized by many sectors of the state apparatus. The goal was to harmonize, as well as depoliticize all Thais. People could enjoy free food, concerts, and medical check-ups by means of which the army and police could present themselves as kind, friendly servants of the people.

On June 15, 2014, I attended one of such “happiness” festival at Lumphini Park located in Bangkok’s center. The festival attracted more than a thousand participants who mostly came with friends and families. Approaching the big stage on which a police orchestra band was entertaining the crowd with fast, rhyming lukthung music (Thai folksongs), I passed several food stalls. Each had more than twenty people lined up. The food ranged from two sticks of grilled meatballs to a little bowl of fish maw soup. After receiving their small free meals, most people sat on the lawn

or sidewalks to eat their small portions of “happiness.” Once done, they would then line up again at a new booth.

The crowds of chatting people, the friendly announcements broadcast from loudspeakers, the sounds of laughing children, and the mouthwatering smells of foods could not conceal the irony that on the same day two other types of gathering were ordered cancelled by the military. Students at Ramkhamhaeng and Thammasat universities were not allowed to make origami art or eat sandwiches in public, since those activities were interpreted by the military as seditious acts. No doubt, a palpable fragility laid beneath the benevolent, stern face of the powerholder. Self-organized public assemblies symbolized threats against the junta. As Scott points out, subordinates are allowed to gather “only when they are authorized to do so from above.”

Indeed, these “happiness” feasts revealed how coup makers envisioned the Thai people and society in the most concrete sense. Their mission fit what Carl Schmitt describes as depoliticization. Schmitt explains, life without politics is life “without the distinction of friend and enemy.” Consequently, in a depoliticized society, life no longer has meaning beyond individual satisfaction. Lacking political qualities, humans only produce, consume, and entertain themselves. Deprived of political voice, Thai subjects became docile welfare recipients of the supreme uncontestable ruler. As individuals, they had liberty to choose grilled meatballs or fish maw soup, to enjoy arts and music, and to spend weekends relaxing with loved ones. Yet, as members of a political community, they were neither supposed to question the ruler’s source of power and legitimacy nor disrupt the image of conflict-free and harmonized society. People would

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167 Ibid., 57.
become incapable of acting in concert to manifest any political cause. Consequently, they had no power, in an Arendtian sense. As Hannah Arendt states, “power springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse.”168 In 2014 Thailand, the crowd and gathering in public spaces were condoned only in state-patronized festive environments. This, for Arendt, was not “action,” but rather an instance of an antipolitical society of labor and consumption producing only sameness and conformity.169

As mentioned earlier, the junta’s vision of society was a society in which subjects lived harmoniously and were united by love and loyalty toward the monarchy. Obsession with the paternal power of the monarchy reached its high point in 2015. Celebrating the King’s and Queen’s birthdays, the two biggest bike rallies in Thailand’s history in which participants wore T-shirts emblazoned with “Bike for Dad” and “Bike for Mom” took place. State agencies distributed the t-shirts nationwide. Thai citizens could easily purchased them everywhere from shops at department stores to stalls on the street. After these national events, people wore these T-shirts while going to work, doing sports, or simply doing their daily routine.

The underlying message was that Thai should refrain from showing affiliation with political groups, organizations, or movements. For the ruling elite, “Redshirtness” represented a threat to social harmony and public order. Symbolic display or expression of being a “Redshirt” was prohibited. Selling fried calamari on the street of Chiang Mai, a man was forced to take off his shirt since it had the Redshirt chairman, Jatuporn Phrompan’s, face on it.170 A restaurant owner from Ubon Ratchathani, had her “Redshirt” sticker removed from her vegetable bucket by

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169 Ibid., 214.
Political symbolism manifested through body, object, and language in the daily life was subject to surveillance and correction.

The widespread fear, stigmatization, criminalization, and the dissolution of “Redshirtness” in the wake of the 2014 coup provided the context that framed the point of departure for my research. Since its emergence in 2006, Redshirts had never faced such extremely limited conditions. Ethnographic research aiming at understanding what it meant to be a Redshirt became nearly impossible, as did exploring possible messages of anti-royalism in Redshirt politics. In place of open questions about the identity of an open political movement, the repression of the post-2014 coup brought new questions: Did Thai society return to its “supposed” harmonious condition under which its people were not color-divided? Do Redshirts still exist? What kinds and in what form were critical views toward the monarchy, if they existed at all, expressed and shared during this era?

1.3 The Site of My Research

This section discusses the primary and secondary sites of my ethnographic research. Even though I spent the majority of research time at my primary site, a [redacted] in a [redacted], I occasionally visited others sites where anti-coup seminars or events were held. Under the military regime, studying political dissents in these sites was indeed challenging because political space was unstable. These spaces were monitored and controlled by the oppressor. However, they could be reclaimed by the oppressed. This section will show how a group of ordinary Redshirts refused to consent to the commands of the dictators. When collective action and open dissent in

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the public spheres were made nearly impossible, resistance changed its form and re-located to new sites.

1.3.1 The Fieldsite

“In 2007, we had PTV, our television channel... We had not yet used red as our symbolic color. I came here to watch TV programs on the...”172

“After the crackdown in 2010, I realized that there was this place where Redshirts could gather. So I came by bus. I knew no one before. Here, I found ideological friends (phuean ruam udomkan - เพื่อนร่วมอุดมการณ์), my Redshirt friends.”173

In June 2014, I found myself standing in front of a located in an area of Bangkok commonly known as a “red” area. is the only public transportation available. It was among the of Bangkok, where Thaksin-endorsed Pheu Thai Party MPs dominated. Unlike Bangkok’s central business district’s such as , this had no . Serving customers on a budget, the were a mix of restaurant chains, retail shops, salons, and massage booths. attracted different kinds of visitors, political ones. For almost a decade, the hosted countless Redshirt gatherings, including press conferences, academic talks, concerts, and . It also offered crucial meeting spaces, both formal and informal, which proved indispensable to the movement, including , vending stalls selling protest T-shirts, print magazines, CDs and VCDs, and small cafés where ordinary Redshirts could spend days talking politics.

In contrast to the lively and highly politicized atmosphere observed during my preliminary fieldwork before the 2014 coup, the in June was completely deserted. Most and on the were also closed and lights were dim. Less than twenty people strolled

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173 Chan, interview by author, Bangkok, January 24, 2015.
around the hallway. Only graffiti, stickers, and posters on the wall were left as political reminders of the Redshirts. These anonymous statements called for an election and expressed admiration for the ousted Thaksin. “Happy Birth Day Thaksin,” was scrawled across one wall, probably written on July 26, 2013 during the Yingluck era.

Hearing lukthung music on loudspeakers, I followed the noise and discovered a VCD vendor still open on . Although non-political lukthung music was playing, among the standard Hollywood films and Thai pop music, the items on the VCD vendor’s table included VCDs about Redshirt struggles and Redshirt leaders’ top hits. Two albums of the highly political Faiyen band whose members had fled to a neighboring country were also available. Clearly, a few Redshirt symbols and exchange markets still existed despite the military’s attempt to eliminate all signs of resistance.

Likewise, in one nearby, an orange-covered book titled “A Collection of Jakrapob Penkair’s Articles and Facebook Posts” was placed on the table at the entrance. The document was manually bound and did not have an ISBN (International Standard Book Number). I entered the shop, which, unbeknownst to me, would become one of my main fieldsites for the following eight months.

The shop displayed no overt political statements. Nor was there any portrait of political figures. Looking from the outside through glass windows, although a clean white wall brightened the place, the atmosphere was desolate. No customer was wandering inside as I began to explore . Containing more than just hand-made Redshirt documents, the shelves on the left were packed with a variety of printed materials including autobiographies of Redshirt leaders, Nattawut

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174 Jakrapob Penkair was appointed a government spokesperson during Thaksin’s administration. After the 2006 coup, he led the anti-coup mass movements which later became Redshirt movements and was charged with lèse-majesté in 2008. He left Thailand in 2009 and has lived abroad as a political exile.
Saikua\(^\text{175}\) and Surachai Saedan,\(^\text{176}\) Thaksin’s *Having Eyes Fixed at Stars and Feet on the Ground* (ตาดูดาวเท่าติดติน), and photo albums of Redshirt rallies. Other texts included a legal critique of the lèse-majesté law, a history of the 1932 Siamese Revolution, the mysterious death of King Ananda – Rama VIII, and second-hand leftist “revolutionary” books published during the 1960s-1970s. Bookcases at the back contained non-political volumes such as Buddhist teaching, amulet guidebooks, and cookbooks. Some book covers were visible. But most books were arranged vertically and had their spines out.

Unlike the other cases, the smaller 3-shelf bookcase in the middle of the shop was not intended to stock as many books as possible but to discreetly display the products’ covers and titles. The two upper shelves contained a complete collection of *Fa diew kan (Same Sky)* journal, while the lowest shelf contained *Aan (Read)* periodical. The former was a leftist progressive journal published since 2003. The latter was a journal of literary criticism published since 2008.\(^\text{177}\) Both offered highly academic articles, for instance, Benedict Anderson’s comparative analysis of contemporary monarchies and film critiques.\(^\text{178}\)

Furthermore, never before had I found that had every issue of these two periodicals.

\(^\text{175}\) Nattawut led the anti-coup movement in 2007 and turned into an outstanding Redshirt speaker. He is one among official UDD leaders.

\(^\text{176}\) Surachai is a former-communist fighter. Since 2007, he joined the anti-coup movement and appeared on the stage of the formal Redshirt UDD. However, due to different strategies and ideologies, Surachai was marginalized by the UDD and decided to establish his own autonomous group called Red Siam. He was charged with lèse majesté and put behind bars for two and a half years during 2011-2013. After being released, he was still politically active with the Red Siam group. After the 2014 coup, Surachai refused to report himself to the ruling junta and lived in exile.

\(^\text{177}\) Most articles in these two periodicals were written by intelligentsia who more or less favored labor-popular movements and were critical to both capitalism and the political establishment. *Same Sky* offered more theoretical and historical analysis whereas *Read* provided excellent textual-discursive analysis and cultural critique. Chapter two goes into details regarding *Same Sky*’s background and its relationship with the Redshirt movements.

Even so, did not have several volumes. The existence of these journals, as well as other printing products, reflect a peculiar relationship between ordinary Redshirt participants and intellectuals. It went against the stereotype that Redshirts were an uneducated mass, incapable of thinking for themselves let alone comprehending difficult historical or political texts.

While I was flipping through *Same Sky* issues, a small woman in her fifties approached, smiled, and invited me to sit on a small red plastic chair. I thanked her and took a seat. Ten minutes passed, I was now sitting on a chair against the right-side wall.

. Staring at a flat-screen computer, the was now sitting on a chair against the right-side wall. . I noticed another woman sitting comfortably with both legs crossed on a sofa. The sofa was placed against the front glass windows. She had more wrinkles and was plumper than the first woman. Unexpectedly, I spent the next 30 minutes chatting politics with these two women before making a payment. In keeping with Thai custom, I would soon come to call both of these women “aunties (pa)” and I would tell them my nickname, “Nam.” Aunt Lek was the; Aunt Sao was the woman on the sofa who as Aunt Lek’s.

With big round eyes and a loud upset voice, Aunt Sao asked me, “Do you know that they even prohibit us from eating sandwiches?” I nodded and added, “And they prohibit the three-finger salute.” Aunt Sao complained, “I want to join them but my son begged me not to.” We then talked about the arrests of several anti-coup activists and Redshirt leaders. Aunt Lek occasionally joined the conversations.
When I mentioned that I studied abroad in New York and had just returned, Aunt Sao lowered her voice and asked, “Can you watch Rose’s video clips?” Rose was a Thai woman living abroad. She was well-known for producing dozens of video clips of herself cursing the Thai monarchy. Amidst strong social sanctions, her parents, living in Thailand, charged their own daughter with lèse-majesté. Rose was typically not an admired figure in Thailand; however, Aunt Sao gave me a proud smile when she told me that she was able to watch Rose’s clips. As I show later, several Redshirts not only shared heroes and celebrities unknown if not notorious according to the mainstream media with me, they also paid respect to those charged and convicted of lèse-majesté. Staying at this for less than thirty minutes, I noted that at least three figures charged with lèse-majesté -- Jakrapob, Surachai, and Rose -- were explicitly praised despite public shaming and ongoing legal persecution. In other words, members of the community that were the patrons of this were shaped by worldviews and values which deviated considerably from Thailand’s public social norms and legal system.

Political chats continued while no new customer entered the . The two aunties and I began to ask questions concerning particular sets of numbers. This was the first time I experienced how people use numeric references to the royalty in their mundane conversations. Aunt Sao asked, “Do you know who ‘901’ is?” I nodded. According to both women, “901” certainly endorsed the recent coup. Used among state agencies, it was known to the public that 901 was King Bhumibol’s code number while 902 and 904 referred to the Queen and the Crown Prince respectively. The conversations did not end with numeric reference to the King. Aunt Sao lowered her eyes to a daily newspaper and pointed her finger at a headline photo of the King making a

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public appearance. With rage, she swore, “the biggest monitor lizard/mother fucker (ai hia tua yai thisut - ไอ้เหี้ยตัวใหญ่ที่สุด).” In Thai language, the term “hia” is not only referred to a type of large reptile – monitor lizard – but also considered as one of the strongest insult equivalent to “mother fucker.” Seemingly, at least for these two people in this [redacted], King Bhumibol was far from a respected figure, but rather the most wicked one who had masterminded Thailand’s most recent coup. Wondering why the aunties dared to openly insult the King in front of a stranger like myself, I tried to conceal my amazement. Was it because they had already read my political stance through [redacted]? Or was it simply because anti-royalist sentiments were so prevalent and normal for them?

1.3.2 The Two Different Worlds of Resistance in the Post-2014-Coup Era

Pichit Likitkijsomboon, a university professor and Redshirt sympathizer, argues that, after the 2014 coup, resistance movements can be divided into two groups – Redshirts who support and follow the tripartite of Thaksin, the Pheu Thai Party, and the formal Redshirt UDD organization, and those activists who worked independently from both Thaksin’s and the UDD’s leadership. Pichit estimates that the former category was likely to remain inactive and wait until normal electoral politics returns. The latter, on the contrary, primarily comprised of university students and urban-based progressive activists under various banners, continued to openly resist the military regime. These latter kinds of groups were known by different names, such as the Resistance Citizens and New Democracy Movement.

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180 In Thai language, the term “hia” is not only referred to a type of animal – monitor lizard – but also considered as one of the strongest insult equivalent to “mother fucker.”

For Pichit, the Redshirt movement was thus gradually weakening, losing its momentum, and might finally dissolve as Thaksin’s power networks continued to be undermined by the coup makers. Putting Pichit’s analysis in the framework of contentious politics, the Redshirt movement was experiencing a period of “contraction” in their protest cycle due to the extremely limited political environment and their lack of a strong mobilizing structure. Furthermore, despite his presence as a longtime intellectual spokesman for Redshirts, Pichit criticized not only the inertia of Redshirt elites but also that of the ordinary Redshirts under the authoritarian regime. He said that a “loser’s mentality” has dominated Redshirt thinking since the coup. For Pichit, most Redshirts live in a fantasy that their enemies are deeply divided and they will be rescued by particular powerful royal elites. Warning his Redshirt fellows, Pichit, a former 1970s leftist student activist, stated, “True democracy must be attained by struggles, fights, and sacrifices of the people, not by begging or hoping in vain to get help from any magical figure.”

Nonetheless, Pichit’s analysis does not tell the entire story and has not done justice to ordinary voices. As opposed to Pichit’s prediction of the downfall of the Redshirts, I maintain that the academic’s and activists’ worlds of resistance must recognize the resistance of ordinary Redshirt participants. Unlike academics and activists, ordinary actors were not protected by either high social status or academic immunity. Echoing James C. Scott’s thesis, I argue that open confrontations were too risky and costly for them. Among 68 lèse-majesté defendants, only

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183 There was a popular belief among the Redshirts that the Crown Prince was on their side and that the ongoing conflict has resulted from the royal contest over the succession rights between the Crown Prince on one side, and the Crown Princess in alliance with Prem on the other. See further discussion in section 1.5.3.


three had affiliations with academic institutions. While university professors and students were likely to get bail, the majority of political prisoners were ordinary Redshirts accused of public gatherings, inciting sedition, and defaming the monarchy. These latter were therefore in far more vulnerable and inferior positions in terms of the socio-economic capital necessary for resistance in the “democratic” model, decorated with catchy slogans and symbols. Scott maintains, “especially under conditions of tyranny or near-tyranny,” a researcher must avoid having too narrow concept of political life and being trapped under the binary of “consent” and “open rebellion.”

James C. Scott’s and Lisa Wedeen’s approaches to power under authoritarian society are helpful. As Scott shows, the ruling elite can only control the “public ritual life” or the “onstage.” In the “backstage,” various forms of resistance negating public order can exist. Scott calls these “hidden transcripts” – “the political life of subordinate groups” located “neither in overt collective defiance of powerholders nor in complete hegemonic compliance.” In a similar vein, Lisa Wedeen examines songs, caricatures in the newspaper, and jokes that are transgressive to official discourses in Syria. She shows that while publicly the Syrian authoritarian regime is embedded in Asad’s personality cult, ordinary Syrians play a “politics of disbelief.” She defines this as obeying power without having faith in it. In short, both Scott and Wedeen expand the terrain of political struggle and dismiss the ideas of ideological mystification at everyday life of the people living under restricted political regimes.

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186 After the 2014 coup, three university students who were arrested and charged with lèse-majesté law included Patiwat from Khon Kaen University, Apichart from Thammasat University, and Akaradej from Mahanakorn University of Technology.


From June through August 2014 and again from October 2014 through May 2015, my fieldsites included a [ ] at a [ ], universities, and other sites where ad hoc anti-coup activities took place. In universities, professors and students who had previously supported the Redshirts attempted to launch academic talks and anti-coup symbolic activities. Some were held outside the campus. I attended these events regularly. Indeed, I felt relatively comfortable joining these events since I often personally knew the events’ organizers, speakers, or student participants who, like myself, had academic backgrounds. For instance, a group of activists organized a “Coup Down, People Rise 2015” event on New Year’s eve at Bangkok’s Democracy Monument, where people ate northeastern papaya salad and sticky rice, enjoyed live music, and sang Thai communist fighter Jit Phumisak’s *The Light of Star for Faith* after the New Year countdown. Due to state suppression, widespread fear, and lack of formal support from UDD leaders, anti-coup events both inside and outside universities often attracted only 200-300 people at most and lasted for just a few hours. I participated at least ten of these events. Locations included Thammasat University, Siam Paragon department store, the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre, and the Bangkok military court.

I spent about three days per week at the [ ] in the [ ], my main fieldsite. The shop opened at 9 a.m. but visitors normally came around noon. The atmosphere thus became more lively in the afternoon. I usually arrived at noon and spent 5 to 6 hours. On several special occasions, I spent time with Redshirt visitors outside the [ ]. For instance, we attended the funeral of a Redshirt leader at Nonthaburi province. We went to Yingluck Shinawatra’s house to show support during her trial over the rice scheme. And we celebrated the birthday of a visitor at a restaurant owned by a Redshirt supporter.

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Invitations to these activities outside the did not come immediately after starting fieldwork. During the first month, despite “being there” at the, most Redshirt participants hesitated to talk to me, not to mention exchanging political opinions critical of the Thai elite. Dvora Yanow maintains, “‘Access’ is not a matter of merely getting a foot in a door; it is about establishing relationships and maintaining them.” I will show in the next section that Redshirt visitors to the and I did not share similar backgrounds in terms of age, academic status, and involvement in Redshirt movement. In other words, unlike in the academic world of resistance, there was a wide gap between them and me. Admittedly, during the first two months, I felt somehow obligated to buy something from Aunt Lek as an exchange of gratitude to her for letting a stranger come there. Five hours went slowly; they were full of uneasiness. While people sat on the floor, chatted politics, and laughed inside or in front of the, I timidly strolled around pretending to examine alone.

As time went by, I purchased less; from to a to a piece of a cookie. Finally, the sense of obligation to buy something disappeared. This process occurred as Redshirt visitors became familiar with my presence and trust was slowly built. First, that I had participated in anti-coup activities allowed me to earn a level of acceptance from visitors. As mentioned earlier, the two worlds of resistance, one of the intellectuals and another of ordinary Redshirts, were not entirely separated. I met some Redshirt visitors at places where seminars and anti-coup events were organized. They also saw me having conversations with one university professor who was well-known among Redshirts. Perhaps, these kinds of events made them become more certain that I was not a spy sent from the police or a military unit. Afterward,

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when we met again at the they were friendlier with me. They invited me to sit on the floor and introduced me to others.

Second, Redshirts at the took me as someone with information and connections regarding other anti-coup activities and student movements. Seeing me as a person with an “academic” background, they assumed that I had long known the young activists while actually most of those activists were my new friends just as they were. They actively wanted me to share the latest news about anti-coup events organized by the youth movements. Most of visitors were, indeed, strong supporters of anti-coup activists. Trying to meet their expectations, I kept myself updated with the situations and participated in all the events. Although Redshirt visitors and I did not meet at the we always kept in touch via social networks.

Finally, I felt that Redshirts at the truly appreciated me after I helped Nong (see section 1.2.1) regarding the harassment of the ring-wing Homeland Trash Collection Organization. One aunty got up and hugged me tightly as soon as she saw me the next day. News spread and I noticed that now Redshirts were willing to share with me their stories, political comments, even secret vengeful desires against their royalist opponents with me.

No doubt my academic background played an important role in shaping my relationships with the people at the At first, I could not help but feel irritated when someone at the talked about my researcher status aloud in their own language. “She came from New York. She is here to collect data,” Aunt Sao bluntly introduced me to others. During a New Year’s party, the host announced into a microphone, “This is Nam. She is a Redshirt Doctor.” In other words, they not only assumed that I was a graduate student studying abroad, but also a Redshirt. Never introducing myself that way, I usually gave a euphemized and humble self-introduction. “I am

193 Abbreviation for a Ph.D. graduate.
interested in the popular movement struggling for democracy. I know nothing and I hope to learn from you.” Although differences in status, age, and appearance could not be more obvious, I always hoped that those gaps could eventually be concealed or bridged.

However, this was impossible. In fact, those unbridgeable gaps partly made my participation at the possible. The term “Doctor” entailed a higher academic status and therefore high expectations. San, a taxi driver, said “Doctor, I want to write a personal memoir. I may be just a taxi driver but I know lots of things...Can you help me?” For San, I appeared to be someone with privileges who attained data from him; he wanted something in return. “Why don’t you write something more controversial?” Aunt Pinky, a Redshirt business woman, commented after she had read my article published online. “After you graduate and teach at the university, will you become like those ignorant bureaucrats who are only busy with their routines?” Aunt Wan and Aunt Chan, two Redshirt Bangkok women, asked me in a serious voice. Implied in these statements, the relationships and data I obtained from this community were not gratis, but were needed to serve their political struggles. As I will show in the next section, political antagonism was central to these ordinary Redshirt worldviews. Those in higher social status were expected to return a contribution to the movement, supplement what ordinary members could not achieve, and act as an agent of change rather than reproducing the status-quo.

My ethnographic accounts of the ordinary Redshirts reveal the lively existence of numerous forms of continuing resistance and insubordination. These forms of resistance, in turn, were not entirely separate from the anti-coup “democratic” resistance. News regarding anti-coup events was the central topic of daily conversation among Redshirts at the The latest anti-coup music videos, event footage, and photos continued to circulate in Redshirts’ social networks. Although they were less visible, more individualistic, dynamic, and spontaneous, these speech-acts, I argue, should be counted as evidence of noncompliance with the junta’s public
Our understandings of “democratic resistance” or “the political” are severely impoverished when we limit them to open collective anti-coup movements.

Similar to Pichit’s approach, after having stabilized its regime, the Thai military regime directed its attention to acts of defiance usually made by urbanite literati and lowered a degree of their surveillance/disciplinary power over those in rank and file position. Informal everyday gatherings, cacophonous complaints, and vulgar curses made by a handful of “no-name” senior citizens, including pensioners, a homeless man, and ex-prisoners, appeared to have no significant political effect. From the Thai authoritarian state’s perspective, so long as Redshirt commoners were left leaderless and disorganized, state resources could be mobilized to monitor and control those stubborn groups or individuals who insisted on using symbolic actions and expressing political demands.

1.3.3 Reclaiming and Creating Political Spaces

Opposing the junta’s de-redization and depoliticization, ordinary Redshirts gradually established novel spaces which enabled them to maintain a sense of community and political life. The [barcode] at the [barcode] was one of these alternate spaces. Arguably, the [barcode] was “a site for hidden transcripts” which, as Scott explains, is “composed entirely of close confidants who share similar experiences of domination.” Moreover, “This space was not a gift; it has to be created by people who fought to create it.”

One month after the coup, Aunt Lek and Aunt Sao brainstormed various solutions and alternative plans to survive economically and politically. Most remaining visitors were neither nor Rather, they were Redshirt participants who used to be active on the streets in the

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195 Ibid., 123.
past decade and then were deprived of opportunities to meet their Redshirt comrades. Consequently, using the Aunt Lek and Aunt Sao attempted to construct spaces which could at least substitute as a protest site. Twenty plastic chairs and tables were placed both inside and outside the shop. Boxes of instant coffee, Ovaltine, and teabags were placed next to an electric kettle and a pack of paper cups and snacks such as crackers, deep-fried doughsticks, french-fries, and sausages were sold in front of the shop. Customers could also buy beverages in a fridge as well as ice-cream in a separate freezer inside. These miscellaneous sweets and drinks indeed became the main sources of the shop’s daily income. This transformation occurred when the army narrowed their focus on the Redshirts to the leader’s level and those who insisted on continuing open collective protests. Unless the visitors started expressing an overt rejection of the junta’s power in concert, the business and small meetings could continue.

Two months after the coup, the slowly regained its vibes and welcomed more visitors. Sitting either on mats brought from home or on the floor, people had their political chat in circles of five to ten. Normally, about six to ten small circles continued during the daytime. Most visitors bought coffee and snacks at the At first, I found it impossible to join any of these informal meetings. My discomfort had to do with my appearance and age. Most Redshirts at the were in their fifties to seventies. As one man asked me with humor, “Are you lost?
People younger than 50 years old do not belong here." Furthermore, these aunties and uncles wore loose T-shirts and pants. Several aunties showed up in traditional sins (sarong-like garments wore by women). They seemed to prefer any outfit which enabled them to sit and move conveniently. Although I am not fond of fancy stylish clothes, my skinny jeans or ripped denim shorts made me look extremely odd at the party.

More importantly, these loosely-tied communities were founded on the pre-existing Redshirt relationships of those who shared memories and the experiences of political struggle. As a newcomer, I showed up during a time when any stranger could have been a spy for the military government. Unlike Aunt Sao, who openly attacked the coup makers and the monarchy, most routine visitors hesitated to frankly express their political comments or past struggles, although they would let me spend many hours with them.

Four months after the coup, Aunt Lek decided to install a television and stereo system. Visitors could spend many hours sitting and watching Redshirts’ preferred programs, namely those broadcast by Peace TV, TV 24, and Voice TV. Starting in September 2014, Peace TV became

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196 In a survey conducted in Redshirt protest sites during March-April 2010, McCargo and Narueemon find that from 400 samples, two thirds of participants were over 40 years old. Similarly, according to a survey of the UDD gathering in November 2013, 75% of Redshirt respondents are over 35. The report asserts that the Redshirt movement did not represent a youth or student movement. See Duncan McCargo and Narueemon Thabchumpon, “Urbanized Villagers in the 2010 Thai Redshirt Protests: Not Just Poor Farmers?,” Asian Survey 51, no. 6 (2011): 1002. The Asia Foundation, Profile of the Protesters: A Survey of Pro and Anti-Government Demonstration in Bangkok on November 30, 2013 (Bangkok, 2013), 3. As shown in both this dissertation and other works, the Redshirt movement attracted a limited number of the young middle class in Bangkok. So far, no researcher has been able provide adequate explanations regarding the generational dimension of the movement, which is indeed an interesting research topic. It can be explained at length why the millennial generation in Thailand, especially in Bangkok, became depoliticized and not interested in joining political movements. To put it briefly here, since the 1980s, the leftist trend in Thailand continued to decline. Universities have no longer served as political sites where demonstrations, strikes, or critical public lectures took place. In addition to the downfall of the left, Thai politics became democratized. Parliamentary and electoral politics became stable. Meanwhile, the monarchy also successfully established its moral and political supremacy. People growing up and entering the educational system during 1990s – 2000s took Thai democracy for granted, experienced no conflict with the Thai elite, and were taught to revere the monarchy while being hostile to “corrupt politicians.” Somsak Jeamteerasakul called this trend “reconciliation with the monarchy” among Thai urban literati. Therefore, the millennials living in Bangkok either have no concern for politics or turn to be royalists who dislike “Western” liberal democracy as well as “universal” values. They are thus the most unlikely group of people to join the movement of which members belonged to lower social status, endorsed “populist” politicians, and called for elections as the most essential element of democracy. See Somsak Jeamteerasakul, “สื่อ 14 ตุลา” “(After October 14),” Same Sky 3, 4 (October-December 2005): 171.
the most popular among the Redshirts because most programs were hosted by the UDD leaders. Each leader gave comments on political issues and provided additional information and historical background. Their talk shows were quite similar to rally speeches, using softer tones to avoid direct attacks on the ruling junta. Although the revival of Redshirt channels and UDD leaders’ political roles reflected the more liberal conditions allowed by the ruling junta, the programs’ contents were under strict surveillance. Leaders were not allowed to mobilize or provoke their supporters. Occasionally, some programs were suspended and some hosts unable to continue their shows. Indeed, Redshirt television programs were the only remaining channel which provided linkages between Redshirt leaders and their supporters.

Unintentionally, television spaces stimulated protest-like atmospheres in which Redshirts sat side-by-side having dialogues with each other while listening to leaders who used to be on stage. Small meetings were scattered all over the area. Sharing fruit, sweets, noodles, and lunch packs, visitors chatted about contemporary political situations. They expressed different views regarding ongoing political conflicts and assessments of Redshirt movements. Gossip on factions within the elite, conspiracy theories, and astrological forecasts for the military regime were exchanged across groups. Far from reproducing homogenous beliefs and political views, disagreements and fierce debates were normal phenomena in these informal gatherings. On the one hand, some believed that, due to internal conflicts among the Thai elites, a poor economy, and international pressures, the military regime would fall without Redshirt collective resistance. On the other hand, some were disappointed in their leaders for being too agreeable. They were tired of recurring defeat. According to the latter assessment, without guns, Redshirts would never win. During this “abnormal” time, they felt they needed a leader like Seh Daeng (Khattiya Sawasdipol), a Thai Army major general who had led Redshirt militant groups
and was shot dead in the May 2010 crackdown. Each side in these debates took turns as speakers and listeners.

As Benjamin Tausig demonstrates, the Redshirts, during gathering moments, embraced entrepreneurship and market values. He notes, “The movement became a fertile home for private media entrepreneurs who organized broadcasting niches at each protest catering to the tastes and perspectives of demographic segments of listeners.”197 After the 2014 coup, the area offered a space where Redshirt informal and extra-legal commerce as well as informational flows continued in even more disguised manners. VCDs containing several video files of those living in exile conducting talk shows were made at home and then disseminated here. Each item had no cover or description. Aunt Lek handed these political products to her customers directly. One woman, a prep school teacher who visited the shop once a week, carried around several copies of a Thai version of The King Never Smiles198 in her bag. The book was officially banned by the Thai government since 2006 due to “inappropriate” contents regarding King Bhumibol and a man who did a Thai translation and online publication of this book was charged with lèse-majesté.199 Still, this woman, on her own, produced and distributed the material. Masking the content inside, the title and picture on the cover were irrelevant to neither The King Never Smiles nor Thai politics.200 At the bottom right, it said “Collected by the Eye-Opening.” Occasionally warned by her Redshirt friends to be careful, the teacher explained calmly, “I have been doing this for a long time and no one is interested in me.” She went on, “I am not an outstanding person,” “I give away things quietly and never get caught.”201

200 For the safety of the source, I avoided disclosing specific details regarding the book’s cover.
201 Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, July 29, 2014.
the stereotype of being gullible and unscholarly, participants here were eager to access, exchange, and learn any kind of knowledge from alternative sources.

A cyber world and social networks were among the few available media in which Redshirts could share news and information and keep in contact with each other. For them, these digital-telecommunication technologies are politically indispensable. Short criticism of the military and elite, links to articles and video clips, and photos of important events were widely exchanged through these social networks. These had come to shape Redshirt political imaginaries in the post-2014-coup era. Escaping the eyes and ears of authority, some even featured unlawful contents.

My friendship with visitors was initially built on solving their smartphone problems. Routine visitors appreciated my help in creating their Facebook and Gmail accounts, giving instructions on how to watch Youtube streaming, and adding friend lists to their social networks.

Strategically, these social networking aunties and uncles took precautions against state online surveillance. The offered a “safe” space where strategies of disguise and denial were frequently discussed. Aunt Wan, a former school teacher, reminded her friends that for public Facebook postings, it had to be “stories about having trips with friends unrelated to politics.” When having the phone fixed at a shop, one needed to delete all “risky” messages. Aunt Chan, Aunt Wan’s close friend, showed me her two cell phones. One was a black old-fashioned button mobile phone used for texting short messages and making phone calls. Another was a white lean touch-screen smartphone capable of taking pictures, internet connection, and online chatting. The owner told me, “When I attend gatherings, I bring the former. Nothing inside. Safe.” She further explained, “The police would believe me because of my age. They would not buy it, if it was you.” In other words, using digital technologies for political purposes, these people were

ready to act as if they were harmless low-tech senior citizens outside the or in an urgent situation.

1.3.4 Confrontations with Those Holding Guns

Similar to other Redshirt sites, the and the were subject to the Army’s routine visits. Regular visitors were familiar with a scenario of three or four young soldiers in their dark green uniforms walking past the shop at least twice a day. One soldier was ordered to use a smartphone taking countless pictures of the area, the and the scattered small meetings. Early encounters between the Redshirts at the and military officers were full of interrogations and arguments. The fully-armed visitors wanted to know who owned the and what kinds of were They ordered Aunt Lek to take down all images of Redshirt leaders. “Yesterday, you just took pictures of all Aunt Lek complained to a soldier who pushed a shutter button non-stop. Aunt Sao aggressively asked out loud, “Why did you hurt a Redshirt, forcing him to take off his clothes?” She continued, “I love Thaksin. You cannot change that. Please, don’t be a prime minister. Hold an election.” The soldier, who appeared to be a chief, quietly listened to Aunt Sao’s dissatisfaction. He kept on replying that the harassment was done by other units and he just had to follow orders from above. As the army’s daily visits became routine, no one bothered talking with or back-talking with the intruders. “Let them have as many photos as they can and do an excellent report to their chief commander,” people talked sarcastically behind the Army’s back.

At a distance, people cursed and made the three-finger salute to show their defiance to the military. Open confrontation never took place. Redshirt members seemed to implicitly know which acts would cross the line and invoke retaliation. The groups were aware of their

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subordinate position, lacking both weaponry, strong leadership, and support from the legal and state apparatus. They never blurted out what they shared with their friends about the Thai elites. Even the outspoken Aunt Sao knew this limit. In front of soldiers, she never talked about “901” or “the biggest monitor lizard.” The furthest she went was asking the army to stop charging people with the “silly (ngi ngao - งี่เง่า)” lèse-majesté law.205 This statement, made by an ordinary woman to a powerful superior, would be considered extremely brave.

On July 26, 2014, the Redzone was unusually crowded and vivacious. Hundreds of Redshirts came to celebrate Thaksin’s 65th birthday. The floor was so congested that I had to zigzag through small spaces between chat circles carefully. In the early morning, an order was given to take down all Thaksin photos on the walls and shop windows. The Redshirts complied. However, as the numbers of participants increased, the five soldiers, sitting or standing uncomfortably in a middle of a hostile crowd, found themselves outnumbered. Some visitors quietly gave scornful glances at the authority figures, but some took this special opportunity to openly vent their anger:

“Only today, why can’t you let us do it? Why did you tear down Thaksin’s pictures?”
“Are you sent to brainwash us?”
“Now I hate their guts, both the army and police.”206

However, Redshirt participants did not let the presence of power ruin the festive moment. This was an opportunity to meet political comrades whom they had not seen for a while. People hugged and laughed with each other. Inside the mangosteen, rambutan, crispy pork, fried chicken, and sticky rice were put on plates or in plastic bags. Notably, Thaksin and Yingluck portraits were erected inside one office. People lined up to take a picture with the two portraits. Given the celebration of Thaksin’s birthday, Thaksin’s and Yingluck’s pictures, and snapshots with the portraits, it was clear that Thaksin and Yingluck remained central to Redshirt

205 Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, July 11, 2014.
politics even at this micro level. This aspect of a “personal cult” within the movement was harshly criticized by intellectuals who allied themselves with the Redshirts. For them, to gain legitimacy and strength, Redshirts must democratize their movement and be independent from Thaksin’s ideological and material influences. Serhat Ünaldi, an academic intellectual, pointed out that Redshirts could be conceptualized as a Weberian charismatic community worshipping Thaksin, but that doesn’t adequately explain the Redshirt behavior on the of this .

From a local perspective, Thaksin and Yingluck came to represent the country’s injustice. Their political tragedies reveal the abnormality and irrationality of contemporary Thai power and politics in general. The strong admiration for Thaksin and Yingluck will not easily dissipate so long as these two figures are subject to attacks and persecution from the royalist establishment.

In short, forms of resistance that ordinary Redshirts could afford in the post-2014 coup era included daily meetings, backstage complaints and curses, and occasional verbal exchanges with the authorities. The was one among the many socio-political sites. As Pae Bangsanan, a Redshirt singer commented, “Now, we take any opportunity, no matter if it is a religious occasion like a robe-offering (to monks) ceremony, a house blessing ceremony, or a funeral. We attend any event that allows us to meet, even at the coffee shop.” Through informal meetings in semi-public places, political ties were maintained. Subversive thoughts and discourses were exchanged and sometimes, on special occasions, were delivered to men in power. These accounts go against the assumption of Redshirt downfall and depoliticization.

209 Pae Bangsanan, interview by author, Bangkok, May 7, 2015.
1.4 The Object of Study: The Redshirts

This section presents the object of my ethnographic research, the Redshirt participants. Unlike conventional wisdom among scholars of Thai politics, I will introduce the new way of understanding what it means to be Redshirts. To be precise, three major features of these political dissidents will be examined. First, instead of a homogenous movement, I portray the Redshirts as internally diverse, dynamic, and different. Second, instead of a project with a clear direction, I show that the political movement of the Redshirts is a “work in progress;” it is internally antagonistic and ideologically uncertain. Last, instead of a secondary or minor feature, I point out that anti-royalism is the most important and dominant feature of Redshirt existence. This is an inconvenient truth that many scholars try to neglect and try to silence.

1.4.1 Redshirts as Dynamic Political Identity: Diversity, Individualism, and Egalitarian Potentiality

At the micro level, being a Redshirt is a way of life beyond such labels as a democratic fighter, Thaksin supporter, victim of royalist/authoritarian regime, and instrument of greedy politicians. Observing and participating in the everyday life of the Redshirts at the shows that underneath the commonality of being a Redshirt, there lay complexity, diversity, contradiction, and dynamic fluidity.

In spite of the common self-identification as “Redshirt,” each Redshirt participant carries different senses of belonging and views of their participation in the movement. For instance, while the UDD is the central formal organization, Redshirts are diversified geographically according to province or district, such as the Udon Lover Association (ชมรมคนรักอุดร), the Chiang Mai 51 Lover
Group (กลุ่มรักเชียงใหม่51), and Red Bang Sue (แดงบางซื่อ).

Formally established, each group had leaders and committees responsible for decision making and mobilization at regional and local levels. Studying the emergence of the Redshirts in Chiang Mai, Pinkaew Luangaramsri argues that rather than being regional branches of the UDD in Bangkok, the various regional groups are connected horizontally and autonomously outside the UDD’s supervision.

Famous Redshirt groups such as Red Siam or Red Sunday were instances of ideologically divided factions. Red Siam was led by the former member of the Communist Party of Thailand, Surachai Saedan. Independently hosting small staged rallies, the group was well-known for their statements “critical” of monarchy. Red Sunday was led by NGO activist Sombat Boon-ngamanong. Having no interest in top-down-style staged rallies, his group emphasized symbolic performance and participatory collective actions. Not highly organized nor having clear hierarchical chains of command, relations between the central UDD and these sub-organizations took the form of loosely allied networks. The degree of autonomy varied among these subgroups. Ideological diversity and conflicts resulted in the groups’ spontaneous multiplication. The number of Redshirt splinter groups were countless and the sense of belonging was overlapping. One could be a UDD Redshirt admiring Surachai of Red Siam, but participating in Sombat’s bike rally.


However, after the 2014 coup, having an outspoken subgroup’s name or a strong organization became a double-edged sword because group leaders, key speakers, and members became military targets.

Diversity and specificity among the Redshirts was not necessarily indicated by the number of official names and organizational structures. To a large extent, it was rather associated with the participants’ own reflection of their political journeys. This abstract identification could not be easily detected by those in power. For instance, the length of involvement in the movement was central to how Redshirts at the described and judged themselves and others. When Aunt Sao introduced me to one regular visitor, she said “This is brother Kha. He is Sanam Luang generation (run sanamluang - รุ่นสนามหลวง).” “Sanam Luang” generation was understood as a group of anti-coup protesters at Sanam Luang during 2006-2007 (see chapter three). Many anti-coup groups existed then; however, none of them had not yet called themselves Redshirts. This informal moniker thus became the pride of those who were Redshirts before the Redshirts were officially established as a political movement. Earlier is better, or at least more prestigious.

Aunt Pinky, an outspoken well-to-do woman from Nan province, proudly noted that her political struggle started even before the Sanam Luang generation’s. A few months before the 2006 coup, she claimed that she had already joined movements supporting the national election. Those actions eventually got her jailed for one month. Contrarily, Aunt Chan humbly described herself as a “latecomer (ma thilang - มาทีหลัง)” since her first experience with Redshirt rallies was in 2009 at a big gathering at Thunder Dome Stadium, Bangkok.

Redshirts at the mentioned several times that Weng Tojirakarn and Suda Rangkupan, the two famous UDD leaders, used to be Yellowshirts who later turned Red. Although these two leaders with intellectual backgrounds were accepted in the Redshirt community, their previous
involvement in the Yellowshirts was stamped into the memory of ordinary Redshirts.\textsuperscript{214} In this sense, Redshirt cannot be valued solely from things he or she is speaking or doing in the present, but also from the political positions he or she had taken since conflict broke out in 2006.

This perception contests the elitist notion which emphasizes the roles of intellectuals and activists. Unlike the intelligentsia, most ordinary Redshirts never were Yellowshirts. Most ordinary Redshirts had taken sides and allied with the movement even before gaining the support of intellectuals. During the early days of the conflict, they were underestimated as having been suborned by Thaksin. As the conflict unfolded and Redshirts obtained more intellectual endorsements, the “Sanam Luang generation” became the claim of the early Redshirts for their more farsighted and bolder stance than those who came later.

Besides the length of involvement, the frequency of participation was another crucial measurement for the level of an individual’s Redshirtness since increased frequency showed greater commitment to the movement’s cause. “Bai” was a deaf man with long hair and missing front teeth. He came to the daily. Sitting in his favorite spot, Bai watched Redshirt programs for more than five hours. His daily income came from selling empty plastic bottles collected from shop customers. Everybody called him “Bai,” which literally means deaf-mute. Although Bai was laughed at behind his back when he tried to talk politics using noises and hand signs, he was regarded as a true Redshirt because “he showed up every time and everywhere.”\textsuperscript{215} Without understandable verbal expression, Bai’s commitment to the movement was articulated through his consistent political participation over the past decade.

\textsuperscript{214} While ordinary Redshirts never failed to mention about Weng’s participation in the Yellowshirt movement, Weng himself omitted this point. In an almost two-hour interview, Weng began with the stories about his involvement as a student activist during 1970s, then the May 1992 violent clash, and skipped to his participation in the Redshirts. (Weng Tojirakarn, interview by author, Bangkok, April 20, 2015).

\textsuperscript{215} Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, March 31, 2015.
Studying a Redshirt group in Doi Saket, Chiang Mai province, Pinkaew points out that Redshirt communities are based neither on existing kinship systems nor traditional patronage-client relationships. Rather, Redshirt bonding flourished based on shared political ideologies, dynamic exchanges of political views, and participation in political struggles. By the same token, Redshirts at the were people from various backgrounds. Most did not know each other before the color-coded conflicts broke out. “Before 2006, I sold plants at Chatuchak market,” Aunt Sao recalled. Aunt Chan, a timid and calm, Bangkok-born, retired civil servant, told me that the people she met at least once a week and with whom she travelled on many trips to the countryside, were not her relatives, old college friends, or co-workers, but political comrades she had met only 4-5 years ago. Without the Redshirt movement, she would not have been friends with a businesswoman from Nan province (Aunt Pinky), a retired high school teacher (Aunt Wan), a massage practitioner from Phrae province (Aunt Nuad), a Buddhist nun, or a taxi driver from Khon Kaen province (San).

Accordingly, the emergence of Redshirt movements brought about novel political, economic, and social relations and networks. As several scholars rightly argue, the Redshirt movement is class-crossing based on politics. The provided a unique space where men and women from various occupational and socio-economic backgrounds interacted with each other. A deaf man collecting bottles to earn his living sat with a businesswoman who had her own chauffeur and traveled to Japan and Germany in less than five months. Showing generosity to the shop owner and less well-to-do visitors, rich Redshirts often bought cups of coffee or ice-cream sticks (10 baht each) as a treat to give to others. The less well-to-do, however, were not entirely receivers. Their diverse occupational skills made them attractive and shaped

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216 Pinkaew Luangaramsri, Becoming Red: กำเริบและพัฒนาการเสื้อแดงในเชียงใหม่ (Becoming Red: Emergence and Development of the Redshirts in Chiang Mai), 42.
217 Ibid.
new forms of interactions. The boundary between friendship and clientage were blurred. For instance, several visitors often used a taxi service from San. Sometimes, Aunt Lek asked San to deliver in exchange for few hundred baht. Aunt Nuad, a Phrae-born massage practitioner in her forties, professionally massaged her friends with her portable ointment for 45 minutes in exchange for 100 baht (3 US dollars). Aunt Bo, a Vietnamese descendant woman with a loud voice, sold colorful stone bracelets. Opening her stone box containing stones of various shapes, sizes, and colors, she let her friends pick out their preferences and then would make inexpensive accessories at their request.

Besides exchanges of commodities and services, stories of one’s workplace described with drama and excitement were endlessly shared among the Redshirts. Apichart Satitniramai and others point out that, composed mostly of “lower middle-class” or “new emerging middle-class” people, Redshirts included independent entrepreneurs such as taxi drivers, salon workers, and commercial agriculturalists.218 Usually acting as service providers, these people had learned to put on their “masks” during duty and vented their frustration only in other social sites.219 That is, they knew how to be good listeners at work, concealing their radical thoughts from bosses or clients, and tolerating insults to their political stances.

Sister Ma, a waitress at a luxurious Hotel, shared adventurous stories about serving the Prime Minister and other military ministers during a gala dinner. “I was only ten steps away from him,” she recalled and commented, “Prayuth [the Prime Minister] was so restless.”220 For this woman, this was a confrontation with the man responsible for arresting her Redshirt guard friends; however, she managed to control her anger and only confessed her vengeful desire with

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218 Apichart Satitniramai, Yukt Moukawijitra, and Niti Pawakapan, โครงการวิจัย ทบทวนภูมิทัศน์การเมืองไทย (Re-examining the Political Landscape of Thailand) (Bangkok: Thai Health Promotion Foundation, 2013), 46.
220 Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, May 1, 2015.
friends afterward, “I wanted to spill the soup over his head.” At the hotel, Sister Ma concealed her Redshirt identity. She explained, “At work, I have an itchy mouth to talk politics, but I manage to be silent.”–221 Living in Bangkok where Yellowshirts and royalists dominated and providing service to those who did not share the same political ideologies, Redshirts developed remarkable skills of adaptation and toleration.

A Buddhist nun, wearing the white robe and with a shaven head, often snuck away from the apolitical religious life at the temple to find friendship and politics at the As a life-long nun, she stayed at the temple and assisted male monks with housekeeping. One day she looked upset. She explained to her friends, “I was out for dharma practice (patibattham - ปฏิบัติธรรม) for ten days. When I returned to the temple, I found I had lost an internet connection.” Friends giggled and punned, “And now you are out for political practice (patibatkan thang kanmueang - ปฏิบัติการทางการเมือง), aren’t you?” The nun continued in a serious voice, “I only need the internet to watch Surachai’s video clip.”–222 Again, looking from the outside, no one would have expected that this old nun was a social network enthusiast, let alone an admirer of Surachai, a political fugitive. The and the surrounded these people with fellow travelers with whom they could take off their masks and be “political.” In their views, “practicing politics” was not limited to joining public protests and demonstrations, but included daily meetings and discussions in a less public location.

Thus, social relations within this catered to a unique egalitarianism and inclusiveness which to some extent challenged Thai hierarchical culture. The welcomed early and late generations of Redshirts, Redshirts of whatever occupation and of different spiritual convictions, and individual Redshirts alienated in other places. Visitors could be certain that they

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221 Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, March 30, 2015.
would meet friends who shared similar political views. Seniority, wealth, and religion did not play large roles here. Nor were traditional codes of conduct highly valued. Dirty jokes and vulgar curses like "monitor lizard/mother fucker" were commonly used to describe political enemies and lighten up the atmosphere. One day, a female visitor asked me to get up off the floor and sit with her on the sofa. She explained, “Don’t do that. We are all equal.” The latter sentence, “We are all equal,” was a famous Redshirt slogan used together with “One Man, One Vote” to advocate electoral politics. This sofa was the most comfortable seat in the however, no one permanently occupied it. People occupying the sofa changed every day, ranging from Mon the ex-prisoner, to the Buddhist nun, to San the taxi driver.

Nonetheless, hierarchical relations between those at the leader’s level and ordinary participants existed and were, from time to time, articulated in the daily practice. When UDD leaders visited the ordinary Redshirts usually talked more politely. Ordinary members busily offered seats, food, and beverages to the leaders. Yet, as the next section will show, for some Redshirts, respect toward these leaders could be seen as mere ritualistic expressions. Behind the leaders’ backs, gossip and criticism prevailed. People talked about leaders’ love affairs and how several male leaders who were married flirted with good-looking Redshirt supporters. They were highly critical of those whose political roles were disappointing, were too concessional, or “ungrateful” to their supporters. Notably, admired figures included activists who worked “backstage” or who maintained a degree of independence from the central Redshirt organization.

1.4.2 Antagonism, Self-Questioning, and Familiarity with Uncertainty

For many people, embracing a political identity as a Redshirt was often at the expense of breaking with old personal ties. Aunt Pinky confessed, “You might find it morally offensive, but I shall say it. Fortunately, both my parents passed away. So we don’t have to fight.” She further
explained that her father was a strong supporter of the anti-Redshirt Democrat Party. Aunt Chan told me that when one of her former colleagues said “we have [the privilege of] today because of the royals (เจ้า),” she decided not to meet this royalist friend again. Likewise, the woman who distributed the Thai-translated version of The King Never Smiles said disappointedly that, back in the 1970’s, she had not understood why her friends were interested in communism and leftism. She continued, “Now my eyes are open. I want to discuss politics with them. But they are now blind.” After one big quarrel, she stopped communicating with friends she had known for more than forty years. These personal stories show not only a willingness to face change and uncertainty, but also the individualistic and autonomous characteristics of typical Redshirts.

Redshirt movements have emerged and evolved for almost a decade. The movement has had its highs and lows. Relationships within groups have changed over time and Redshirts are now familiar with coping with unpredictable shifts. They have witnessed their friends being killed or jailed. Rallies drew them close to each other at one moment, but apart over the years. After the coup, Redshirts went through a period of self-evaluation and self-criticism. Some spent time with old friends discussing difficult questions. Some questions challenged the authorities, including their leaders.

“We came to this point because of what?” This question was thrown into one chatting circle at the Our government,” Aunt Lek replied referring to the Yingluck administration. “Yes!” Aunt Bo agreed. Aunt Pinky commented, “They should have joined the ICC.” For Aunt Pinky, it was partly a mistake of Yingluck government not to turn to international organizations while they still had a chance. As a result, now the junta’s violation of rights is not held accountable by the international community.

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223 Thailand does not ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. In 2012, Redshirt activists and intellectuals called for Thailand’s ratification hoping that those who were responsible for the Redshirt massacre in 2010 would be put on trial.
However, criticisms and complaints directed toward Thaksin and Redshirt leaders circulating at the displeased Aunt Sao. Some Redshirts expected Thaksin, Yingluck, and other leaders to “do something” in response to the coup. Aunt Pinky explained that the reason for the leaders’ inactions was that the stakes were too high for them. “How many assets do they possess here?” She then came up with the slogan, “Leaders fought then retreated, while followers fought then died.” Contrarily, in Aunt Sao’s view, leaders wanted to do something, but “they couldn’t do anything.” Aunt Sao sat with a frowning face and murmured that she disliked it when Redshirts attacked each other instead of the junta. Aunt Bo, who had known Aunt Sao since 2006, told Aunt Sao, “You are always on their (the leaders’) side.” That was the first time I began to sense the tension in this loosely-tied community.

In mid-October 2014, as we were packed into an open-air minibus traveling through splendid green fields on a Redshirt trip to Luang Phrabang, Laos, one woman said disappointedly, “Ordinary people died. Leaders should have done more.” Suddenly, Aunt Sao shouted aloud, “No one wanted anyone to die. I wonder if those who criticized the leaders could do what the leaders have done so far?” Then, fierce debates commenced among people who similarly called themselves Redshirts, in sharp contrast to the fresh air and beautiful countryside scenery:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First woman:</th>
<th>They can surely do more.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aunt Sao:</td>
<td>Now whoever does anything will get arrested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First woman:</td>
<td>I know, but what we need now is to listen to criticism, especially criticisms about ourselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunt Sao (yelling):</td>
<td>Show me the evidence proving that the leaders made wrong decisions....You talked trash about them. Can you mobilize people like they did? Are you willing to be jailed as they were?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second woman (yelling louder):</td>
<td>Enough! I am tired of this shit! Stop! Stop! Stop!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunt Sao (looking angrily at the second woman):</td>
<td>Why did you rudely cut into the talk?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First woman:</td>
<td>We are not fighting. We are Redshirts. We must talk with reason.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunt Sao (now very upset at the second woman):</td>
<td>We were just talking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second woman:</td>
<td>Aunt Sao, don’t you deny it. You started the fight.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First woman (trying to end the quarrel with a calm voice): We are open to any opinion. We must like or love with reason and question things.\(^{224}\)

It was five months after the coup and the trip was organized for Redshirt participants to take a break from politics. However, deeply political questions were continuously raised during the trip. As mentioned above, self-confidence, independence, and individualism are common among ordinary Redshirt participants. They were ready to jump into political talks regardless of place and time to defend their positions.

After that trip, Aunt Sao decided that it was too uncomfortable for her to be around Redshirts at the army camp because of these differing political views. Additionally, Aunt Sao’s dissatisfaction might also have come from her personal view that Aunt Lek and others did not recognize how much she had contributed to the shop. So, she decided to leave the Redshirt group at the army camp for another one. I met her less often and only when she joined anti-coup events outside the army camp. Aunt Sao reflected her political journey in an interview. She said that, since the Sanam Luang era, “I met many people with whom I became friends...Later I fought with some and stopped seeing them.”\(^{225}\) There was no dramatic breakdown. That Aunt Sao distanced herself from one Redshirt community did not mean withdrawal from being a Redshirt.

\(^{224}\) Fieldnotes, Chiang Rai, Thailand, October 21, 2014. Thai translation is below:

ป้า 1: มีแต่ประชาชนคนธรรมดาต้องตาย แก่ก้านทำอะไรได้มากกว่านี้

ป้าเสาร์: ไม่มีใครอยากให้ใครตายหรอกค่ะ ที่ว่าๆนี่ทำได้แบบเขาถูกไหม (ทุกคนถูก)

ป้า 1: ก็เข้าใจจริงๆ ไม่มีใครอยากให้ใครตาย แต่ต้อง คำทำได้นานกว่านี้ค่ะ

ป้าเสาร์: ตอนนี้ใครทำอะไรก็ต้องเจอหมด

ป้า 1: เวลาเรื่องกับการบริหารงานของค่าย

ป้าเสาร์: เอกสารกฎหมายฟรีชิ้น ไม่รู้ว่าแต่ปลายความจะได้แบบค่ายหรือเปล่า ไม่ติดทุกแบบเข้าién

ป้า 2: โหด หุ่นลักษณะไหน เธอ หุ่นๆ ทำลายกันอยู่ให้

ป้าเสาร์: เล่า คดคุกตุ่มกันอยู่ดีมีอยู่อะไร

ป้า 1: ไม่ได้สักทีกันค่ะ เราคนเสื้อแดง ต้องดูเผื่อเหตุผล

ป้าเสาร์: ไม่ต้องอยู่ ป้าเสาร์นี่เหงา บอกว่าไม่ต้องอยู่

ป้า 2: ก็คุยกันอยู่

ป้าเสาร์: เวลาพี่พี่คนเดี๋ยวนี้ ไม่อยากให้รักใครอย่างง่าย ต้องรักอย่างแอ้มเหวทย

\(^{225}\) Sao, interview by author, Bangkok, October 29, 2014.
1.4.3 Attitudes toward the Monarchy

After having explored what it means to be a Redshirt opposed to the 2014 coup and military regime, this section, and the next, provides various instances of anti-royalist narratives desacralizing the Thai monarchy, portraying it as an undemocratic, outdated, and exploitative institution. These unwritten accounts are proof of the twilight era of the Thai monarchy. They derive from informal interviews with and daily conversations among ordinary Redshirts. Some Redshirts revealed their critical thoughts to me the first day we met; some waited for several months before they let me join their “secret” chat circle. For these people, the great King Bhumibol has already lost his divinity and exceptional power as the benevolent Father monarch of Thai nation.

Thailand is a country where, because of the lèse-majesté law, people can only publicly express love to their king. Refusal to love is both politically challenging and dangerous. In less public spheres, several Redshirts do not hesitate to state that they “do not love” the monarchy. However, their refusal to love must be distinguished from the desire to overthrow the whole institution. A Redshirt’s “refusal to love” can be seen as a political demand and desire for a regime in which any political institution and public figure, regardless of royal connection, is subject to criticism. Or at the minimum, one should be able to state publicly that he or she has a neutral feeling toward the monarchy. In opposition to this liberal idea, the Thai royalist establishment only allows a one-dimensional expression of love, respect, and glorification toward the monarchy. All other expressions are lumped into seditious acts intent on abolishing Thailand’s political regime.

One day at a [redacted] Aunt Sao and Aunt Lek rehearsed what they would have said if they had been interrogated by the army. “What do you think about the monarchy?” Aunt Sao immediately responded, “I don’t love them. I only love my parents and my kids.” Giving her
reasons, Aunt Sao insisted, “My parents gave me birth and my kids give me money.” As for the monarchy, “I don’t really know them.” She said this aloud while knotting her eyebrows. Her answer brought smiles to the listeners; however, they concluded that this probably was not the right answer the authorities wanted to hear. For Aunt Sao, her immediate comment regarding the monarchy did not touch on its problematic political and economic powers, but its command to love, which made no sense to her. People who deserved her love must be someone who she knew well and who had done something good for her.

Aunt Sao, in another conversation, explicitly said, “I hate their guts.” Clenching her teeth and using a high-pitch tone, she expressed her deep hatred, as opposed instead to a simple “not love” feeling. She emphasized that she “hated them (the monarchy) because they excluded the poor (kliat wa man mai ao khonchon - เกลียดว่ามันไม่อาคเนก). In her view, the monarchy was alienated from and had been hostile towards the Thai masses, the majority of voters. “Frankly, I wish we didn’t have the monarchy,” Aunt Sao said, as if what was just uttered was normal and lawful to state. But then she added, “Otherwise, I wish they didn’t intervene in politics (หรือมีก็ไม่อยากให้ยุ่งการเมือง). Let the election take place. Then after four years, we elect again. Not like this.” She stressed that in the past ten years, the monarchy definitely “intervened” in politics many times. There was no reason for the King to sign an approval for the coup makers. “Why did you sign? Why did you come out late at night to approve [the coup]? [I] don’t like [it]. Don’t interfere in politics. Stay quiet.”

It is important to note that Aunt Sao did not mention the establishment of a republican nor socialist regime. Although she at first dreamed that Thailand did not have a monarchy, she

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226 Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, July 18 2014.
227 The Thai word for “them” (man – แม่) here connotes derogatory tone.
228 ทำไมต้องเซ็น ออกมาเซ็นดึกดื่นๆ นี่ไม่ชอบ อย่ามีการเมือง อยู่เงียบๆ
229 Sao, interview by author, October 29, 2014.
specified later that she was most interested in the abolition of the Thai monarchy’s extra-constitutional political roles. So long as Thailand’s normal politics proceeded smoothly, Aunt Sao seemed to condone the existence of the royal institution as merely a national symbol. Finally, instead of eradicating it, she desired a new relationship between the monarchy and its people in which the former paid respect and was grateful to the latter, not the current roles. Posing the Khmer monarchy as an example, Aunt Sao admired how Khmer royalty “wai (humbly salute with respect)” its people.

In addition to expressions of “not love” and “hatred,” several Redshirt participants said that the Thai monarchy represented outdated customs incompatible with modernity and practicality. Here, individual subjects were not criticized but sets of belief and practices associated with the monarchy.

“It is so boring every time I watch [royal] publicity on TV. I am sick of the long jargony expression of loyalty and gratitude,” said Aunt Kai, another Redshirt protester from Surin province. I first met her at Thammasat University in March 2015 when student activists planned to organize a small anti-coup seminar. She was not a routine visitor at the but had befriended the aunties there. While waiting for the event to be held, we started having a conversation. With no aggression in her voice, Aunt Kai argued that it was anachronistic to use royal language because it was uselessly long and entailed shocking meanings. For example, when speaking to the palace, one must begin the statement, “May the power of the dust and the dust under the soles of your royal feet protect my head and the top of my head” (See chapter 2.3.1). Here, the speaker is so powerless before the king that the mere dust on the royal feet can be his shelter. Likewise, in her view, it was inconvenient and ancient, especially for old people and children, to prostrate before royalty.
Aunt Kai repeated the term “archaic (boran – โบราณ)” many times. This Redshirt woman told me that she had, indeed, written the King an unsent letter. In the letter, she asked if several archaic court languages should be kept where archaic things belonged. Instead of using them, they, as with other “historical objects,” should be put on the shelf just for show. Aunt Kai commented, “Some argue that these are our traditional customs. But there are many traditional things which no longer serve any good nowadays.” Finally, in Aunt Kai’s letter, she emphasized, “His Majesty should be the one who initiates the change. He will be a hero and be loved.”

Likewise, Aunt Sao also disliked it when people were forced to prostrate at the royal feet and when the traffic was shut down because of a royal procession. As opposed to the idea of a divine monarchy, Aunt Sao commented, “You do not fly magically in the air. Why do old people have to prostrate at your feet?” In addition to the traffic shutdown, people are normally prohibited from walking on overpasses during royal processions. This is because it is felt that it would be disrespectful for commoners to be above the heads of royalty. Countering this tradition/rule, Aunt Sao complained, “Why can’t we walk [on the overpass]? We are all humans alike.” Her remarks remind us of Brutus’s anti-monarchist pamphlet in the 16th century. As it reads, “They [kings] should remember that they are born entirely by the same lot as other men.”

Rather than analytical insights, Aunt Sao’s and Aunt Kai’s critiques arose from their personal experiences, observations, and evaluations. However, although they did not make explicit references to sources, their explanations were associated with universal principles of

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231 มึงไม่ได้เหาะเหินอากาศมา  คนแก่ทำไมต้องมากราบ
232 ทำไมข้ามไม่ได้จะเห็นกัน
233 Stephanus Junius Brutus, the Celt, Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos: or, concerning the legitimate power of a prince over the people, and of the people over a prince, ed. George Garnett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 68.
equality and egalitarianism. They both dreamed of a less hierarchical society which no longer divided people through language and a submissive culture.

During political chats at the [redacted], the King was called by different names. Codenames included the common formal one such as “901” as well as those with derogative significance such as “blind bastard (ai bot).” One day at the [redacted] out of sheer boredom, Sister Ma examined the rack of Same Sky journals. She picked one issue from the shelf and read the title aloud, “From June 24 to December 5 (จาก24มิถุนายนถึง5ธันวา).” While I thought that this issue offered historical accounts about how Thailand’s national day had been changed from June 24 (the People’s Party 1932 revolution day) to December 5 (the King’s birthday), Sister Ma reaction was quick. She said right away, “From the People’s Party to the Blind Bastard.” Then, happy with her own interpretation of the cover title, she giggled.234

While the “blind bastard” mocked the King’s visual disability235 and thus was a good instance of desacralization, ordinary Redshirts also made several indirect references to the monarchy which satirized its economic power and exploitative nature as a political institution. On the one hand, for instance, the King has been referred to as “the richest person on earth,” who has never distributed his wealth to his poor populations and wasted millions on unaccountable royal projects.236 This reference derives from Forbes magazine’s ranking of “the 10 richest royals in the world” with King Bhumibol at the top.237 On the other hand, the Thai royal institution has been contemptuously called “the beggar family (trakun khothan - ตระกูลขอกทาน).”238 In daily

234 Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, December 17, 2014.
235 On October 4 1948, King Bhumibol was seriously injured from a car accident in Switzerland. The King has lost vision in his right eye. Although the accident and injury are publicly known, it is considered offensive to link the King with blindness.
236 Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, April 16, 2015.
238 Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, June 6, 2014.
conversations, Redshirts often talked about the palace’s problematic sources of income including donations and land accumulation. “They are paid huge amounts of money every time they are invited to preside at any ceremony,” stated one Redshirt. This includes mandatory university graduations, weddings, and funeral ceremonies. Moreover, every royal engagement costs a lot of money. Aunt Pinky observed that the Thai monarchy owned a huge amount of real estate, often in economically valuable locations. She further commented that when these places were desolate and profitless, “They would let people live there. But after development, the estates were reclaimed by these monitor lizards/motherfuckers.”

Earning wealth without investing much of their own capital and labor, the royal family is compared to that of a beggar. This critique reverses the idea that all Thais are indebted to the Thai monarchy for their well-being and country’s prosperity. “The blind mother fucker never gives anything to the people,” opined Aunt Sao. Giving an example, she argued that “our money” was plundered for the King’s birthday celebration. She suggested, “Why don’t you spend it on rescuing dogs, cats, or homeless people?” Comparing the royalty to her beloved Prime Minister, Aunt Sao claimed that Thaksin hated flattery and he never made his birthday a big deal. Likewise, Aunt Chan used to comment that it did not make sense why “people still had to donate money to the richest person in the country.”

To summarize, for these ordinary Redshirts, it did not make sense to express love and respect towards the institution which, in their views, “excluded” the majority of Thai populations through “archaic” cultural practices which perpetuated servility, royally-led political intervention, and economic monopolization. The Thai monarchy appeared to embody an ironic contradiction.

240 Sao, interview by author, October 29, 2014.
241 Chan, interview by author, January 24, 2015.
They were the richest beggars who taught others to live self-sufficiently,242 but they themselves never had enough. Critiques of extreme economic inequality took place through plain narratives in daily conversations.

1.5 Anti-royalist Arts of Resistance: Thailand’s Transitional Period Perceived on the Ground

Although King Bhumibol famously declared during his 2004 birthday speech that he would live for 120 years,243 his health gradually deteriorated since the early 2000s. He spent the past four years resting on the 16th floor of Siriraj Hospital. His last birthday speech was delivered in 2013. Afterwards, the King became so weak that he rarely made either a public speech nor a public appearance. As Thailand’s political instability increased, many scholars pointed out that the 2014 coup served to ensure that the royalist elites and military junta were in control of royal succession.244 While Bhumibol’s reign already suffered from a crisis of legitimacy, many expect a worse situation after Bhumibol’s passing. Above all, precisely because Thailand’s political regime excessively glorified King Bhumibol and built a personality cult, the following reign faces an impossible task. Attempting to prevent the whole institution, its networks, and the royalist ideologies which supported them from collapsing during this transitional period, the royalist establishment has resorted to military dictatorship.245 Andrew Marshall writes straightforwardly:

The junta hunkered down to cling to power for as long as necessary to ensure they remained in charge for the royal succession when Bhumibol eventually died...Thailand had become a desolate and divided place, haunted by the past.

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242 In 1997, the King introduced the so-called “sufficiency economy philosophy” as the way to handle with the Asian Economic Crisis. As a guidance for the rural poor, this philosophy preaches locally subsistence economy disconnected with both national and global capitalism as well as abstention from excessive consumerism.


and afraid of the future, waiting fearfully for its decrepit and depressive old king to finally die.\textsuperscript{246}

Marshall’s book with the above content was banned in Thailand.\textsuperscript{247} It was considered blasphemous to talk about the King’s approaching death, not to mention various possibilities in the post-Bhumibol era. Many people were charged with lèse-majesté for spreading false rumors that the King had died or that he had to appoint the Crown Prince as regent.\textsuperscript{248} Nonetheless, as an example in the next section tells us in a symbolic fashion, so long as it is impossible to prevent time from moving forward, nothing can stop the people from talking about this important issue behind the back of the powerful.

From 2014 onwards, several people did not live in an illusion that the King was immortal or would live for hundred-twenty years. They spread news regarding Bhumibol’s failing health and recognized the insecurity of the ruling elites during this transitional moment. Some of this discussion took the form of visual arts, whereas others appeared as conspiracy theories. On the latter, I draw upon Andrew Johnson’s understanding of Redshirt conspiracy theories. Instead of counter-narratives against the truth, such conspiracy theories, Johnson maintains, should be seen as “opening space to question certain taken-for-granted truths about power.” Redshirt conspiracy theories, for Johnson, cast doubt on “the moral knowledge’ of divine kingship.”\textsuperscript{249} Therefore, what should be emphasized here is not the accuracy of the stories, but the collapse of royal power as a legitimate source monopolizing truth and knowledge.

\textsuperscript{246} Andrew M. Marshall, \textit{A Kingdom in Crisis: Thailand’s Struggle for Democracy in the Twenty-First Century}, 207.


\textsuperscript{248} For example, “Salman”: The Stock Falling Case and "Ness": Dissemination of Fake Statement. For details, see https://freedom.ilaw.or.th/en.

Eventually, on October 13, 2016, the junta officially declared that King Bhumibol was dead. Thai society and the media responded to the news with shock, confusion, mixing with deep sorrow. Since the government had strictly prohibited people from talking about the end of the ninth reign, people were not well-prepared to properly deal with the King’s passing. Some immediately removed Bhumibol’s portraits from buildings and overpasses. Some still chanted “Long live the king” as an expression of love and gratitude to Bhumibol rather than the new king. Confusions rose since people did not know how the late Bhumibol should be formally called. These instances showed how the society came to encounter moments of truth, which had been denied and suppressed previously. However, as this section shows, there were also several Thais who secretly and symbolically talked and even dreamt of this moment.

1.5.1 Thailand’s Doomsday Clock

Hitting a perfect storm, Thailand was counting down on its doomsday clock, fearing an unknown catastrophe after King Bhumibol, the ninth monarch of the Chakri Dynasty, dies. Unlike the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists’ symbolic clock published in 1947, Thailand’s doomsday clock could only run forward. It could not be re-adjusted, since Bhumibol’s death was inevitable. Contrarily, the possibilities of nuclear or environmental disasters always change according to the current situation. The final moment of the ninth reign was approaching. To put it symbolically, Thailand’s doomsday clock would certainly hit “10 o’clock” soon.

In its so-called “Stopping Time (yut wela - หยุดเวลา)” Issue (Figure 1.2) published in 2015, Same Sky journal produced sophisticated political art through numeric and graphic symbols. On the cover, an analog clock was located on the upper right. Its short hand was past the 9 and had almost completely reached 10, while the long hand was on the mark just before the 12. Put simply,

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250 Thanapol Eawsakul and Chaichawat Tulathon, eds., Same Sky 13, no. 1 (January - April 2015), cover.
it was 9.59; the time was about to change from 9 to 10 o’clock. However, the long hand was held back by a rope tied with a gavel at the opposite end. The gavel appeared integrated into an army tank with a whistle inside. Together, these three objects symbolized the judicial sector, the army, and the royalist forces.\textsuperscript{251} Interpretatively, using a rope almost ripped apart, these three forces attempted to “stop time.” They wished it were 9 o’clock forever. However, they had an impossible dream. The poem below the image read:

Stop the fire from having smoke.
Stop the sun and the moon from shining.
Stop life from aging.
If only these things above are plausible, then [we] can stop …

\textsuperscript{251} Whistles and the Thai national flag were key symbols of the anti-Yingluck protesters, the PDRC.
The poem is an extract from “Laws of the World (โคลงโลภนิติ)” a Thai poem written almost two hundred years ago and found in school textbooks. The overall message from this cover is that it is impossible and against nature to freeze the time at “9 o’clock” no matter how strong and powerful the forces that are mobilized. This cover perfectly captures Thailand’s political predicament at the end of the ninth reign. Amidst the abuse of draconian lèse-majesté law, the journal escaped the sweeping prosecution.

Finally, what the cover intentionally left unwritten was as significant as what was illustrated. The poem as written omitted its last word, “gossip (nin tha – นินทา).” According to the Thai Language Learning Group According to The Basic Education Curriculum B.E. 2544 (A.D. 2001), “บทที่ ๒: โคลงโลกนิติ,” (“Chapter Two: Laws of the World”), วรรณคดีวิจักษ์ มัธยมศึกษาปีที่ ๑ (Waannakadee Wichak: Grade 7) (Bangkok, 2001).
original text, the poem’s last line is “If only these things above are plausible, then [we] can stop gossip.” Thus, in addition to its political message regarding the inevitable end of King Bhumibol’s era, another one is the unstoppable and uncontrollable nature of gossip in the human world. This puzzling art on this journal illustrates how anti-royalism were articulated by Thai literati. The following two sections provide instances of how ordinary Redshirts perceived and expressed their views on Thailand during this transitional period.

1.5.2 At a Funeral Ceremony for a Redshirt Leader: The Hope for Another Funeral

Private discussions about the King’s mortality prevailed at the level of everyday life during 2014 - 2015. Gossip and rumor regarding the King’s condition and potential demise circulated in daily conversation. Since the coup makers restricted people from actively resisting the junta, relying on time and wishing for the final moment of “9 o’clock” were two among the few “weapons” people could turn to in the wake of the 2014 purge. Gossip can be read as “a kind of democratic voice,” Scott points out, “in conditions where power and repression make open acts of disrespect dangerous.”\textsuperscript{253} Likewise, a rumor is “powerful form of anonymous communication” prevailing “in situations in which events of vital importance to people’s interests are occurring and in which no reliable information – or only ambiguous information – is available.”\textsuperscript{254}

One late afternoon on October 2014, I was sitting next to Add, a Redshirt woman, at a temple. Both of us had arrived early and waited for Apiwan Wiriyachai’s – the Redshirt leader and fugitive – funeral ceremony that evening. Apiwan died of a lung infection while living in exile in the Philippines. He left Thailand under a conviction for lèse-majesté and returned as a Redshirt martyr. Many Redshirts went to the airport to welcome Apiwan’s body and joined his funeral ceremony the next day.

I had met Add several times at the [blank]. She usually spent most of the time sitting by herself and watching Redshirt programs. Add was not well-to-do. Aged 40-50, this woman, with a very short and curly haircut and a manly personality, could not afford a touchscreen cellphone. Occasionally, Aunt Lek let Add sit inside the [blank] and offered her a free meal. Add never had quarrels with anyone there. No one hated her or talked behind her back. But at the same time, no one called or went looking for her if she disappeared for months. They just asked how she was and remarked on how emaciated she had become when she showed up again. It took me almost a year to realize that Add had a chronic disease.

At the temple, bending her back and moving closer to me, Add whispered, “Now they are recruiting the best men.” Add claimed that she knew people who worked at the cafeteria of Siriraj Hospital where the King reposed. They saw many famous doctors. This was interpreted as a sign of the King’s declining health. I felt strangely sad because we were attending the funeral of a Redshirt leader who died in exile while whispering to each other about the King’s ailing condition. The death of the former was real and had already happened whereas we barely acquired any concrete and credible information regarding the coming death of the latter which had not occurred despite many rumors, such as the one Add shared with me.

I spoke my mind to Add, “It turns out that people from our side are the ones who die first.” Add immediately responded, “He was poisoned.” Add believed in the conspiracy theory regarding the death of Apiwan, “Just like what they did with Samak.” Add added. Holding on to these thoughts, she concluded that “the sick man” could not live longer than the next Chinese New Year (February 2015).

255 Samak Sundaravej, the former Prime Minister of Thailand as well as politician from Thaksin’s camp, died of a cancer in November 2009.
256 Fieldnotes, Nonthaburi, Thailand, October 17, 2014.
Likewise, the aunties at the were certain that the “blind bastard” had already died from a heart attack. Explaining why we still saw the King showing up publicly, the aunties commented, “They either use a doppelganger or wax figure.” I asked if it was a wax figure why the King could move his body. Add confidently gave a quick response, “they pulled a string behind.” Unable to take to the streets and protest, ordinary Redshirts spent time speculating and imagining King Bhumibol’s passing.

While people discussed this issue privately among close friends, others sought artistic ways to articulate it. The song, “A Black Shirt Man (khon suea dam - คนเสื้อด)” was a vital example.

In October 2014, a group of Redshirts travelled to Laos. On the surface, there was nothing political about this trip. The five-day trip involved cruising on the Mekong River, visiting temples, and appreciating waterfalls. However, it was also an opportunity for these Redshirts to meet several Thai fugitives. During a dinner held outdoors alongside the Mekong River, special “guests” showed up and started giving speeches. The dinner turned into a small political gathering. The Thai tourists stopped eating and carefully listened to the speakers. The talks ranged from political analyses of the current situation to what needed to be done. The talks were also briefly interrupted by a surprise birthday cake to one fugitive.

It was Ton’s turn to go onstage. Everybody there knew that Ton was a member of the Faiyen, a Redshirt musical band. Today he came alone. Unlike other fugitive speakers, the audience immediately encouraged Ton to sing. This tall man, with a tender smile and charming eyes, turned to a traditional percussion band behind him and said, “Play cha cha cha, please.” He then informed the birthday man that, “If I play this song, I am not sure whether it will be rude to the birthday man.” He started singing “A Black Shirt Man.”

Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, November 29, 2014.
Fieldnotes, Laos, October 23, 2014.
Redshirt small stage in early 2014. Then, they recorded and released it online while living in exile.

The audience clapped and sang along. The catchy parts are:

- **Black (ตัวดำๆๆๆๆ) (repeat 5 times).**
- We prepare to wear black all over the country. *Sakdina* [Feudalists] are shedding tears (repeat twice). (เตรียมใส่เสื้อดำกันทั้งแผ่นดิน ศักดินาน ้าตาหลั่งริน ๆ)
- People in this land are ready to wear black. (คนทั่วแผ่นดินเตรียมใส่เสื้อดำ)

When this song was recorded, it was general knowledge that Thai people had been color-coded into Red and Yellow for almost a decade. Why did Faiyen urge their supporters, who were supposed to prefer red, to wear black? The song continued and gave the reason why people should wear black. “We keep on waiting for the change. Redshirts prepare to wear black shirts. We have been oppressed since we were born. It must be karma. When will death come?” This first part did not clarify whose death the Redshirts longed for. The next section clearly elaborates Redshirts would like to die because of their unbearable poverty and oppression. This song thus led to the understanding that the Redshirts wished to wear black to mourn for their own deaths because their lives were so miserable. However, the song’s last section brought about confusion and ambiguity:

- I look for a black shirt. It will bring prosperity to Thailand. In the whole town, red changes into black. Sooner or later, Yellow shirts will also have to wear black shirts (เที่ยวเสาะหาเสื้อดำอยู่ไหน เตรียมไว้เปลี่ยนไทยให้รุ่งเรือง เปลี่ยนแดงเป็นดำ สำกันทั่วเมือง ๆ ประเดี๋ยวเสื้อเหลืองต้อง มาใส่เสื้อดำ).

- Faiyen played with double-meanings and indirectness here. On the one hand, “A Black Shirt Man” reflects Redshirts’ complaints about their unfortunate lives. On the other hand, its cha cha cha, “fun,” rhythm makes real sadness unconvincing. Moreover, blackshirts conveyed a sign for a bright future or positive changes. Finally, the song emphasizes repetitively that all Thais, either Red- or Yellow-shirts, will have to wear black shirts shortly. It is unlikely that such collective national action would mourn the death of ordinary poor people. It is obligatory for all Thais, especially public personalities and civil servants, to wear black clothes for a period of time when
members of the royal family pass away, as had occurred in the cases of the King’s mother and sister. Parodizing Thailand’s royal ritual, Faiyen’s song found an indirect way to express its expectation of the end of the Ninth Reign.

That being said, anti-royalist texts did not always signify a secret desire for the death of the King. On the contrary, these texts could articulate a wish that the royal family would endure suffering and pain as long as possible as their health and power slowly decayed. Some Redshirts felt satisfaction when they saw pictures of the King and Queen sitting still in a chair or while riding in a car, dropping their jaws, unable to talk, and absent-minded. “This is the karma for those who refuse to let go of their power,” commented one Redshirt in a private conversation.\(^\text{259}\) This was one reaction to a newspaper’s headline photos of the King and Queen leaving Siriraj Hospital for Hua Hin on May 10, 2015.\(^\text{260}\) The former’s body looked stiff and he did not respond to public cheering, whereas the latter widened her eyes and waved her hands. However, her excitement seemed erratic. The helpless portrayal of the monarchy brought about laughter among the Redshirts. In this case, they abandoned the idea about the King’s doppelganger and really wished that the old man and woman in the royal vehicle were the King and the Queen of Thailand.

These examples represent various forms of backstage Redshirt “curses” made against the invincible dominant class. They partially shared similarity with instances of the “millennial theme of a world turned upside down” given in Scott’s work.\(^\text{261}\) Taking the form of “joy at the misfortunes of others” or “a wish for negative reciprocity,” dominated groups fantasize the utopia where the existing hierarchical orders were reversed or collapsed. As expressed in the song “Black Shirt Man,” Redshirts refused to succumb to the dominant idea that King Bhumibol will live up to 100

\(^{259}\) Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, May 13, 2015.
\(^{260}\) “ความสุขคนไทยทั้งชาติ ‘ในหลวง-พระราชินี’ เสด็จฯ ‘วังไกลกังวล’” “(All Thais were joyful: The King and Queen returned to Klai Kangwon Palace),” Thairath, May 10, 2015, accessed December 24, 2015, http://www.thairath.co.th/th/content/497968.
years, imagined the day when Thai elites shed tears on the death of the great monarch, and
dreamt of more prosperous Thailand for all. Despite suppression and silencing, Redshirts seemed
to believe that time was on their side. The King and the Queen were old and ailing. As the Same
Sky’s cover indicated, stopping time is impossible. Nonetheless, time did not always stand on the
powerless and instead treated them cruelly. By the end of year 2015, while “the sick man”
remained hospitalized in Siriraj, Add, a Redshirt woman who loved to share rumors and
superstitious belief, quietly passed away. Unfortunately, Add, as well as many Redshirts who died
after the 2014 coup such as Apiwan, Uncle Yim ta sawang, and Cho Uan (Ubon Redshirt) to name
a few, did not live long enough to witness the end of Bhumibol’s era.

1.5.3 Conspiracy Theories: Fights between Prince and Princess for the Thrones

Ten days before the 2014 coup, Surachai Saedan, leader of a radical Redshirt fraction,
spoke on the Redshirt “small stage” that current conflicts needed to be understood as “star wars”
– wars beyond normal parliamentary politics between “stars” over the throne.262 According to
Surachai as well as other Redshirt speakers before him, such as Banpodj, the latest putsch was a
scheme engineered by Princess Sirindhorn to ensure that she and her satellites were in control
when the King passed away. The King’s second daughter, Princess Sirindhorn or Phra Thep
(Princess Angel) was well-known for her down-to-earth personality. Like her father, Sirindhorn
embodied an image of a studious, hard-working royal with untarnished public records different
from her brother’s. The royalist middle-class admired and loved her. Her popularity generated a
conspiracy theory among the Redshirts that Sirindhorn, with the approval of several royalist elites,
planned to enthrone herself to save the royal institution. Based on this narrative, hatred toward

262 Surachai Saedan, “อ-สุรชัย วเวทีเล็กอักษะ14-05-12 ” (“Prof. Surachai on the Small Stage at Aksa 14-05-12”) (video of rally speech, Redshirt protest site, Nakhonpathom, May 12, 2014) accessed October 22, 2015,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFkPyr9e-10
Sirindhorn grew among the Redshirts since she was believed to be at the heart of the on-going conflict.

Conspiracy theories regarding royal succession found after the 2014 coup can be traced back to fictions circulated in the cyber world a few years earlier. However, this “game-of-thrones” theory was popularized after the 2014 coup. Possibly, this theory was one among very few ideas which enabled Redshirts to make sense of their repetitive defeats and current helplessness. “This time, it is beyond our control. It is above politics,” commented Pae, the Redshirt singer.²⁶³ Put simply, it was easier to believe that all of the mess was caused by skirmishes between “brother and sister” instead of the Redshirt movement’s inability to bring about the change they wanted to see. Suppressed by the junta, some Redshirts started to believe that victory could only be achieved by entrusting themselves to the Crown Prince or “waiting” until the elites finished killing each other.

Unlike their royalist middle-class opponents, Redshirts never showed admiration for Princess Sirindhorn. On the contrary, they disliked her. Several Redshirt informants remembered that during their big 2010 demonstration, Sirindhorn paid a visit to Chulalongkorn University Hospital and showed concern for both hospital staffs and patients. This happened after the Redshirts stormed into the hospital in the belief that the place provided shelter for snipers dispatched to fire at the protesters.²⁶⁴ Sirindhorn’s visit was thus interpreted as an act of taking sides against the Redshirts. Afterward, hostility based on rumor grew. Several Redshirt accounts revealed the belief that Phra Thep was both indirectly and directly complicit in the killing of Redshirts in 2010. First, the Redshirts’ last stronghold, the Ratchaprasong intersection, was

²⁶³ Pae Bangsanan, interview by author, Bangkok, May 7, 2015.
located near Sirindhorn’s residence, the Sra Pathum Palace. Dispersed and shot down, many Redshirts had hoped that the Palace might become the shelter for frightened unarmed protesters. But it soon became clear that they had waited in vain for the royal response.

The second rumor asserted that Phra Thep was, literally, a chief commander of the Redshirt crackdown operation in 2010. While the origin of this rumor is unknown, a similar narrative was constructed and spread together with a mysterious photo of Thai army forces and their tanks stationed in the street. According to the Redshirt oral report, the masked person sitting on the top of the first tank was Princess Sirindhorn. As Aunt Nuad, the Redshirt massage practitioner from Phrae province confirmed at the [redacted], “In 2010, ‘the open bitch (i thang – อีถ่าง)’ was herself a chief commander on the tank.”265 This vulgar nickname “i thang,” given to Sirindhorn, was rather new. It was abbreviated from “the open-legged butch bitch (i thom kha thang - อีก้มขาถ่าง).” It alluded to the “down-to-earth” Princess who never married and walked funnily due to her obesity.

Although intellectuals never provided concrete facts, Redshirts widely believed that Sirindhorn was allied with the elite and plotted to compete with the Crown Prince for the throne. During an interview, a Redshirt couple asked me who I was rooting for. I was in a quandary. I wondered, “Since when did movement participants not only stop being politically active, but return to being a passive audience hoping one elite would beat another?” Instead of expressing my thoughts, I just replied that I did not know whom to choose. “And what about you?” I asked. “Of course, the Crown Prince. The law of succession cannot be broken,” was the confident reply.

In contrast, another group of Redshirts doubted that the next King was truly the key to their political victory. “Love [him] and then what? We will be disappointed again.”266 Aunt Pinky

265 Nuad, interview by author, Bangkok, January 24, 2015.
266 รักแล้วเป็นไง เดี๋ยวก็ผิดหวังอีก. Redshirt sub-leaders, interview by author, May 9, 2015.
called the “We love the prince” strategy, “Monitor lizard/mother fucker battling each other”\textsuperscript{267} In the end, she giggled and concluded, “We are the monitor lizard/mother fucker ourselves.”\textsuperscript{268} She then appropriated academic jargon, “Structural changes are needed.” She pessimistically foresaw that the lèse-majesté law was unlikely to be abolished during the next reign.\textsuperscript{269}

At a , a Redshirt prep-school teacher compared the Redshirt struggle to the felling of a tree. “When we fight them, we mostly aim at destroying things visible to us such as leaves and fruit.” For instance, the military, bureaucracy, and educational system. She went on, “What remains intact is the root underground. It is the foundation of everything.” For this woman, if one really had their eyes open, “there must be no exception.”\textsuperscript{270}

To conclude, while the junta and royalist elites attempted to tranquilize Thai society by denying the approaching end of Bhumibol’s reign, counter-narratives diversified and circulated. Symbolic, artistic, and private forms of anticipation for the King’s death became prevalent. Furthermore, amidst this perfect storm, some Redshirts adhered to the belief that the ruling elites were deeply divided and endorsed the Crown Prince, while others no longer had an optimistic view toward the royal institution no matter who became the next monarch.

\textbf{1.5.4 Sophisticated Anti-Royalist Visual Graphics in the Cyber World}

This section provides examples of anti-royalist art during the post 2014-coup era. Here I shift to the cyber world where numerous anti-royalist satirical and parodic art was produced. Statistics show that many Thais have gained access to the internet over the past few years. In 2009, only 27 percent of the population were internet users.\textsuperscript{271} By 2016, internet penetration had

\textsuperscript{267} “เอาเหี้ยไปชนเหี้ย.”
\textsuperscript{268} Pinky, interview by author, February 10, 2015.
\textsuperscript{269} Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, December 10, 2014.
\textsuperscript{270} Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, June 29, 2014.
risen to 41 percent of which 96 percent had a Facebook account. Although the 2014 coup deprived Thai citizens of basic rights and freedoms and brought about the most authoritarian rule since the cold war, many internet users chose to laugh at the absurdity of the current regime and Thai royalism.

During the post-2014-coup era, one could observe peculiar visual graphics online which were, at first glance, mistaken for typical royal expressions. Nonetheless, upon close and careful examination, this online art featured forms of anti-royalism. Unlike the negative approach to anti-royalism which this chapter has shown so far, these visual graphics appropriated court language and imitated formalistic glorification of the monarchy made by ultra-royalists; however, they over-identified and pushed this art to extremes.

Far from being novices, anti-royalist internet users honed their satirical skills, involved in their ability of use royal official expressions fluently to the point where viewers could not be sure whether political messages were or were not hidden underneath explicit hyperboles. Figures 1.3 – 1.4 were made by the same group of Facebook users who claimed to be anti-Thaksin and loyal subjects of King Bhumibol. They called themselves “The People’s Army Overthrowing Thaksin’s Regime (กองทัพประชาชนล้มล้างระบอบทักษิณ).” However, despite using royal language and anti-Redshirt/Thaksin jargon, they often made viewers doubt the authenticity of their loyalty. Their strange mixtures of photos and short captions asked for further interpretation, thus leading to demystification of the Thai monarchy.

Circulated online on the King’s birthday in 2014, Figure 1.3 is a photo of a young Bhumibol sitting on the ground in front of a royal vehicle. He seems to be on a “rural journey” listening to a

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273 Their English Facebook name is “Anti-Thaksin Lanna.” See https://www.facebook.com/antithaksinlanna/?fref=ts.
local man’s problem. The description below reads, “[The King] has been working so hard without having a publicity team. This photo was accidently taken by an Akha tribal villager while he was digging up a bamboo shoot in the woods. Long live the King.” Despite its heartwarming tonality, the story of the Akha man was too specific to be believed. If it was ridiculous for an Akha man to have a camera, it was also ridiculous for the story to assert that the King was without a publicity team. This combination of photo and three sentences urged viewers to question whether countless images of the King traveling around the country visiting poor villagers, with which Thai were very familiar, were merely propaganda fabricated by a well-organized publicity team.

Figure 1.3: Online parody “The King has been working very hard without a publicity team.” Contemporary anti-royalist cyber art (Source: The People’s Army Overthrowing Thaksin’s Regime Facebook account, December 5, 2014)

Touching upon the King’s sufficiency economy, Figure 1.4 headlines “So moving. People in the African continent started living self-sufficiently.” The photo, on the left, shows a group of emaciated African tribesmen. Although the UN hailed King Bhumibol as a “visionary thinker” guiding the world with his sufficiency economy philosophy,274 everyone knows that Africans did not adopt his doctrine (if they even knew about it). The criticism behind the photograph is that

the so-called self-sufficiency is likely to be a euphemism for poverty. The short comment on the right reads, “Self-sufficiency does not mean complete deficiency, having few possessions, nor not being ranked on the top by the magazine every year. [Sufficiency] is moderation, not too much, not too little. Content is in our heart.” Reading between the lines, this obscure statement revealed the contradiction between King Bhumibol’s economic wealth and his preaching about self-sufficiency. The graphic asked if the King was really an honorable example of self-sufficiency when he held large stakes in global marketplace and was ranked as the world’s richest monarch.

Figure 1.4: *Online parody on African people and the King’s sufficiency economy.* Contemporary anti-royalist cyber art (Source: The People’s Army Overthrowing Thaksin’s Regime Facebook account, December 14, 2014)

The last instance, Figure 1.5, contains an image of a book cover with the title written in a non-Thai, non-English language. An image of King Bhumibol and a short English caption at the bottom indicate that this book is “A biography” of the Thai King. Beside the image, the Thai message reads, “Even the Burmese love the King. What about us, Thai people? What do you know about the King? Don’t you feel ashamed? [These are] Questions to the Redshirts.” On the surface, this online illustration aimed to inform us that another book, praising the King was published in Burmese and that the Burmese respected the Thai King, unlike the ungrateful Redshirts. Carrying deeper meanings, this graphic possibly mocked Thai royalism in several ways. First, it ridiculed royalist fantasies that their beloved King was internationally admired, even by their neighboring
country which has had antagonistic relationships with Thailand throughout history. Second, the person who made this graphic naively pretended not to acknowledge that this book cover was similar to the famous cover for “The King Never Smiles,” banned in Thailand. Therefore, even if it were true that the Burmese had written a book about King Bhumibol, it was unlikely to promote love and admiration toward him.

Figure 1.5: Online parody “Even the Burmese love the King!” Contemporary anti-royalist cyber art (Source: The People’s Army Overthrowing Thaksin’s Regime Facebook account, September 24, 2014)

To summarize, ideological, political, and economical criticisms of the monarch, were articulated in disguised and creative symbolic speech-actions. In daily activities, people spread rumors and sang their impossible dreams. In the cyber world, artistic and satirical internet users replicated royalist texts to expose the regime’s absurdity. Both online and offline world did not have to share similar forms of anti-royalism. “The King Never Smiles,” for instance, was translated and secretly distributed at the [location] (See section 1.3.3). Meanwhile, as the case above has shown, Facebook users referred to it in satirical fashion. These examples reminded us of the two key characteristics of hidden transcripts; physical and symbolic distance. All of these indicated not only the failure of the Thai junta’s indoctrination of “happiness” and “royalist nationalism” but
also how deeply rooted and widely shared anti-royalist ideas and its subculture had become in the late Bhumibol era.

1.6 Conclusion

Please petrify us into a stone, the great leader.
Forbid the river from flowing with your black magic.
Hide the sun in the cave as you wish.
Let the fish fly side by side (with) the bird in the sky.

Please petrify us into a stone, the great General.
Otherwise, the people will keep on writing their stories.
The persistent grumbling crowd, you will see.
Disrespectfully, we will raise the three fingers to you!

Piangkham Pradapkhawm (At the People’s Party Memorial Plaque on June 24, 2015)

One year after the coup, Piangkham, the Redshirt poet, showed up again at the People’s Party’s memorial plaque to commemorate the 1932 revolution. Her poems were imbued with sad sarcasm which over-exaggerated, mystified, and emphasized the differences in power between the ruling and the ruled. As she portrayed them, Thai authoritarian elites never ceased trying to stupefy its people. However, she insisted that this was the leaders’ hopeless utopian project. Against state-imposed narrative, “the people will keep on writing their stories.”

As this chapter has shown, the 2014 coup makers utilized both coercive forces and ideological propaganda in the most extreme fashion. However, underneath a façade of public compliance and obedience, subversive thoughts and actions were reproduced and exchanged among groups of ordinary people calling themselves Redshirts. Remarkably, not only was the legitimacy of the military junta rejected and contested, the supposedly most revered institution of Thailand, the monarchy, was a target of ideological challenge. This anti-royalism needed to be contained by an oppressive military ruling. As one scholar puts it, “The country’s royalist order
has all but lost the authority it once had to exercise power without force.”

The next chapter will briefly discuss how the monarchy and its domination emerged and established its supremacy. At its peak of popularity, the royalist elite had barely resorted to brute force and legal suppression.

Various acts of resistance against the 2014 coup, illustrated in this chapter, were located in semi-public sites motivated by pre-existing political networks, sets of belief, and semiotic orders. Deprived of leading figures and collectivities, ordinary Redshirts struggled to stimulate through every day practices an atmosphere of protest, talk politics, vent frustrations, and reclaim political identities as Redshirts. The Thai authoritarian rulers’ attempts to build trust and gain consent completely failed at this micro level. Moreover, online media moved into hidden anonymous spaces where Redshirts exchanged news and creative internet users shared their anti-royalist artworks.

Anti-royalist voices were not homogenously expressed. On the one hand, as “Stopping Time” visual graphic on the Same Sky journal illustrates, the intellectuals tended to seek refuge in subtle and symbolic forms of critique of the monarchy. Also, they took every precaution to avoid touching monarchical issues. Recognizing the junta’s legal abuse, student activists limited their criticisms to anti-coup/dictator discourses. On the other hand, ordinary Redshirt participants were more inclined to rumors and conspiracy theories. Several carelessly made anti-royalist remarks in explicit fashions; therefore, they composed the majority of post-2014 lèse-majesté prisoners.

This articulation of defiance and disbelief did not come from empty space. The 2014 coup was indeed the result rather than the cause of Thailand’s longstanding political conflicts. So was the Redshirt subversive political culture illustrated here. The Redshirt lack of inner belief about

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the military-royalist ruling power was neither a spontaneous reaction nor an entirely novel development. Since the 2006 military coup, the legitimacy of Thailand’s traditional institutions had become gradually eroded. In order to understand Redshirt anti-royalist sentiments and their politics of resistance in the wake of the 2014 coup, it is crucial to connect it with the hegemonic royal power of the Thai monarchy and the Redshirt political struggles over the previous decade. The subsequent chapters take readers back to the time before the current antagonism emerged.
CHAPTER 2

A BRIEF HISTORY AND THE CONTEMPORARY POWER OF THE THAI MONARCHY

If we would like to give a present to Dad
Can we all act together?
Let’s unite as if we are a clump of earth.
So Dad can be happy
and does not have to be exhausted [from working] as he has been.
Lyrics to “A Present from a Clod of Dirt (1999)” sung by Thongchai McIntyre

When I was young, I asked my mother,
“Whose picture is hung on our home;
the picture which mother worships every night before going to bed?”
Mother told me to prostrate [before] that picture every day.
“He is indeed a breathing deva [god].
We still have enough to eat today
because he has been taking care of us for so long. Remember.”
Lyrics to “The Picture Every Home Has (2007)” sung by Thongchai McIntyre

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first offers a brief history of the Thai monarchy, illustrating the transformation of its power from the late 19th century to the present day. The second unpacks religious, ideological, political, and legal foundations which serve the divine, extraordinary, emotionally-embedded power of the monarchy. Unless we take into account the historical dynamism and mechanisms for the deploying of power of the Thai monarchy, we will not be able to fully make sense of the most recent forms of anti-royalism formulated during the late 2000s. This chapter aims to show that prior to Thailand’s political turmoil, the birth of mass movements, and anti-royalist sentiments, the Thai monarchy, particularly under King Bhumibol Adulyadej, had been successful in establishing itself and himself as a god-like, moral, and paternal figure standing above parliamentary politics.

This royalism, as an ideology, not only cultivated particular forms of obedience, allegiance, and love, but also expectations which could be, in turn, a double-edged sword
undermining royal authority itself. In other words, this chapter offers a socio-political background which helps explain the evolution of Redshirt anti-royalism and its underlying logic of resistance. Chapters three and four will expand on the royalist language, symbols, and beliefs defined in this chapter which were found in the Redshirt movement during 2006 – 2009. Anti-coup and Redshirt protesters compared the monarchy to the Sky untarnished by worldly politics; they called Bhumibol the Father King – the last savior who could rescue people in need; they humbly perceived themselves as a worthless dirt immensely inferior to the Sky. Nonetheless, a series of “eye-opening” experiences featuring senses of injustice, betrayal, and abandonment gradually contributed to the erosion of the monarchy’s legitimacy, ideological inversion, and thus semantic shifts of these royalist discourses.

It should be noted that by the end of Bhumibol’s reign in 2016, royalism, despite taking on the facade of mass-based pop songs, movies, and daily commodities, was sustained and popularized under a political regime which had little tolerance towards oppositional voices. Chapter one showed, in the wake of the 2014 coup d’état, that military dictatorial rulings, coercion, and legal suppression became the main political tools to elicit compliance and loyalty. These replaced indoctrination and persuasion to shape consent and voluntary acts. In a sense, Thai royalism, despite its half century of development and impressive success of domination, eventually encountered predicament and needed to resort to the brutest forms of power.

2.2 A Brief History of the Thai Monarchy

During the past half-century, the idea that the monarchy is transcendent, timeless, and natural has dominated Thai society. The royal institution represents traditional continuity from the past which has lasted until the present and will persist in the future.²⁷⁶ Kukrit Pramoj, a royalist

intellectual and Thai former Prime Minister, asserted that since the early Kingdom of Sukhothai of the 13th century, Thai people have adhered to the idea that the monarchy rules as “the head” of society preventing “amoral” forces. As I demonstrate in this section, however, far from being a timeless, naturalized entity, the Thai monarchy has undergone periods of upswing and degradation as political contexts have changed domestically and internationally. Divided into three parts, the first section depicts the rise and fall of Thailand’s absolutism from the end of the 19th century through the first half of the 20th century. The second section shows how, even after the end of absolutism, a 1957 military coup restored the political divinity of the monarchy and revived royalism. For approximately 30 years after this coup, the monarchy gradually grew to occupy a hegemonic position in the Thai political system as a moral figure obtaining popularity and standing above normal politics. The third section portrays the pinnacle of royal legitimacy and authority in the person of King Bhumibol during the 1990s – 2000s. As Thailand’s dominant ideology, royalism spread during this period through the means of commodities and mass communication. The royal domination was hegemonic in the sense that the royal elite were able to establish moral and intellectual leadership over its allied classes in Thai civil society. Moreover, through mass media and educational system, they succeeded in embedding rhetoric and symbols in the structure of daily experience which not only legitimated their interests but also shaped the subordinate class’s views and concerns. King Bhumibol represented not only the highest source of political authority but also a flawless wise ruler in contrast to elected politicians, making Redshirt challenges to royalist hegemony that followed this period all the more dramatic.

2.2.1 The Rise and Fall of the Thai Absolute Monarchy

Prior to the late 19th century, Southeast Asian kingdoms and the relations between them can be characterized as similar to a *mandala*. As Thongchai Winichakul argues, instead of sovereign states in a modern sense, ancient states’ boundaries and sovereignties were unstable, overlapping at one place and absent at another. Similar to a candle’s light, ruling power from the center diminished as distance increased.\(^{279}\) Through rituals of tributary relationship, weak states, for example Cambodia, sought protection from strong kingdoms, such as Siam and Vietnam, to retain their independence, in a quite different sense from the modern understanding.\(^{280}\) In this regard, Siamese kings as well as other overlords in ancient polities possessed limited and unstable ruling power.

As Southeast Asian kingdoms encountered European colonization, Siam, under King Chulalongkorn, Rama V, the fifth monarch of the Chakri dynasty (1868-1910), went through structural changes featuring political and economic centralization. A modern tax system, army, bureaucracy, and regional administration were established together with the abolition of slavery.\(^{281}\) Rather than modernizing the whole polity, these transformations served the interests of the Thai monarchy at the expense of more peripheral states and the noble class. Benedict Anderson points out that it was “modernizing only in the special sense that the regimes of colonial governors were modernizing.”\(^{282}\) Connecting with the global economy, Siam thus emerged as a nation-state in which wealth and power were centralized in Bangkok. Arguably, while its neighbors were colonized by Western powers, Siam indeed experienced an internal colonization imposed by the newly emerging absolute regime. King Chulalongkorn maintained:

\(^{280}\) Ibid., 88.
The king has absolute power as 1) ruler over the realm and refuge for the people; 2) the source of justice; 3) the source of rank and status; 4) commander of the armed forces who relieves the people’s suffering by waging war or conducting friendly relations with other countries. The king does no wrong. There is no power that can judge or punish him. [Emphasis mine]283

On the one hand, Chulalongkorn attempted to “westernize” the monarchy, for example, abolishing the practice of crawling and prostration before the royalty. On the other hand, he rejected Western ideas of parliamentary politics and constitutionalism. Thus “the king does no wrong,” as he is the ultimate sovereign ruler standing above the law. Toward the end of Chulalongkorn’s reign, the court justified Siamese kingship through the assertion that the king received “consent” from his subjects. Bringing “well-being” and “progress” to the people, the king ruled benevolently as a father ruled over son. In Chulalongkorn’s view, parliaments were undesirable, a source of “additional divisions and conflicts.”284

The modern justification of Siamese absolutism regarding popular consent and national progress could, in turn, undermine the ruling authority of the king. Matthew Copeland points out, “Insomuch as the political authority of the monarchy was ‘absolute,’ there is nothing surprising about the fact that the king was frequently held to account for the nation’s underdeveloped condition.”285 In other words, while positioning the king as the ultimate ruler, it also brought the king into public scrutiny and made him responsible for the well-being of his people. Chulalongkorn’s reign was followed by those of two less successful monarchs, Vajiravudh (Rama VI, 1910 - 1925) and Prajadhipok (Rama VII, 1925 - 1935). The former was fond of literature and drama. His extravagant spending on his male entourages, leisure activities, and new palaces

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brought him into deep debt and caused dissatisfaction among bureaucrats and officers.\footnote{286}{See Chanan Yodhong, นายในสมัยรัชกาลที่ 6 (The Gentleman-Court during Rama VI Reign) (Bangkok: Matichon, 2013).}

Succeeding his brother, the latter aimed to restore public confidence by cutting the royal budget and planning political and economic reforms. Nonetheless, criticism of and discontent towards the monarchy had already prevailed in print medium and among various social groups, particularly the Thai urban literati.\footnote{287}{See Matthew P. Copeland, “Contested Nationalism and the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam”; Scot Barmé, Woman, Man, Bangkok: Love, Sex, and Popular Culture in Thailand (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002); Nakarin Mektraiat, การปฏิวัติสยาม พ.ศ. 2475 (The 1932 Siamese Revolution) (Nonthaburi: Same Sky, 2010).}

The monarch himself was fully aware that the absolute monarchy was, by nature, a fragile political regime. Rama VII opined, “Benevolent absolute monarchy depends on the qualities of the King. It is unfortunately a fact that every dynasty, however brilliant, will sooner or later decay, and the danger of having some day a bad king is almost a certainty.”\footnote{288}{Benjamin Batson, Siam’s Political Future: Documents from the End of the Absolute Monarchy (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, 1974), 49.}

However, Prajadhipok insisted that Siam was not ready for a representative system.\footnote{289}{Ibid., 15.}

While the monarchy and nobility were scolded, satirized, and ridiculed as various types of animals in the newspapers, progressive intellectuals believed that ideas of equality, the rule of law, and accountability were essential for Siam’s independence against imperialism.\footnote{290}{Matthew P. Copeland, “Contested Nationalism and the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam,” 151.}

Criticisms and dissatisfaction expressed in media and prevailed among the Thai middle-class grew as Siam suffered from the world economic depression that began in 1929. In May 1932, the king admitted that “it is already too late” to teach the Thai people to revere the absolute monarchy. It was impossible to “restore the support and the respect for the monarchy that existed in the former days” since criticizing the monarchy had become “habitual.”\footnote{291}{Benjamin Batson, Siam’s Political Future: Documents from the End of the Absolute Monarchy, 96.}
Finally, on June 24, 1932, a group of civilian and military officers called the People’s Party (Khana Ratsadon) overthrew the absolute regime. Prajadhipok, Rama VII, became the last Siamese absolute monarch. Written by Pridi Banomyong, a French law school graduate and head of the civilian faction, the People’s Party’s manifesto maintained that the king governed without principle and that the royalist elite politically and economically gained at the expense of the suffering of the Thai people. Three days later, Siam’s first constitution was promulgated. It began, “The sovereign power belongs to the people.”

The 1932 revolution aimed to establish “constitutionalism” and “place the King under a constitution.” However, the People’s Party’s attempt was obstructed by the newly constitutional king himself and royalist forces. An armed counter-revolt instigated by the latter broke out and was quelled in October 1933. Prajadhipok, residing abroad, vetoed several bills which would have undermined his power and wealth. Thongchai rightly points out that, during this period, the royalist camp struggled to revive the royal power exercised during the time of absolutism. However, they had not yet established a new type of power to secure its position within the new political order in the long run. Finally, after the government refused to accept the king’s demands to secure the royal elite’s political power and prestige, the king announced his abdication in March 1935. The 10-year-old Prince Ananda Mahidol, studying in Switzerland, became the legitimate successor.

292 Nattaphol Chaiching, “ก าเนิดระบอบประชาธิปไตยแบบอ านาจจ ากัด” (“The Birth of Limited Democra
tic Regime”), in ร ะบอบประชาธิพไตยไทยแบบอ านาจจ ากัดศ (ระบอบประชาธิพไตยแบบอ านาจจ ากัดศ (2475-2500) (To Dream the Impossible Dream: The Counter-
Business: The Contagion of Conflict over a Century of Thai Political Development,” in Good Coup Gone Bad: Thailand’s
Political Development since Thaksin’s Downfall (Singapore: ISEAS, 2014), 21.

293 It is commonly said that the king abdicated because, as he wrote in his abdication letter, the government
led by the People’s Party ruled against Thai people’s wellbeings. However, as Somsak Jeamteerasakul’s work shows,
the king’s abdication took place under the context in which the king attempted to bargain for more power with the
People’s Party. Somsak Jeamteerasakul, ประวัติศาสตร์ที่เพิ่งสร้าง (History That Was Just Made Up) (Bangkok: 6 October
From 1932 to 1946, the monarchy and the royalist camp did not play a significant active role in Thai politics. Led by members of the People’s Party, the political regime was oriented towards becoming a typical constitutional monarchy. As a “limited monarchy,” the king and the palace could not exercise their power without parliament’s approval. Royal spending and properties were under the government’s supervision. During this period, “The king does no wrong” not because he possessed absolute unchecked power, but because he could almost do nothing.

2.2.2 The Revival of the Monarchy

Despite the attempt at radical change, the People’s Party’s revolution did not contribute to a decisive break with nor complete suppression of royal power. 294 The chance for the royalist comeback was made possible by an unexpected national tragedy. On June 9, 1946, King Ananda was shot dead in his bedroom. Bhumibol, Ananda’s younger brother, became the next king, Rama IX. This incident hugely undermined the People’s Party as its leader and the then prime minister, Pridi, was accused of being complicit in the regicide. He was forced to resign and live in exile for the rest of his life.

Thongchai argues that the period between 1947 – 1951 marked the beginning of royalist revival. The 1949 constitution stated, for the first time, that Thailand’s political regime was a “Democratic Regime with the Monarchy as the Head of the State.” 295 In 1948, the Crown Property Bureau (CPB) was legally granted the status of a government agency exempted from paying taxes. Yet, it was run by the palace, a private entity which had and has no accountability to the public.

295 Rabop prachathippatai an mi phramahakasat pen pramuk
The CPB was (and has been) the biggest landowners in Bangkok and the main shareholder in companies such as the Siam Commercial Bank and Siam Cement.

In addition, royal rituals and customs were gradually (re)initiated and put in practice. The government announced that April 6 was “Chakri Day,” celebrating the founding of the Chakri Dynasty and Bangkok as the capital city. King Prajadhipok, the last absolute monarch who abdicated in 1935, was hailed as the Father of Democracy. In other words, royalist historiography began to re-write the People’s Party’s democratic achievement.

The 1957 military coup completely vanquished the People’s Party and its legacies. For the next 16 years, Thailand was ruled by a military dictatorship. Seizing power in 1958, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat played an important role in empowering the monarchy. A new alliance between the military and the monarchy was forged. According to Thak Chaloemtiarana, the monarchy functioned as a legitimizer of Sarit’s dictatorial leadership as well as a main participant in the regime’s “paternalistic programs” to promote “national security and economic development.”

As “a good advertisement of the government,” the young King and Queen traveled abroad and to rural areas of Thailand and became the symbol of nation. The King’s birthday was officially declared a national day, replacing June 24, the day of the 1932 revolution. Influenced by the Cold War and US geopolitics, the Thai government asserted that the Thai nation and the monarchy needed to be protected from Communist threats. With the support from the US government, Thai state apparatuses distributed photos of members of royal family in remote areas. As Charles Keyes notes, the two most popular photos displayed in most households in northeastern villages

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296 Thongchai Winichakul, ประชาธิปไตยที่มีกษัตริย์อยู่เหนือการเมือง (Democracy with the Monarchy above Politics) (Nonthaburi: Same Sky, 2013), 40.
298 Ibid., 207.
were photos of Bhumibol as a monk wearing yellow robes and Bhumibol receiving a flower from an old woman during his “rural trip” (Figure 2.1 and 2.2).²⁹⁹

Figure 2.1: *The King in monkhood.* A royal portrait popular during the early Cold War era

Moreover, restoring the sacredness of the monarchy, the royal language, and other rituals, such as the Brahanical Plowing Ceremony and the Buddhist-influenced Royal Kathin Ceremony were reinvented and put in practice regularly.\(^{300}\)

Although the monarchy initially relied on the military government’s support, it began to form its own independent power base. The King and Queen initiated various “development” projects including an irrigation project, introducing new crops to hill peoples in the North, and promoting hill peoples’ handicrafts.\(^{301}\) As Bhumibol’s “selfless” public works were propagated
through the new medium of television, the King “had become the paternal, activist king of a childlike, quiescent peasantry.” 302 Besides drawing support from the countryside, the King established close relationships with political elites, the state bureaucracy, business sectors, and social groups, especially the middle class. He performed marriages for them, received donations, and gave speeches to students at universities, which occasionally were critical of the military government.303

From the late 1960s to the early 1970s, elite groups became deeply antagonized to military rule. As the military government became increasingly unpopular among Thai intellectuals and activists, the Thai monarchy positioned itself in favor of the latter.304 Prajak Kongkirati’s works show that the anti-military government sentiment among the urban literati led to the idea that the Thai monarchy had not only been against military dictatorship but also a democratic leader.305 In other words, student activists thought that they and the monarchy were driven by the same motives to fight for the common good and for the nation.306

The popular uprising against the military government on October 14, 1973, fortified this ideology of “royalist democracy.” Calling for a new democratic constitution, the student movement protested against the “tyrannical” military rulers. Some were arrested. Acting as an umpire, the King met with student activists and promised that the detainees would be released. Later, after unexpected violence broke out on Bangkok streets and protesters were killed, the

305 Prajak Kongkirati, ตะวันออกอมตะถดถอย�回bage: การเมืองของนักศึกษาปัญญาชนและเชื้อชาติ (Finally the Movement has Unfolded: Politics of Students and Intellectuals before October 14) (Bangkok: Thammasat University, 2005), 501-519; Prajak Kongkirati, "40 ปีราชาชาตินิยมประชาธิปไตย” “(40 Years of Royal Nationalist Democracy),” ใปวันที젊 earners: หนึ่งทันพื้นที่ติดฝรั่ง (Repeating Era, Progressing Time: Celebrating 40th anniversary of October 14) (Bangkok: Fong Tong Enterprise, 2013), 88-90.
306 Somsak Jeamteerasakul, ประวัติศาสตร์ที่เพิ่งสร้าง (History That Was Just Made Up), 123.
palace became a shelter for those who sought refuge. The King then appeared on national television and informed the public that the military government had resigned and he had appointed a new Prime Minister. The King and the Queen paid a visit to hospitalized students. National cremation rites for those who lost their lives on those days were sponsored by the royal family.  

Accordingly, the end of military rule and the “democratic” victory resulted not only from the popular uprising but also from the King’s extraordinary role. “Royalist democracy,” as an ideology, thus came to mean a regime in which the King exercised his royal power during exceptional moments, rescuing those in need as well as appointing both executive and legislative bodies. As Thongchai writes, describing the King’s role in the October 14 incident, “The King’s act created a lasting impression of him as a democratic monarch who has been the highest moral authority above all political forces. It is popular democracy with the monarch/y on top of it.”

In the more open political environment that followed, student activists embraced anti-imperialist leftist ideas. They protested actively and frequently alongside workers and unionists. The palace slowly perceived this communist/leftist trend as a threat not only to the kingdom but also to their power and existence. When the monarchy in Laos was abolished in 1975, the Thai monarchy distanced itself from leftist students and became aligned with right-wing nationalist forces. The King stated in a public speech on December 1975 that Thailand was under siege from the threats both “inside and outside.” Using a metaphor, he compared the Thai people to a tongue and the Thai elite to teeth and maintained that it was impossible for the former to completely “emancipate” themselves from the latter. Without teeth, a man could not eat (“เขาว่าต้องปลดแอกก็ไม่ได้”)

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Moreover, the King composed a song, “We Fight (Rao su - เราสู้),” to express his anti-leftist/anti-revolutionary position. Translated into English by the King himself, the song vehemently declared,

The future map must show the Land of the Thai. We will not allow anyone to destroy it. Unmoved by any threat of annihilation. We will fight without any thought of flight.310

Street violence, detentions, and assassinations against left-leaning activists grew during 1975 - 1976. Right-wing movements organized by state agencies and endorsed by the palace were mobilized. While the rightist camps campaigned on the slogan “Right Kill Left,” any movement calling for social change was labeled as “‘communist,’ ‘un-Thai,’ and treasonous ‘enemies of nation, religion, and king.’”311 On October 6, 1976, a massacre took place. Students, stigmatized as communist, Vietnamese, and anti-monarchist, were lynched, raped, burnt alive, and murdered by the police and a right-wing mob at Thammasat University. There was no royal intervention this time.312 Many students and leftist activists fled to the forests and jungles, joined the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), and armed themselves. Nonetheless, by 1980, communist and leftist forces weakened. The downfall of Thai communism was caused by the split between China and the Soviet Union in the late 1970s as well as internal conflicts over strategies and worldviews between urban middle-class student activists and existing members of the CPT.313

309 Somsak Jeamteerasakul, ประวัติศาสตร์ที่เพิ่งสร้าง (History That Was Just Made Up), 134 - 135.
310 Ibid., 141.
311 Pasuk Pongpaichit and Chris Baker, A History of Thailand,
312 In “'เราสู้' หลัง 6 ตุลา ('We Fight': After October 6),” Somsak shows how members of royal family positioned themselves in favor of the far-right anti-student forces. For instance, the two princesses paid a visit to injured members of Village Scouts and police officers the day after. See Somsak Jeamteerasakul, “'เราสู้' หลัง 6 ตุลา” ('We Fight': After October 6),” Somsak's work Blogspot, October 27, 2006, accessed August 22, 2016, http://somsakwork.blogspot.com/2006/10/6.html.
313 The CPT operated under a chain of command from Peking not Moscow. This caused the CPT major trouble and internal factionalization when the CPT, following the Chinese position, supported the Khmer rouge regime against Vietnamese forces (supported by the Soviet Union). Some CPT members contended that the CPT should endorse the Vietnamese. Furthermore, the CPT and leftist activists became disoriented after the Chinese government improved relationships with Thai government. Peking closed the CPT radio station. Thus, the CPT got caught in the middle between larger communist rivals. These events contributed to the fragmentation of Thai communism and forced several key members to leave the jungle.
Meanwhile, as the King and the Queen became the Father and Mother of the Thai nation, Thai politics entered an era of “semi-democracy,” in which elections and parliamentary politics co-existed with unelected “political soldiers” and the 8-year Premiership of General Prem Tinsulanond (1980 - 1988) who had close relations with the palace. The King was officially hailed as “Bhumibol the Great.” In 1984, Thailand’s National Identity Office formally elevated Bhumibol as “the Father King” and “Developer King.” In 1988, Prem rejected the “Prime Minister invitation” made by the winning party and was immediately appointed as a member of the Privy Council by the King.

All in all, power and status of the monarchy from 1957 to late 1980s was completely different from that of a “limited monarchy” and deviated greatly from the principles of popular sovereignty which the People’s Party strived to achieve five decades earlier. Through state ceremonies and rituals, the monarchy regained its divine charismatic aura through references to religious beliefs. With regard to nationalism, the monarchy became a symbol of national unity and Thainess against both internal and external threats. Right-wing groups mobilized this intense love of nation which led to gruesome massacres, such as occurred on October 6, 1976. Finally, in terms of democracy, so-called “Thai-style democracy” was set in motion. Uniquely defined, this “democracy” involved royal intervention in politics in the pursuit of restoring order, cleansing corrupt leaders, and appointing/approving “good people” to rule the country.

Importantly, despite building impressive alliances and empowering itself, the monarchy during this period was still caught in overt political disputes. The palace explicitly endorsed far-

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314 Queen Sirikit’s birthday on August 12 officially became Mother’s Day in 1976 and the King’s birthday on December 5, National Day, Father’s Day in 1980. This paternal aspect of Thai royalist ideology also became a state ritual in villages. Katherine Bowie describes the five-day ritual of the right-wing Village Scout movement in Chiang Mai, during which participants cried hysterically after an intense demonstration of love toward the monarchy in which the King was proclaimed Father and the Queen as Mother of the nation. See Katherine A. Bowie, Rituals of National Loyalty: The Anthropology of the State and the Village Scout Movement in Thailand, 226.

right movements such as the Village Scout movements against the “Communist” threat. It supported Prem and enabled him to survive an unsuccessful 1981 coup. In other words, the royal institution was neither “transcendent” nor detached from normal politics, contrary to how it wished to present itself. Somsak Jeamteerasakul rightly observes that the monarchy in the post-1973 era remained the “head of a ruling clique.” However, since 1988, he argues, the monarchy transformed itself into the “head of a ruling class” or what he terms “mass monarchy.” As the next section shows, under Thailand’s parliamentary stability, King Bhumibol during the 1990s and 2000s successfully rose to become a moral ruler aloof from dirty politics, a beloved Father/Dad, and an idol of the Thai bourgeoisie.

2.2.3 The Popular Monarch vs. Corrupt Politicians

During the 1990s-2000s, Thai politics can be understood in two deeply interconnected senses. On the one hand, this was an era of democratic consolidation and the stabilization of parliamentary politics. The Thai army returned to its barracks and no longer played the role of “democratic soldier” as it had done previously. In addition, outside the formal realm of politics, civil society organizations became more vocal and engaged in various forms of political activism. The agendas of these organizations included national political reforms and protections of local and environmental rights. On the other hand, as this section will show, the above-mentioned democratization did not undermine royal power but, instead, strengthened it. Somsak observes that former leftist fighters who became disenchanted with their revolutionary project

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316 See Katherine A. Bowie, Rituals of National Loyalty: The Anthropology of the State and the Village Scout Movement in Thailand.
“reconciled” with the monarchy. They turned to Buddhism, localism, and the village economy which were already His Majesty’s areas of claimed expertise.

Resulting from his “intervention” in the 1992 Black May incident, King Bhumibol successfully gained the image of not only the national savior but also the great overseer of parliamentary politics and democracy. Unlike the October 14, 1973 incident, the 1992 moment, when the King acted as umpire between two conflicting parties, was captured, broadcast, and reproduced widely through mass media. Indeed, Thailand’s democratization and political reforms co-existed with the desire, especially among elite, intellectuals, and the middle class, to seek royal guidance. The idea that politicians and capitalists needed to be checked by the monarchy who stood “above” politics was further solidified. This was the period when royal power became highly personalized due to intense state and media propagation of King Bhumibol’s hard-working legacies, sufficiency economy philosophy, and his advice if not criticism of the government. Finally, in an age of commodification and mediatization, royalism expanded into the realm of everyday life. Rather than state-sponsored sacred rituals, practices of love and worship expressed to the King were initiated by various social sectors. As Henry Giroux summarizes well the hegemonic domination, “ruling classes do not produce and disseminate ideologies directly; instead, they appropriate the services of intellectuals and other cultural workers who have the creativity and skills to organize and run cultural apparatuses such as schools and the organs of mass media.”

The end of Cold War and the absence of communist threats indirectly delegitimized the Thai army’s influence and role in politics. The Black May incident in 1992 forced the military to stay out of politics and under control of the civilian government for the next 14 years. Briefly,

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319 Somsak Jeamteerasakul, “หลัง 14 ตุลา” (After October 14), Same Sky 3, 4, 171.
Black May involved a popular uprising against the government of General Suchinda Kraprayoon who was not elected by the people. Demonstrations took place in Bangkok and were violently repressed from 17 to 20 May. Finally, the Prime Minister together with the head of the anti-government populace were called to meet with the King. Broadcast nationwide, the King, sitting on a sofa, addressed the two parties kneeling humbly on the floor. He urged every side to stop the violence. Four days after the meeting, the protests ended and General Suchinda resigned. What followed included the removal of “political soldiers” and attempts at political reforms. These resulted in the 1997 constitution requiring the prime minister and lower and upper houses to all be elected by the people.

The image of King Bhumibol and the moment of his admonishing the heads of government and anti-government forces became so iconic and intriguing that it inspired Paul Handley to write Bhumibol’s famous biography, *The King Never Smiles*.\(^{321}\) The popular meanings attached to this image were that every time Thailand encountered a crisis, the King would call an end to the conflict and unite all Thais.\(^{322}\) However, these interpretations omitted the fact that the King’s speech condemned every side. In fact, Handley points out that, in the King’s view, the protesters had stirred up the disorder.\(^{323}\) His Majesty’s open-ended proposal was to let members of the Privy Council lead negotiations.\(^{324}\) Moreover, violence did not immediately stop after the meeting. The Black May issue started with public opposition against an “unelected” Prime Minister, but ended with an unelected royally-approved “middleman” member of the royalist

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elite, Prime Minister Anand Punyarakchun (June – September 1992). As Kittisak Sujittarom unpacks the ideological contradiction of the Black May movement in his dissertation, the 1992 anti-government uprisings, participated in by urban intellectuals and media, were less about upholding principles of election and representation than appealing and seeking royal intervention to fight the army and politicians.

Somsak Jeamteerasakul noted that during the 1973 royal intervention, the King’s speech given to student activists was made in private, whereas in 1992 the extraordinary moment was recorded and publicized through means of mass communication as if it were a “reality show.”

Afterward, as Thailand’s parliamentary politics became stabilized and normalized, the King and the Queen no longer explicitly played onstage politics; they instead exercised power through either “proxies” such as privy councilors or through indirect means of “advice.” Somsak calls this a new phenomenon. These kinds of influence constructed the image of the monarchy as a neutral institution and further justified its political intervention during a crisis.

Therefore, in the 1990s, the King embraced a new role in accordance with political contexts and the age of mass media. As Kittisak observes, since 1989, the King’s “birthday speech,” annually delivered on December 4, gained public attention and created a “national sensation.” Thai mass media consumers were eager to know what agenda the King had set and how he would criticize the government. For example, in 1989 the King expressed concern over environmental problems and in 1991 the issue of unity. More importantly, in 1997, the King came up with the so-called “sufficiency economy philosophy” in response to the Asian Economic Crisis

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325 Somsak Jeamteerasakul, “หัวตุลา” (After October 14), Same Sky 3, 4, 170.
in the short term and to contemporary globalization in the long term. Adopted as the national development plan with intellectuals, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the business elite jumping on the bandwagon, the idea of “sufficiency economy” was preached particularly to the rural poor, urging them to be content with what they already had, quit struggling in global capitalism, and return to the idyllic state of the subsistence economy.

Remarkably, images of the King, reproduced in this era, fit squarely into bourgeois values: intellectuality, fatherhood, love, hard-working, and dog master. In other words, the King turned into a role model for the conservative Bangkokian upper middle class who detested “money politics” and the expansion of capitalism despite the fact that they lived comfortably at the top of a socio-economic hierarchy. Acclaimed by the public, the King’s NGO-style developmental projects, initiated by the Chaipattana (Victory of Development) Foundation, aimed to solve urban-related problems such as water pollution and floods. As a writer, the King wrote a book called Mahajanaka (1995) re-telling the story of a king who saved his people through “education and through sustainable development using traditional technology.” In 2002, he published The Story of Tongdaeng. This book not only depicts the heart-warming story of the King’s favorite dog, Khun Tongdaeng (Madame Copper), and reveals “humanized” aspects of the King, but also tacitly promotes values of loyalty and servitude. Tongdaeng was praised for her submissive manner as she always timidly crouched on the floor in front of the King. As the book states, “If one wanted

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328 Kittisak Sujittarom, “ทัศนะของสื่อหนังสือพิมพ์และปัญญาชนสาธารณะที่มีต่อสถานะและบทบาทของสถาบันกษัตริย์ระหว่าง พ.ศ. 2535-2540” (Thai newspapers’ and public intellectuals’ views on the status and role of the monarchy between 1992 and 1997), 103.
332 This is a re-telling of a famous story of a previous life of the Buddha, with some crucial changes by His Majesty. Pasuk Pongpaichit and Chris Baker, A History of Thailand, 240.
to know how to sit properly when one had an audience with the king, one should look at Tongdaeng.” 334 In this regard, it is important to note that nowadays acts of crawling and prostrations before the royalty or even before their portraits are commonplace. As stated earlier, this practice was abolished by the absolute monarch, Rama V, more than a century ago. 335 Today under the “constitutional monarchy,” it was turned into part of a beautiful cultural practice showing humility and inferiority toward those in higher or holy statuses. As Tongdaeng had already set an example, crawling and prostration before the King became natural and obligatory for every Thai.

Besides formal emotionless expressions involving incomprehensible royal language, the King’s exaltations took on affectionate casual forms through mass commodities and pop culture. In 1996, on the occasion of the King’s 50th anniversary of his reign, GMM Grammy Company launched a song “Dad’s Tree (Tonmai khong pho).” In this song, Thailand is compared to a tree planted and nurtured by Dad’s “sweat.” On the occasion of the 72nd (the sixth 12-year cycle) birthday of the King in 1999, it produced a new song, “A Present from a Clod of Dirt.” Dad, as the song proclaims, represents the great force which unites the dirt-like Thai. Worthless dirt is transformed into a solid land. Lastly, during a year-long celebration of the King’s 60th ascension to
the throne (2005-2006), “We love the King” yellow wristbands and yellow T-shirts became popular commodities, since yellow is considered the King’s color.

King Rama VII, Prajadhipok in May 1932, stated, “It is no longer possible to restore the support and the respect for the monarchy.” The last “absolute” Thai king would have been amazed if he had lived long enough to witness the nation under Bhumibol’s reign in the 1990s and 2000s. As Thongchai succinctly put it, “Eulogies become facts; hyperbole becomes the norm; performative royalism becomes normative.” In terms of state propaganda, royal expressions became juxtaposed with irrelevant public campaigns, for instance, “Love the King, care about our children, let’s fight narcotics (รักในหลวง ห่วงลูกหลาน ร่วมกันดับยาเสพติด),” “Reforestation honoring His Majesty (ปลูกป่าเฉลิมพระเกียรติ),” and “Do good deeds for Dad (ทำดีเพื่อพ่อ).” In daily television programs such as *Thailand’s Got Talent*, Thai artists passed into the next round easily if their performances involved praising the King. Tearful judges and standing ovations were the expected reactions. The King’s portraits were found in front of hospitals or school buildings, on overpasses, and on “the walls of every household.”

By the mid-2000s, most Thais had lived only during Bhumibol’s reign. Memories faded of the young king during the rule of the People’s Party and military dictatorship. Those who were born after World War II could barely imagine how the royalist forces “played politics.” Perceptions of democratic struggles were limited to “struggles against military dictatorship, politicians, and corrupt capitalists.” King Bhumibol, as an exceptional “world’s longest reigning monarch,” turned into a retired Father who had spent more than a half-century building and unifying the Thai nation. He was a wise thinker. He never associated with petty politics and self-serving

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businesses. Accordingly, Thai democracy needed him to check and control vote-buying politicians. Through several decades, royal power became increasingly personalized. Rather than seen as a divine demi-god, Bhumibol was a man with extraordinary qualities of leadership or “charisma,” in the Weberian sense. However, the followers of this charismatic “superhuman” also became obsessed with his ordinary and humanized dimensions. Short anecdotes circulated among the urban middle class emphasizing the King’s “down-to-earth” character, sense of humor, and practical teachings. Yet, Thai royalism “with a human face” never came to the point during which it was ordinary to see the King make a mistake, get angry, or become vulnerable mentally and physically.

Therefore, in early 2006, the government and royalist elites reacted frightfully to Yale University Press’s publication of Paul Handley’s *The King Never Smiles: A Biography of Thailand’s Bhumibol Adulyadej*. In contrast to the contemporary “above politics” image, this book depicts how the Thai monarchy played an important role in reviving its political prestige and power since the 1932 revolution. Rather than seeing the monarchy as a morally exceptional institution, the book explores the Thai monarch, the monarchy, and his/its councilors as political players, endlessly competing for power supremacy and striving to build public appeal. Above all, touching upon an issue Thai academics had avoided, Handley straightforwardly claimed that Bhumibol’s political legacy over the past six decades were oriented neither toward constitutionalism nor democracy.

After the government’s failed attempt to prevent publication, the book was banned. A spokesman for the Thai Embassy in Washington, D.C., asserted, “All Thais revere the king and there is a law that he may not be criticized.” He added, “You can’t criticize the king because there

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is nothing to criticize him about.” In 2006, Thailand was a place where the King did no wrong, not because no one could punish him nor because he could not do anything, but because “there is nothing to criticize.”

2.3 Propping up the Contemporary Thai Monarchy

This section unpacks various forms of domination and ideologies fundamental to the Thai monarchy’s seemingly invincible power. Explanations are needed to understand how the Thai monarchy, at least until the late 2000s, not only became elevated into sacrosanct and uncriticizable positions, and became essential to Thai democracy, but also evolved into a benign Father figure loved by the people. Religious beliefs, namely Hinduism and Buddhism, enable the Thai King to acquire statuses of devaraja (god king) and dhammaraja (righteous king) respectively. In terms of politics and democracy, the Thai monarchy represents a guardian of the “unique” Thai-style democracy. Unlike a typical European understanding of constitutional monarchy, the Thai monarch’s role is not limited solely to the symbolic and ritual realms. Since it is “above politics,” relying on the “network monarchy,” it can successfully present itself as a nonpolitical actor untarnished by dirty politics even as it exercises enormous power in and over political processes. Thus, it possesses extra-constitutional powers to advise, criticize, or occasionally intervene. Indeed, the idea that the King is democratic as well as the “Supreme Arbitrator” implies a peculiar Thai meaning to sovereignty which deviates from the principle of popular sovereignty.

Outside the religious and political realms, the monarchy has turned into a “logo” or “role model” popularized in the activities of everyday life, provoking mixed senses of entertainment, pleasure, and self-fulfillment. In these situations, Thai people do not treat the King in awe. Rather,

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they love and admire Bhumibol because of his life-long public service, helpful practical teachings, and written works.

Finally, a regime in which only the perfect flawless dimensions of a monarchy are ubiquitous requires strict legal reinforcement. Article 112 of the Criminal Code, the lèse-majesté law, prevents any “blasphemous” or “deviant” discourse or information regarding the monarchy from transgressing into the public sphere.

2.3.1 The Godlike and Buddhist Righteous King

Since most mainland Southeast Asian societies are influenced by both Hindu and Theravada Buddhist beliefs, the status and power of Thai kings have been justified by and placed at the top of a hybridized Hindu-Buddhist cosmology. Based on Brahmanical beliefs, the king (raja) is regarded as an incarnated god (deva). Politically, devaraja means “the divine essence of kingship which [is] embodied itself in the actual king.”342 This belief was adopted by the ancient kings of Ayutthaya. Peter Jackson explains, ancient kings “legitimated their rule by linking themselves with Vishnu.” According to Brahmanical teachings, Vishnu, a supreme Hindu deity, has ten incarnations of which the seventh is Rama, the hero of the Ramayana (Ramakien) epic. The name of Siam’s previous capital, Ayutthaya, was indeed adopted from Ayodhya, the name of the city ruled by the divine Rama.343 This tradition of sacralization of space continues nowadays. “Krungthep,” the Thai name for Bangkok, Thailand’s capital city, literally means city of devas.344

According to its full long version of the name given by King Mongkut (Rama IV), references to

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344 The full official name of Bangkok is very long, it translates as: ‘The city of angels, the great city, the residence of Emerald Buddha, the impregnable city (Ayutthaya) of god Indra, the grand capital of the word endowed with nine precious gems, the happy royal city, abounding in an enormous royal palace that resembles the heavenly abode where reigns the reincarnated god, a city given by Indra and built by Vishnukam.’ Peter Jackson, “Virtual Divinity: A 21st Century Discourse of Thai Royal Influence,” 37.
Hindu gods are self-evident. Bangkok is a city “given by Indra and built by Vishnu” and “wherein resides the reincarnated deity.”\textsuperscript{345} Furthermore, all Bangkok kings of the Chakri House are called Rama.\textsuperscript{346} As the ninth king of the current dynasty, King Bhumibol’s other well-known name is Rama IX. These instances show how names of capital cities and monarchs from the past until the present have been heavily influenced by Brahmanical belief which emphasizes the sacredness of the king. At the same time, these legacies from the past help to define the nature of kingship and place in Thai culture today.

As a consequence, this “devaraja” or “god-king” discourse contributes to several cultural practices which reinforce social hierarchy between the divine royalty and the commoners. Practices of crawling and prostration are basic examples. No one is allowed to physically be in a higher or even equal position to the king. In Thai, the King is thus called \textit{Phra Chao Yu Hua}, which literally means “the lord (god) upon our heads.”\textsuperscript{347} As superior beings, the kings and royal family must be spoken or referred to with special royal language, which originates from Pali, Sanskrit, and Khmer. The longer and more sophisticated a sentence becomes, the more divine and the higher the status. For example, ordinary Thais \textit{son} (teach). The prince \textit{mi phra rat owat} (teaches). And the king \textit{mi phraborom rat owat} (teaches). When speaking to the palace, one must begin the statement, “May the power of the dust and the dust under the soles of your royal feet protect my head and the top of my head.”\textsuperscript{348} Here, the speaker is so powerless before the king that the mere dust on the royal feet can be his shelter.

\textsuperscript{345} Peter Jackson, “Virtual Divinity: A 21st Century Discourse of Thai Royal Influence,” 37.
\textsuperscript{346} This naming took place during the Rama VI reign.
In other words, royal language functions not only to distinguish different groups of people, but also to signify the inferiority of normal people. As stated earlier, the monarchy became redivinized under the premiership of Field Marshal Sarit through the (re)invention of religious ceremonies and royal language. This hierarchized linguistic format remains deeply embedded in cultural practices and ways of thinking, although the constitution has already declared that every Thai is entitled to dignity, rights, liberty, and equality. Due to this tradition, most Thais, when they hear the King’s anthem comparing themselves to a clod of dirt under His Majesty’s protection, respond approvingly, if not delightedly, rather than being appalled or with anger.

In addition to the devaraja discourse, the Thai king also embodies the ideal of the Buddhist dhammaraja (righteous king). According to this justification, the king represents a good follower of Buddhism and patron who rules the country according to Buddhist moral law (dhamma). The ten dhamma principles for moral rulers consist of almsgiving, morality, liberality, rectitude, gentleness, self-restriction, non-anger, non-violence, forbearance, and non-obstruction. Notably, unlike a divine godlike king, a Buddhist king has no absolute unconditional power, but rather power bounded by a set of rules. Therefore, this dhammaraja quality must be performed, perceived, and proved. Adopted into the contemporary era, this Buddhist concept not only reveals the “humanized” dimension of the king, but also contributes to the idea that the king has been popularly elected based on his virtues and dedication to the people. Put simply, Buddhist belief provides the Thai monarchy with a democratic ground for its authority. Thongchai maintains that while ancient kings gained authority from “ritual and religious performances,” a

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modern Buddhist king had to prove himself by “performing public services.” Thanks to well-organized media propagation and other state apparatuses, King Bhumibol undoubtedly met these qualifications. Every night at 8 p.m., every television channel reports the daily activities of royal family members for approximately 30 minutes. Current members of the Thai monarchy are portrayed as benevolent figures who tirelessly meet subjects, listen to their problems, and help them with mercy.

Moreover, according to the epistemological model of Buddhism, social hierarchy is determined by the degree of dhamma and merit one has. As Christine Gray and David Streckfuss point out, people are born into high-rank thanks to their merit from their past lives; therefore, kings are “men of merit” at the top of the hierarchy. Gray notes, “The dhamma is primarily a hidden or immanent phenomenon that must be carefully ‘searched for’ or ‘illuminated’...[and] is open to a very few exceptional individuals in society – monks and kings, to men of pure minds.” The more merit, the closer to dhamma. As a consequence, in Thailand, a Theravada society, kings are not only seen as “enlightened” Buddhist rulers capable of accessing dhamma, but also the center attracting those of lower rank who seek to gain more merit.

The hybridized Hindu-Buddhist discourse attempts to balance the tension between being a sacred deva and a selfless virtuous ruler. The king’s supreme divine power is “tempered” by Buddhist principles. The monarch still possesses a magical aura. But at the same time, his godlike status does not alienate him from his subjects. The benevolent Buddhist king is always close to his people, working for their well-being. His genuine virtues as a ruler co-exist with
magical sacredness. As a result, Bhumibol was called by names hybridized between humanlike and godlike features, for instance, “breathing deva” or the “Buddha who lives today.”

Several scholars have argued that the king’s divinity and magical power based on religious beliefs thrive and are even magnified in the age of capitalism and mediatization. As Jackson’s work shows, the pre-modern concept of god-king became popularized through “visual media and the spectralization of life under neo-liberalism.” In the same vein, Serhat Ünalı notes, “The spread of neoliberal capitalism has led to the expansion of cults involving amulets, monarchs, monks, and spirits in the service of material gain in this world.” Using Weber’s idea of charisma, Ünalı’s book shows that Buddhist and Brahmin concepts in Thailand constitute the supernatural or charismatic authority of the monarchy. Consequently, the King, as a head of the cosmological order, possesses invisible exceptional charisma which attracts Thai commoners. This religious legitimization goes hand in hand with capitalist expansion. Entrepreneurs “work towards the monarchy” as a way of “religiously legitimizing and promoting their profane commercial activities.” In a sense, the monarchy’s sacred charisma is protected and/or expanded by its followers or “charismatic community.” Additionally, this charisma turns into “the most potent source of symbolic capital” legitimizing “the accumulation of other forms of capital, most notably economic capital.”

To conclude, the Thai monarchy relies heavily on a religious legitimization of its power. The Buddhist political ideology portrays the King as a self-sacrificing righteous ruler serving a

357 Serhat Ünalı, Working towards the Monarchy: The Politics of Space in Downtown Bangkok, 46.
358 Ibid., 35.
359 Ibid., 13.
360 Ibid., 50.
popular mandate. This Thai-style theory of the social contract emphasizes the monarchy’s humanized aspects. At the same time, the supernatural divine aura justifies the royalty at the top of the socio-political hierarchy. Through ceremonies, rituals, daily cultural practices, and language, Thai subjects must highly revere and treat it with respect. Furthermore, rather than fading away, this sacred charismatic dimension of power is commodified and popularized through the Thai media. The monarchy’s extraordinary charisma serves capitalist accumulation and creates a charismatic orbit in which its followers work towards either material gains or emotional fulfillment.

As the following chapters will show, resistance against the Thai monarchy mainly featured elements of desacralization, toying with or subverting its religiously symbolic orders. The term deva, for instance, turned into a convenient indirect reference to the royalty. It was used either in a satirical sense or in the way which emphasized the hypocrisy, exploitative nature, and dependency of the deva on the commoner. The story of Ramayana was retold and reinterpreted in the way which its hero and villain characters were reversed. Finally, rather than representing a beautiful traditional Thai culture, royal language and acts of prostration became symbols of backwardness – “archaic” customs which supposed to be kept in the museum.

2.3.2 The Constitutional Monarch who holds the Sovereign Power

Thomas Paine, the revolutionary and republican thinker, states, “Sovereignty...appertains to the Nation only, and not to any individual.” He further adds, “Every citizen is a member of the Sovereignty, and as such, can acknowledge no personal subjection; and his obedience can be only to the laws.”361 Instead of merely the right to rule and legislate, sovereign power, as Paine describes it, features, a “right to abolish any form of Government it [the Nation] finds

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inconvenient, and establish such as accords with its interest, disposition, and happiness.” In regard with constitutional monarchy or “mixed Government,” Paine explains that a King can do no wrong because he does not have rights to do anything as a King:

When there is a Part in a Government which can do no wrong, it implies that it does nothing; and is only the machine of another power, by whose advice and direction it acts.

Therefore, under Paine’s paradigm, a King, if he was still allowed to exist, must act according to the “advice and direction” of other powers whose sources are legitimated by principles of election and representation. Speaking against the hereditary power of the few, Paine emphasizes that “extraordinary” or “prerogative” power must not be “lodged in the hands of any individual.” Paine argues, “When extraordinary power and extraordinary pay are allotted to any individual in a government, he becomes the center, round which every kind of corruption generates and forms.”

As mentioned in section 2.2, upon the downfall of the People’s Party, a new political ideology which empowered and legitimized the Thai monarchy slowly emerged. Instead of the restoration the king’s absolute ruling power, the royalist establishment sought to shape a new and enduring type of royal power capable of coexisting with either Thailand’s authoritarian or parliamentary politics. Nonetheless, Thailand’s “constitutional monarchy” reverses Paine’s model. Far from being merely symbols of the nation whose actions must be approved and checked by the government, the Thai monarchy has been credited with extraordinary political roles. Indeed, under the guise of so-called “constitutional monarchy,” the Thai King is understood as the sovereign in the most traditional Bodinian sense (see Introduction). That is, he is the one who “has the highest power, not as civil servant or commissioner, but rather continuously and on their

362 Thomas Paine, Rights of Man, Common Sense and Other Political Writings, 193.
363 Ibid., 191.
364 Ibid., 256.
own authority, that is, by virtue, of their own existence. He is bound [only] by divine and natural law.”

During times of “normal” Thai politics, whether under a military dictatorship or elected government, King Bhumibol usually acted as a moral force overseeing the executive, legislative, administrative bodies. As Kevin Hewison and Kengkij Kitirianglarp summarize:

The monarch’s political role is to control and watch over government in the best interests of all the people, because the king is the father of the family-nation and a benevolent and moral leader who protects his people from all threats. Thus the monarchy is not an obstacle to democracy, but the very center of Thai-style democracy; the king is effectively the moral check and balance on government, acting in the interests of his children – people.

The royal “moral check and balance on government” manifests itself in interferences by the so-called “network monarchy” or “proxies.” This network power, as Duncan McCargo argues, includes various socio-economic political groups from different walks of life and with different political convictions and interests. Prem Tinsulanond, the Privy Councilor and lead proxy (1988 - 2016), managed and monitored both power networks and government structure. The King himself did not directly manipulate them; therefore, His Majesty appeared to be autonomous from petty politics and personal interests. The monarchy gained its reputation from the success made by its networks, but was not held accountable for their misdeeds. However, McCargo also notes, the King occasionally “acted as a didactic commentator on national issues, helping to set the national agenda, especially through his annual birthday speeches.”

Reversing Paine’s model, the Thai monarch was free to make public speeches, policy recommendations, and criticisms towards the head of executive power, the Prime Minister.

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368 Ibid., 501.
During times of crisis, the monarchy’s sovereign power unbounded by any constituted law revealed itself in an explicit fashion. Developed from Carl Schmitt’s theses, Giorgio Agamben argues that sovereignty possesses the right to decide the state of exception in which all laws are suspended. When Thailand encountered exceptional moments, it was not the people but the King who acted extra-constitutionally. In other words, the right to “decide” regarding forms of government and exceptionality during life-and-death situations belonged to the King. Amidst chaotic violence, King Bhumibol appointed the “middleman” Prime Minister. In 1992, the King’s extraordinary power was self-evident when the two conflicting parties humbly listened to his advice. After the 1997 Economic Crisis, the King suggested the philosophy of economy sufficiency as a solution. Lastly, in April 2006, the King commented to the judiciary that the electoral result should be nullified. The royalist legal expert, Borwornsak Uwanno, vividly described the monarchy’s special power:

Once the King speaks, all sides will wholeheartedly act accordingly, thereby miraculously calming down heated political problems, as evident in the cases of the incident on Oct 14, 1973, the Black May incident in 1992 and the Royal remarks of April 25, 2006. [...] Consequentially, the Thai monarchy has attained a social status of Supreme Arbitrator and Conciliator of the Nation.

This legal expert, a prominent law professor and constitutional drafter, formulated Thailand’s notion of sovereignty which strikingly contrasts with Paine’s and most liberal constitutionalist thinkers’. The following formulation indeed represents the dominant political ideology of Thailand:

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When the constitution is abrogated due to a coup d’état, sovereign power returns to the King. This is because this sovereign power belonged to the King before June 24, 1932, and the King granted it to the People.\(^{372}\)

From a Thai royalist standpoint, the King is the true sovereign ruler who can act without accountability and who can exercise prerogative power during exceptional moments.

Where should the elected body and the people be positioned within this royalist paradigm of sovereignty? Distinguishing between the ordinary and extraordinary realms of Thai politics, Thongchai argues that while the former is disdained as a profane sphere for struggles over power and interests, the latter is preserved exclusively for “the monarchy, royals, and those royalists who claim to be cleaner, uncrupt, and superior to the ordinary.”\(^{373}\) Since the monarchy successfully presents itself as autonomous from the former, it possesses higher moral authority. “Over time, people look ‘up’ to the royal authority when they are dissatisfied with the normal political system.”\(^{374}\)

Royal domination over both realms of politics inevitably constructs a binary opposition between “corrupt greedy” politicians, on the one hand, and the moral non-partisan monarchy, on the other. Repudiation of electoral politics, majority rule, and politicians fosters and reinforces royal power. Royalist intellectuals promote the idea that the King is a pillar of Thai democracy.\(^{375}\) They assert that Western democracy, in which legitimacy derives from majoritarian votes, lacks “morality.” Moreover, democracy must not comprise only the elected representatives and the voters. It needs the monarchy and the nobility to prevent the system from becoming “tyrannical.”


\(^{374}\) Ibid., 89.


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In short, the monarchy and nobility represent “moral forces” outside the legal realm which governs the elected government and Thai voters.\textsuperscript{376}

Eventually, this antagonistic relationship between royally-led moral politics and electoral politics intensified under the premiership of “populist” Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006). Overwhelmingly supported by the rural mass and having won national elections twice, the rich businessman-turned-Prime Minister, from the royalist perspective, threatened Thailand’s moral order. Although Thaksin never explicitly challenged the monarchy, his mass support and populist initiatives indirectly made him an inevitable “rival” against the monarchy. As Hewison notes, “Far from urging a return to the farm and being content with rural ‘sufficiency,’ Thaksin’s policies emphasized ‘getting ahead,’ producing for the market and promoted entrepreneurialism.”\textsuperscript{377} Moreover, Thaksin’s introduction of a universal health care system provided the poor with a more viable option than dependence on royally-sponsored humanitarian projects such as Princess Mother’s Medical Volunteer (PMMV), established since 1969. Above all, Thaksin saw himself as a “CEO Prime Minister,” setting national agendas, quickly solving problems, and acting aggressively against his critics.\textsuperscript{378} From the point of view of the royalist establishment, Thaksin not only competed with the King over the rural constituency but also undermined His Majesty’s sovereign power. This fear of losing popularity and exceptional political power to an elected politician manifested itself clearly in a telegram written by an American Ambassador of Thailand, Ralph Boyce, and exposed by Wikileaks:

Prem [Tinsulanond] remarked that from the outset of his time as Prime Minister, Thaksin had been personally unprepared for the fawning reception he gets, especially when he travels around the country. It had gone to his head, Prem said, and made him believe that “he’s number one.” But Thailand was not like

\begin{footnotes}
\item[376] Prajak Kongkirati, “40 ปีราชาชาตินิยมประชาธิปไตย” (“40 Years of Royalist Democracy),” 93-94.
\item[378] Thanapol Eawsakul and Chaithawat Tulathon, “เขาถูกบังคับให้เป็น ‘นั่มเบอร์วัน’” (He was forced to be ‘number one.’) Examining problems of the status of a Prime Minister under Thai political regime through Thaksin Shinawatra’s political journey),” Same Sky 12, 1 (January – April, 2014).
\end{footnotes}
America, Prem added. "We already have a number one." Thaksin needed to learn that he was the manager of the shop, not the owner.  

For Prem, the Privy Councilor, Thailand had already had “the number one” before concluding, “Thaksin should understand that he cannot rival the King for the people’s affection.” In a sense, Thai-style democracy means a political system in which the King is the true “owner” of the country, the number one who monopolizes “the people’s affection.” The logic behind this statement was monarchical and patriarchal. As the “Head” of state, the King could not share his ultimate power. “A body with two heads would be a monster.”

In a sense, Thai-style democracy means a political system in which the King is the true “owner” of the country, the number one who monopolizes “the people’s affection.” The logic behind this statement was monarchical and patriarchal. As the “Head” of state, the King could not share his ultimate power. “A body with two heads would be a monster.”

In 2005, amidst fear of the “tyranny of the majority,” “electocracy,” and a “capitalist-absolutist regime,” Thai royalists, intellectuals, and the upper middle class welcomed Pramuan Rujanaseri’s book “Phra rat amnat (The Royal Power).” The book straightforwardly advertised the King’s extraordinary power. According to its logic, the King signed the constitution before its promulgation; therefore, he is not bounded by the charter. In its preface, the author proudly asserts that the King made the following remarks about his book, “I have already read [it]. I like [it] very much. [You] wrote well. [You] wrote correctly.”

To conclude, despite the abolition of the absolute monarchy in 1932, the palace’s prestige and “extra-constitutional prerogatives” have not been challenged and indeed become more enduring and fortified. In other words, the People’s Party’s attempts to establish constitutionalism based on popular sovereignty remain “unfinished business” even today. The monarchy has learned to adapt itself to some extent. King Bhumibol came to know how to avoid

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379 Wikileaks, “Prem on Thaksin,” July 6, 2006.
380 Ibid.
getting entangled directly in petty politics, how to build alliances with the middle class, and how to rely on horizontal networks. However, royal exceptional power continually generates conflict with electoral and popular power. Structurally, the former’s success and expansion are at the expense of the latter and vice versa. In the end, the underlying problem of Thailand political conflict can be traced to the classic theoretical question: Who legitimately and ultimately holds sovereign power?385

From 2005 to 2014, the anti-coup protest groups which later transformed into the Redshirt movements brought this question to center stage. Their political struggles could be read as a quest to unveil those invisible networks of power which constantly jeopardized Thailand’s electoral democracy and popular sovereignty of the people. In other words, the Redshirt movements aimed to unmask the Thai elite who claimed to be morally and politically superior to others.

2.3.3 The Beloved Father King and the Middle Class

Several Marxist scholars argue that capitalism today is ideologically founded on new types of spirit. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello write that the current capitalism is less about primitive accumulation, alienation, and the assembly line. Rather, as we see in “post-modernist/fordist” workplaces, working organizations become less hierarchical and more participatory. Gaining more autonomy through flextime, networking, and multitasking, employees produce and work to express their creativity and for self-fulfillment. 386 Boltanski and Chiapello call this “a new, liberated, and even libertarian way of making profit.” 387 At the same time, capitalism enables consumers to be “socially responsible” and express concern for others “from ecology and

387 Ibid., 201.
charity.” In short, this “capitalism with a human face” appropriates positive self-empowering and even democratic rhetoric as “the ideology that justifies engagement in capitalism.” Of course, these new spirits can only be realized among a handful of the so-called “immaterial labor” force who have intellect, communicative skills, and autonomous privileges.

In a similar fashion, this section unpacks the ideological foundation of Thai royalism “with a human face.” Popular among the urban middle class, especially in Bangkok, the Thai monarchy relies on several modern justifications which downplayed its superstitious mystical aspects. Love and popularity towards King Bhumibol did not derive solely from religious beliefs and ritualistic and ceremonial performances. Nor were they mobilized from top-down nationalistic campaigns. The Village Scout Movement during the Cold War period was an instance of a state-sponsored royalist project. As Bowie’s work shows, during the five-day ritual, participant villagers were bombarded with nationalist propaganda. On the last day, they received the royal scout scarf; a sacred object placed on the shelf for worshiping. This popular far-right movement reached its peak in 1976 and began to decline in the 1980s.

During the 1980s, Maurizio Peleggi argues, the visual production of the monarchy shifted from an emphasis on the militaristic dimension to a developmental and benign stance. In the post-Cold-War era, King Bhumibol turned into an “inspiration” or a “role model” for his subjects so that they could survive in the competitive world of rapid transformations and uncertainties. Moreover, royalism became commodified in daily products and articulated in casual “feel good” forms, for example, pop music, short “indie” films, wristbands, and t-shirts.

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389 Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, The New Spirit of Capitalism, 8.
391 Maurizio Peleggi, “Semiotics of Rama IX” (working paper series no. 114 presented at the Roundtable on Thailand in Crisis: The Twilight of a Reign or the Birth of a New Order held at the Asia Research Institute on February 24, 2009).
Similar to the “humanized” monarchy proposed by Somsak, after the 1990s, royalism and the Bhumibol cult depended on modern justifications through visual representations and easily understood narratives. Rather than a demi-god, Bhumibol became an ordinary man with extraordinary qualities. First, as the development and philosophical King, he was the master of “scientific knowledge,” tirelessly studying and working through experiments and cartography to solve problems. Sarun Krittikarn notes, royalist narratives stressed how the King listened to the people’s hardships, receives first-hand data, and thinks empirically. Royal portraits of King Bhumibol holding a camera and a map were popularized and even printed on the 1000-baht bill. Irene Stengs points out that these portrayals celebrated the King’s oversight of his subjects and kingdom. Furthermore, besides practical knowledge responding to contemporary problems, the King was praised for his ability to think and write philosophically. The King’s “sufficiency economy philosophy” drew support from Thai academic circles, NGOs, and political and business elites. His rewriting of the Mahajanaka story has been interpreted and elucidated as an advocacy of perseverance. These qualities of wisdom enabled the King to surpass any other intellectual or politician and state agencies.

393 Irene Stengs, Worshipping the Great Moderniser: King Chulalongkorn, Patron Saint of the Thai Middle Class (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), 224 – 225.
Second, contemporary royalism heavily counts on the idea that King Bhumibol was a hard-working monarch. As typical narratives go, from north to south and east to west, there was no place in Thailand where the King had not set foot. The backcountry, flooded areas, catastrophic zones were not exempt, but became targets of royal visits. The iconic portrait of the King with a bead of sweat on the tip of his nose symbolized this self-sacrificing diligent virtue. Comparing the country to a tree, a Thai pop song “Dad’s tree” metaphorically depicts the King watering his “tree” with his sweat. More importantly, despite painstaking public tasks for his country, the King never failed to spend time with his mother (when she was alive) and thus earned praise for his

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395 Irene Stengs, Worshipping the Great Moderniser: King Chulalongkorn, Patron Saint of the Thai Middle Class, 225-6.
gratefulness. As one television commercial preached, “While His Majesty has been working for his people thousand times harder than us,” he could still manage to see his mother “five days a week.”

The selfless workaholic aspect was tamed and balanced by family values. No doubt, the King represented the ideal type for the Thai bourgeois class; work hard yet never forget to express your gratitude towards your parents.

Third, rather than leading a glamorous, extravagant way of life, King Bhumibol was admired for his down-to-earth frugal lifestyle. Countless stories, circulated in the media, in government campaigns, and even among gossips, obsessively emphasize how the King sufficiently lived his life according to his need. Anecdotes of the King’s pencils, toothpaste, and fried-rice are three important examples. It is said that the King used only 12 pencils in one year: one a month. When a servant threw away a short one, the King picked it out of the garbage bag, put it in an extender, and continued using it. Several state agencies repeat this story to promote sufficiency economy and frugality. Similarly, an image of a flattened toothpaste tube stirred up a public sensation in early 2000s. As the story goes, the King squeezed out every drop from the tube. The “royal toothpaste tube” has been put inside a glass box and is now exhibited at the Faculty of Dentistry, Chulalongkorn University. The Ministry of Energy then used this story to urge the public to save energy.

A final story celebrating the King’s frugality was told by Sumet Tantivejkul, Secretary-General of the Chaipattana Foundation and repeated in a visual footage. During a royal trip,


\[\text{397 True plook panya, “ดินสอของพระเจ้าอยู่หัว” (The King’s Pencils) (video of a television program “พระทรงเป็นแรงบันดาลใจ (His Majesty is the inspiration),” August 14, 2009), accessed September 15, 2016, http://www.trueplookpanya.com/learning/detail/211-000157.} \]

\[\text{398 Petchara Tejakumpuch, “จากปก: หลอดยาสีพระทนต์ประวัติศาสตร์,” “(From the Cover: The Historical Toothpaste Tube),” in ฟันดี สุขภาพดี (Good Teeth, Good Health) (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1999).} \]

everyone, exhausted from work, was having a dinner, fried rice. However, after everyone finished their meal, one plate of fried rice was left on top of the table. It was for the King. Tirelessly working, the King was the last one in the group who had dinner. Although the fried rice had turned cold, the King told the servant to bring it to him. “His Majesty inspired us not to take things for granted,” the short movie proclaims.400

Last but not least, although the King’s birthday has officially been Thai Father’s Day since the 1980s, the embodiment of the King as a benevolent humanlike father is a new phenomenon. Since the 1990s, royalist expressions, particularly among the urban middle class and the media, began to figure in casual references to the King. The term “Pho” is used ubiquitously in several forms of adulation for Bhumibol. While its English meaning is “father,” under casual contexts it can also mean “dad.” The use of “Pho” as “dad” in a casual sense often occurs when formal royal language is not employed. Based on the idea of the godlike divine monarchy, this casual reference could be considered presumptuous and offensive to the King. According to the traditional rationale, the speaker is merely dust underneath the King’s feet, not the “child of a Dad.” However, as Pramin Kreuthong argues, 1996 marked the beginning of the usage of “Pho” in an informal sense. Celebrating the King’s 50th anniversary of his ascension to the throne, the song “Dad’s Tree” urged all Thais to precisely take care of his “tree.” Ten years later, “Pho” discourse became prevalent. As Pramin notes, books published in 2006 to glorify the King incorporated “Pho” in their titles, for example, Dad’s Teaching Words, Dad’s Blessing, Dad Teach [how to] Read, and Dad’s Garden.401 Eventually, in 2015, two enormous bike rallies to celebrate the King’s and Queen’s Birthdays were organized. The English slogans, promoted in the media and printed on

participants’ shirts, were “Bike for Dad” and “Bike for Mom” (Figure 2.5). This usage goes hand in hand with the hard-working and down-to-earth images of the King. As a Dad, King Bhumibol was seen as the head of the Thai family whose gaze was “warm, protective, forgiving, full of self-sacrificing love and care.”

Figure 2.5: Bike for Dad T-shirt. T-shirts worn by bike rally participants as well as Thais in general in 2015 to celebrate Bhumibol’s 88th birthday

This phenomenon can be explained in various ways. All commentators seem to take into account that the Thai middle class is both the main producer and consumer of the new spirit of royalism. Pramin sees this as an ideological shift away from the idea of devaraja. Embodied the humane paternal figure, his subjects, especially the middle class, can relate to or identify with the King. Pramin observes, “Never before in previous reigns have the people felt this ‘close’ to the monarchy.” 403

Somsak sees that the “humanization” of the King is a result of the ideological crisis of the Thai middle class, especially those in professional, administrative, and managerial jobs. Globalization and rapid socio-economic transformations have created anxiety in them. The King appeared to “represent” an ideal example for them and enabled them to disavow the insecurity and instability integral to their competitive worlds of production and consumption. Constructing and consuming these humanized dimensions of the King, the middle class could at least be consoled by the myth that they lived meaningful lives and were not merely parts of an exploitative system which alienates from each other and other classes of Thai society. By joining networks of “royal patronage” or through following the King’s teachings, they contributed something back to the society.

On the other hand, Sarun views the current Bhumibol cult as a “new form of nationalism” which serves “less the purpose of nation-building than to entertain and to give immediate pleasure.” 405 Obsessed with visibility and authenticity, the middle class has become addicted to royalist narratives and the portrayal of the King’s mundane everyday life. Serving “sensation-gatherers of the consumerist age,” these narratives contribute to self-fulfillment and subliminal

pleasure. As with us, the King, the omnipotent superior figure, had put blood, sweat, and tears into his work, lived a frugal life, struggled to spare some time for family, played with his favorite dog, and occasionally eaten cold fried rice for dinner. Sarun notes that, in this overly televised era, it is important to distinguish between what the King does and the display of what he does. Resulting from this distinction, the monarchy has turned into “a fetishized commodity” in Thai bourgeois society.

To conclude, while royal ceremonies and rituals organized by the state have become more spectacular, glorifications of the monarchy also emphasize its benign human aspects, taking on various cultural forms. Thongchai defines “hyper-royalism” in contemporary Thailand as “the politico-cultural condition in which royalism is intensified and exaggerated in public and everyday life.” He maintains that rather than top-down state propaganda, hyper-royalism has been perpetuated by and participated in members of various socio-economic sectors. Hyper-royalism creates the “spells” that exaggerate “the importance of the monarchy to the extent that it is believed that Thai society cannot survive without it.” Royalist rhetoric and symbolic representation have been adapted to the post-modern age of communication, commodification, and “feel-good” consumption. Despite its diverse forms and horizontal multiplication, this hyper-royalism shares similar themes, messages, and formats. It eventually transforms Thai society into a “community of believers.” Within this community, members are capable of “shouting and singing similar words...shredding tears for the same cause, having the same faith...[and] expressing it in a similar, uniform way.”

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407 Ibid., 76-77.
409 Ibid., 14.
410 Ibid., 19.
2.3.4 Legal Protection: Article 112

The span from religious beliefs to royalism “with a human face” forms the Thai monarchy’s “soft” and ideological powers. Royalist ideology shares considerable similarities with the tacit domination of capitalism in modern societies, providing senses of self-fulfillment and security in a world of rapid change and uncertainty. Moreover, this royalist ideology adapts well to new consumerism, media, and bourgeois values. Put it theoretically, modern society, as Michel Foucault argues, entails a new rationality of power and punishment which are less centralized and “capable of operating everywhere...down to the finest grain of the social body” in a way which is “more regular, more effective, more constant, and more detailed in its effects.” Examining functions of power in penal system, military, educational institutions, and the realm of sexuality, Foucault shows how negative and coercive “sovereign power” to “take life or let live” has been “replaced by a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death.” He concludes, “Power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress, if it worked only through the mode of censorship, exclusion, blockage, and repression... If, on the contrary, power is strong this is because, as we are beginning to realize, it produces effects at the level of desire and also at the level of knowledge.”

However, ultimately Thai royalism is not a “post-modern” form of power relying entirely on the subject’s self-discipline, self-internalization, and disavowal. Legal mechanisms and harsh punishments function to invoke compliance and ensure that only the idealized perfect representation of the monarchy is allowed in Thai society, especially in the public spheres. Article 112 of Thailand's Criminal Code states that anyone who "defames, insults or threatens the king,

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the queen, the heir-apparent or the regent" will be punished with up to 15 years in prison. Further strengthening legal protection, Thailand’s constitution also states: “The King shall be enthroned in a position of revered worship and shall not be violated.”

Based on Noppon Archamas’s Master Thesis and David Streckfuss’s series of works, this section briefly traces the development of Thailand’s lèse-majesté law, its dynamism, and implementation in different periods. It shows that several features of lèse-majesté law in Thailand are different from modern biopolitical forms of power mentioned above. Although the punishment has become less cruel (from slitting the mouth to incarceration), the legal implementation is far from systematic and predictable. Ultimately, the law relies on negative dimensions of power of repression and censorship.

In the ancient Siamese kingdom before the emergence of a modern legal code, the Three Seal Laws prohibited Siamese subjects not only from “imprudently speaking of the king,” but also from disparaging his commands and officers. Among penalties included beheading, slitting the mouth, and cutting off the ears, hands, and feet, and up to 30 lashes with a leather whip. In 1875 in the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), Nai Thim Sukkhayang was whipped and jailed for committing lèse-majesté by writing a poem called “Nirat Nongkhai.” The court ruled that the poem used improper language to attack an officer of the king; therefore, it was the attack on the king as well.

The notion of godlike monarch elevated the king to an inviolable position. To call the king by name or failure to use royal language can be interpreted as injuring the king’s sacredness.

However, due to the political structure of the ancient kingdom, the implementation of law was limited to the elite class close to the center, rather than applying it widely to the whole population.418

With the age of colonization, Siamese legal modernization took place. Under Chulalongkorn’s rule, Siamese legal codes were promulgated and publicized. First, Section 4 of the 1900 edict prohibited anyone from defaming and using “intemperate words” against “the reigning king of Siam or the major concubine, or the princes or princesses, or the kings, rulers, or presidents of foreign countries which share close, friendly, relations with Siam.” The penalty was up to three years of imprisonment.419 Then, in 1908, more sections were added. Section 98 and 100 of the criminal code punished anyone who “displays malice or defames the King, the Queen Consort, the Heir-apparent, or Regent” or “the princes or princesses from whichever reign.” The maximum sentence rose to seven years of imprisonment.420

The 1932 revolution brought an end to Thai absolutism and redefined the essence of the legal system. According to the principles of the People’s Party, the law now protected the King as the Head of the State instead of as a sovereign ruler and took into account principles of civil rights and freedom of expression. In 1935, the lèse-majesté law was amended to exempt “an expression of good faith or amount to a critical and unbiased comment on governmental or administrative acts within the spirit of the Constitution or for public interest.”421 In Streckfuss’s view, the 1930s – 1940s marked the period in which Thailand’s “public sphere” emerged and expanded at the expense of the sacred and official spheres. He notes that, despite no significant legal change, the

420 Ibid., 92.
421 Ibid., 99.
interpretation and implementation of the law proceeded in ways which endorsed public criticism.\footnote{David Streckfuss, \textit{Truth on Trial in Thailand: Defamation, Treason, and Lèse-majeste}, 98-99.}

In the wake of the revival of the monarchy in the 1950s, Article 112 of the Criminal Law appropriated the phrase “defames, insults, or threatens.” The law protected “king, queen, heir-apparent, and regent.” Although the maximum penalty remained seven years of imprisonment, Section 112 was put in the category of crimes against the kingdom’s security. As a consequence, the law allowed anyone to press charges regardless of their relationship with the defamed royal party.\footnote{Noppon Archamas, “การประกอบสร้างความกลวัและการเมอืงว่าด้วยการบังคบัใช้ประมวลกฎหมายอาญามาตรา 112” “(Construction of Fear and the Politics of Enforcement of the Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Code),” 62.}

In 1957, a man was imprisoned for two years after saying at a political gathering that King Bhumibol had murdered his older brother, King Ananda. In addition, a legal expert was accused of committing lèse-majesté after trying to clarify the scope of the king’s power and stating that the King should not make public comments regarding the country without the government’s approval.

However, with the military dictatorship and in the context of the Cold War, lèse-majesté accusations became subsumed under charges against communism and the coup decree, which prohibited any “seditious” act against the throne, the nation’s peace, and its security. In other words, in the Thai state’s view stemming from the 1950’s, communism presupposed anti-monarchism. It thus was defined as the ultimate treason.\footnote{David Streckfuss, “Freedom and Silencing Under the Neo-Absolutist Monarchy Regime in Thailand, 2006-2011,” in \textit{Good Coup Gone Bad: Thailand’s Political Development since Thaksin’s Downfall}, 127.}

Eventually, right-wing nationalists and royalist mobilization led to the October 1976 massacre followed by the coup. The coup decree increased the maximum punishment for lèse-majesté in response to the “present situation.” Since then, the penalty for lèse-majesté crimes has been a minimum of three to maximum of fifteen years’ imprisonment per count.\footnote{David Streckfuss, \textit{Truth on Trial in Thailand: Defamation, Treason, and Lèse-majeste}, 105.} There is no upper limit; therefore, a person can, for example,
be sentenced to 60 years altogether for writing six lèse-majesté remarks (10 years per count). Compared with the original, Streckfuss sharply points out, the current lèse-majesté law under Thailand’s constitutional monarchy has “a maximum sentence five times more severe than under the absolute monarchy of 1900.” Moreover, the maximum sentence in 1900 (three years) has turned into the minimum sentence today.

Thailand’s lèse-majesté law and its implementation have hindered freedom of expression and democratization at the expense of the monarchy in three ways. First, what counts as “defamation” and “insult” is unclear. According to court records, this “discursive crime” or “crime of immateriality” covers a wide range of words, gestures, art, or graffiti. For instance, a public speaker wishfully said that if he had been a prince, his life would have been more comfortable and happier. One expert testified in the court that this speech would cause the loss of people’s faith in the institution of monarchy. Also, lèse-majesté offences can include an insult to any royal symbol. A remark “Hey, What song is this? I can’t understand it” upon hearing of the royal anthem is lèse-majesté. Above all, the law does not take into account the speakers’ intentions.

Second, legal protection is likely to be extended to figures other than those specifically enumerated in Section 112. In 2004, a man was accused of committing lèse-majesté for making a

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429 Ibid., 219.
430 Ibid., 192.
431 Ibid., 193.
false claim regarding Princess Sirindhorn, the King’s daughter.\textsuperscript{432} In 2005, a man innocently commented in a radio program about Thai society’s backwardness regarding human dignity during the Rama IV reign 200 years ago. Although the law does not cover previous kings, in this case Bhumibol’s great-grandfather, the man was charged with lèse-majesté.\textsuperscript{433}

Lastly, lèse-majesté offences in Thailand are “unprovable crimes”\textsuperscript{434} in which veracity is secondary to the perpetuation of the monarchy’s flawless images. As the case above indicates, even a historical simple fact regarding social inequality in early Siam can be deemed to offend the royal reputation. Typically, during lèse-majesté trials, defendants are not allowed to argue or provide evidence to prove the truthfulness of alleged defamatory remarks. On the contrary, authority belongs to “national security experts or linguists” who can “read” the malicious intention of the defendant, “unravel the layers of ambiguity,” and interpret the crime.\textsuperscript{435}

In conclusion, prior to conflict breaking out in 2006, Thailand’s lèse-majesté law entailed two different features. On the one hand, the law had authoritarian roots and was itself problematic in terms of legal principles and freedom of expression. Historically, one can observe the “reverse” development of legal evolution. As Streckfuss notes, in most constitutional monarchies, lèse-majesté law, despite formally written in legal code, is, nowadays, rarely put into effect. This trend reflects the transformation from authoritarian to liberal states in which the expansion of public spheres has taken place.\textsuperscript{436} Regarding penalty, Streckfuss writes:

The penalty in Spain is from six months to twelve months for a less serious violation and up to two years for serious one.; up to three years in Jordan and in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{432} Noppon Archamas, “การประกอบสร้างความกลวัและการถ่วงดิ่งการบังคับใช้ประมวลกฎหมายอาญา มาตรา 112” “(Construction of Fear and the Politics of Enforcement of the Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Code),” 79.
\item \textsuperscript{434} David Streckfuss, Truth on Trial in Thailand: Defamation, Treason, and Lèse-majesté, 209.
\item \textsuperscript{435} Ibid., 191.
\item \textsuperscript{436} Ibid., 25.
\end{itemize}
recent Nepal; up to five years in the Netherlands and Norway; up to six years in Sweden.  

Unlike others, the written maximum penalty in Thailand is much greater. Moreover, there is no exemption for “honest opinions” cast upon royal public figures. Noppon’s dissertation shows that court sentences gradually increased from the late 1970s to the late 1990s. Previously, the maximum sentences given by the court were 5 years. Afterward, the sentence increased to 9 years. All in all, if we take into account other forms of power of the Thai monarchy and its exceptional roles in Thai politics, Thailand’s lèse-majesté law, arguably, is not merely intended to protect the reputation of royal individuals, but also to protect the whole system of power.

On the other hand, in comparison to today’s situation, prior to 2006 lèse-majesté charges involved only a handful of people, focused especially on those in academic circles and on politicians. According to Streckfuss’s data, the average number of charges from 2000 to 2004 was 1.6 per year. The number rose to 30 in 2006 and 127 in 2007. These numbers tell us much about the relative success of other dimensions of royal power. In other words, before 2006, the monarchy’s legitimacy had not been widely questioned and its defenders did not have to resort to a coercive apparatus such as legal suppression. Moreover, because anyone can file a charge against anyone under the lèse-majesté law, people used it occasionally during political conflicts or conflicts of interests. The aim here was to “discredit” political rivals; the issue had nothing to do with the reputation of the monarchy. Many charges were filed, but no arrests were made. Only a few lèse-majesté cases went through the juridical process.

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The implementation of Article 112 before 2006 was starkly different from the post-2006 one. Since 2006, most lèse-majesté defendants have been immediately imprisoned after being arrested. Many of these political prisoners did not have academic or political backgrounds; they were Thai commoners from various occupations such as a vegetable vendor, shoe repairman, and hotel maid. The following chapters reveal that Article 112 became widely and negatively perceived by a large sector of the population. The law symbolized injustice and the freedom of expression in chains. “Revoke 112, then I will tell all [the truth]” became a catchphrase implying how truth could not be uttered under Thailand’s lèse-majesté regime.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how, unlike other contemporary constitutional monarchies, the Thai monarchy, under Bhumibol’s reign, seized the hegemonic position, economically, politically, and culturally. Despite going through a modest amount of democratization, modernization, and capitalist development, Thailand seems to offer an intriguing case in which a monarchy successfully retains its power. Unlike other cases, the rise of the Thai bourgeoisie and capitalism neither weakened nor toppled this traditional institution. This chapter has demonstrated that the Thai monarchy co-exists with and even thrives in the Thai capitalist, mass-mediatised society. Furthermore, it became capable of acting beyond purely ceremonial realms, playing important decisive roles in the political arena.

For seven decades, King Bhumibol emerged to become the soul of the Kingdom, the morally superior ruler over any elected political body, the great arbitrator, the astute developer, and the all-wise philosopher. Moreover, although many Thais praised the King as a down-to-earth

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monarch living a humble and frugal life, the Crown Property Bureau’s (CPB) wealth became two times as great as the richest member of the Thai bourgeois, Dhanin Chearavanont. Owning Charoen Pokphand Group, Dhanin is considered the wealthiest businessman in Thailand and Southeast Asia. While Dhanin’s business success is eclipsed by the Thai monarchy’s, the former also actively participates in the cultural production of royalism through mass media and pop culture. Accordingly, it can be argued that the Thai monarch has adapted and transformed itself to become the King of the Thai bourgeois elite through both ideological and economic domination.

In the early 21st century, while non-Thai may believe that the post-Cold-War era is the “end of history” in which alternatives to capitalism and Western liberal democracy cannot be imagined, the most unimaginable thing, in Thai case, is the Kingdom without the monarchy or at least without the great Father monarch, King Bhumibol. This chapter has offered a survey of the recent history and changing and emerging mechanisms of power to explain how the monarchy is indispensable to Thai society.

More importantly, the monarchy can be seen as exacerbating if not providing the causes of subsequent chronic conflict. Particular forms of resistance have emerged from this Thai-style democracy with King Bhumibol as the morally superior, greater thinker, and most benevolent Dad of all Thais. Indeed, resistance is hemmed in and heavily shaped by this dominant power, its myth, discourse, and ideology. The next four chapters offer in detail how the “deva” has slowly fallen from the sky and become transformed into a “pathetic dog,” how the national savior has turned into the great murderer, and how “a clod of dirt” underneath the Father’s feet has become transformed into the “warrior of the dust.

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CHAPTER 3
DAWN OF THE DOUBT OF ROYALIST IDEOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Thailand’s chronic political turmoil can be traced back to late 2005. It started when the parliamentary system, political parties, and politicians faced crises of legitimacy. Thaksin Shinawatra, a successful telecommunication businessman-turned-politician, won landslide elections in 2001 and 2005 and served as prime minister for two terms. Using royal symbols and calling themselves “Yellowshirts,” anti-Thaksin demonstrations, largely composed of the Bangkok middle class, intelligentsia, and civil society organizations, demanded the end of the “Thaksin regime” corrupted by capitalism, cronyism, authoritarianism, populism, and violations of human rights and freedom of expression. Eventually, the military coup d’état toppled Thaksin on September 19, 2006.

Far from bringing political stability and harmony to the country, the 2006 coup gave birth to another political movement composed of Thaksin supporters who rallied against the coup makers and the Yellowshirts. From 2007 to 2008, conflicts deepened and society became polarized. First, the constitutional court dissolved Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai Party in May 2007. Next, a crackdown on anti-coup protesters took place in July 2007. Disempowering the elected bodies, the junta-backed 2007 constitution was passed through a referendum. Finally, despite attempts to undermine the Thaksin camp, Thaksin’s proxy party, The People Power Party, won a general election in December 2007. As a consequence, in early 2008 anti-Thaksin forces were re-mobilized and again incapacitated the elected government by street protests and judiciary power. However, unlike in 2005, anti-Thaksin forces now had to not only run against Thaksin and his handful of satellites but also a mass political movement that was frustrated by the elitist exercise of extra-
constitutional power which repetitively deprived the protestors of their voting rights and undermined electoral politics.

During his talk, “Outsider view of Thai politics” in 2011, Benedict Anderson cited Antonio Gramsci’s famous quote, “When the old refuses to die, and the new is struggling to be born, monsters appear.” Using European cases, Anderson explained how socio-economic and cultural transformations led to the “end of the old magical aura of kingship.”

This chapter shows the emergence and early development of what soon would be called the “Redshirt” movement. In the wake of the 2006 coup, protesters started their political activism as Thaksin’s supporters and anti-coup protesters but then slowly institutionalized into the mass political movement called the Redshirts.

I argue that this period marked the beginning of the decline of Thai royalist ideology which had dominated Thailand for several decades since the 1950s (see chapter two). However, the articulation of resentment through language and symbols shows that the protesters were far from well-organized revolutionary vanguards who aspired to republicanism. Moreover, the main driving forces here were neither the intellectuals, prominent activists, nor the upper middle class, but rather ordinary men and women from the lower class or lower middle class such as taxi drivers and small entrepreneurs.

In a sense, this chapter presents the moment when “the crisis of authority” started. As Gramsci notes, “If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer “leading” but only “dominant,” exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to

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believe previously, etc.” The process of detachment from royalist hegemony began in 2006; however, this is a long process which went through several stages of transformation.

Occupying public spaces and loosely connected, protest speakers and participants attempted to identify “who is behind the 2006 coup?” and to construct an antagonistic politics. Dominant themes during this emergence period (from late-2006 to mid-2008) showed support for Thaksin and opposition to the Yellowshirts, the coup, and above all, Prem Tinsulanond, the head of the Privy Council. Selective character assassination was central to the anti-2006 coup movements. Meanwhile, loyalty to the monarchy was widely expressed. Ordinary anti-coup protesters could support Thaksin and worship the Thai monarchy compatibly and reasonably. The powerful “enemy,” in their political imaginary, was the King’s adviser, Prem, who arrogantly instrumentalized and corrupted the royal institution. King Bhumibol Adulyadej’s sacredness and inviolability was upheld, particularly in public realms such as formal protest stages and movement media.

I maintain that, at the mass level, anti-royalism did not abruptly emerge as doubt or direct discontent toward any royal figures, let alone the royal establishment. Rather, it started from an erosion of legitimacy for those who surrounded the palace. Subversive discourses were initially deeply rooted in the idea that the King’s counselors betrayed both the King’s and the people’s democratic will. Therefore, the monarchy was left intact.

Contrarily, despite the marginalization of the academic communities, several intellectuals, including university professors and journalists, offered structural critiques and framed the conflict as royalist democracy versus popular sovereignty. Unlike the politics of the streets, these intellectuals, expressing ideas in a progressive academic journal, the cyber world,

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and in seminars, problematized the monarchy as a political institution deeply involved in Thai politics. Using cyberspace, a handful of well-educated urbanites exchanged not only critical ideas but inventive innuendoes such as “eye-opening (ta sawang – ตาสว่าง),” which afterward spilled over widely into the off-line protest world. However, during 2006 - 2008, these comments hardly influenced a large number of people.

3.2 Intellectual Critiques of the Thai Monarchy: Unheard Cautions before the Democratic Downfall

In response to the overwhelming demand for using “royal power” to depose Thaksin Shinawatra’s “corrupt” and “populist” power in late 2005, the editor of Same Sky magazine wrote, “It is impossible to understand Thai society without taking into account the monarchy’s role as one factor of changes.” Since the defeat of the Thai leftism and communism in the 1980s, Thai academics had endured a period of dormancy regarding critical views of the monarchy. Countering this trend, the July-December 2005 Issue of Same Sky attracted magazine buyers with its red cover with a white italic title which read, “The Monarchical Institution and Thai Society (สถาบันกษัตริย์กับสังคมไทย).” The font with its white curves cutting through the title appropriated the Coca-Cola logo (See Figure 3.1). Equating the monarchy with the powerful multinational beverage brand, the cover tacitly urged the readers to broach important but sensitive subjects, namely the Thai monarchy’s economic power and its influence on Thais’ everyday life. Moreover, it implicitly asked, “If Thaksin’s policies are labeled populism, what about the monarchy?” Inside the issue, several articles attempted to understand the contemporary Thai monarchy from different angles,

such as its hegemonic discursive power and historical development. On March 28, 2006, the commissioner general of the royal Thai police signed an order to ban this issue and filed a charge of lèse-majesté against the editor.449

Figure 3.1: Banned “Coke” issue, *Same Sky*, volume 3, no. 4, 2005
(Source: Same Sky Book website)

From 2003 to 2005, *Same Sky*, a quarterly left-leaning magazine, heavily criticized Thaksin’s administration, especially human rights violations in the Deep South. This critical position toward Thaksin administration was common among Thai intelligentsia. For more than a

decade, Thailand had not experienced any major event which caused political instability, namely
the military coup and violence against mass demonstrations. As democracy seemed to be “the
only game in town,” Thai intellectuals and activists thus aimed to better the quality of Thai
democracy overcoming vote-buying and populist electoral politics.

Although Thaksin’s “populist” policies, such as universal healthcare, public housing, and
funding small enterprise impressed people in the rural sector, his domination of parliament and
strong executive power worried many. They feared for the rise of “capitalist-absolutist regime” in
the guise of democracy. During late 2005, anti-Thaksin sentiments grew sharply. Led by Sondhi
Limthongkul, a media tycoon, anti-Thaksin forces appropriated royal symbols such as the King’s
yellow color, accused Thaksin of disloyalty to the monarchy, and called for the Royal
Prerogative and a royally-appointed new prime minister. According to their logic, Thaksin had
already abused democracy; therefore, undemocratic solutions, particularly turning to the King’s
exceptional power, appeared fully justified. This forced Same Sky to shift its direction.

In the controversial “Coke” issue, Thongchai Winichakul argued that Thai politics had
been dominated by a so-called “royalist democracy.” Problematizing the status of being “above”
politics, Thongchai maintained that the Thai monarchy was placed in the “upper” realm of
extraordinary politics so that the King could act as a morally superior figure in contrast to normal
“corrupt” parliamentary politics. Accordingly, Thongchai wrote that, every time Thailand
encountered a political crisis, often caused by “immoral” politicians and the army, the King

450 Yoshifumi Tamada calls it a period of Thailand’s democratic consolidation. Yoshifumi Tamada,
452 Sondhi showed up in a press conference wearing a yellow shirt with the message “We will fight for the
king” on September 15, 2005. See “เราจะสู้เพื่อในหลวง 4ปีกับการพิสูจน์ความจริง” “(We will fight for the king: Four years and the
Testimony of Truth),” Manager online, November 10, 2009, accessed October 4, 2015,
453 “สัมภาษณ์พิเศษ เสน่ห์จามริก: ไคร์วาทะ รัฐประหารคือทางออกที่เหลืออยู่” “(Special interview with Sanae Chamarik:
Clarifying ‘the coup is the only way out”),” Prachatai, December 26, 2006, accessed September 10, 2016,
intervened and restored democracy, peace, and national unity. For Thongchai, this royalist democracy originated in the October 14, 1973 incident when the King was believed to have endorsed the student movements, ceased state violence, and brought down the military regime. Even these intersessions, at the time, occurred to bring about democracy, the ideas behind this interference were antagonistic to the idea of a popular right to rule, or popular sovereignty. Ultimately, these actions asserted that the monarchy, not the people, retained the source of legitimacy and the right to claim justice.\footnote{Thongchai Winichakul, “ข้ามให้พ้นประชาธิปไตยแบบหลัง14ตุลา” “(Going Beyond the Post-October-14 Democracy),” \textit{Same Sky} 3, 4 (October – December, 2005): 150-4.} Earnestly pleading to his anti-Thaksin intellectual fellows in Thailand, Thongchai asked:

> Why do we shortsightedly abandon democratic principles to fight the government which destroyed democracy?... I agree that the current government undermines democracy by deceiving the people, being skeptic against, and thus obstructing people participation. Yet, if we wish to win against [Thaksin’s government] without respecting the people, what is the point of winning?\footnote{Ibid., 166.}

Thongchai’s article was followed by comments by Somsak Jeamteerasakul, a history professor at Thammasat University. Instead of marking the October 14, 1973 as a critical turning point, Somsak argued that the Thai monarchy went through another significant shift in terms of power in the 1990s. Somsak pointed out that what is new regarding the King’s popularity and legitimacy were his “humanized” aspects, for example, the King’s representation as a hard working “Father/Dad” of the nation, a philosophical writer, and a dog caring owner.\footnote{Somsak Jeamteerasakul, “หลัง14ตุลา” “(After October 14),” \textit{Same Sky} 3, 4 (October-December 2005): 170.} Under this royally popular regime, Thai intellectuals, in Somsak’s view, ceased producing works critical to the monarchy. Meanwhile, love and loyalty to the Father King took the form of commodities affordable among most middle-class Thai, such as yellow shirts, yellow wristbands, calendars, and pop music.

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{Thongchai Winichakul, “ข้ามให้พ้นประชาธิปไตยแบบหลัง14ตุลา” “(Going Beyond the Post-October-14 Democracy),” \textit{Same Sky} 3, 4 (October – December, 2005): 150-4.}
\item \footnote{Ibid., 166.}
\item \footnote{Somsak Jeamteerasakul, “หลัง14ตุลา” “(After October 14),” \textit{Same Sky} 3, 4 (October-December 2005): 170.}
\end{itemize}}
The “Coke” issue of Same Sky led to the earliest wave of political awakening or, in local language, “eye-opening (ta sawang)” among Thai urban literati. Composed of two words, namely ta (eyes) and sawang (bright), eye-opening generally means having clear eyes, an inability to sleep, and disillusionment after coming to know what is right and wrong. Sharing the third sense of original meanings, the term was deeply politicized and specifically appropriated to describe the collective experiences and feelings of one group of people. The new contested meanings were now additionally attached.

Disillusioned with the royalist myth, “eye-opened” people began to look at the monarchy as well as Thai politics from novel perspectives. It was impossible to point out when and where exactly the term “eye-opening” was first used in this newly political sense. On the Same Sky web board in October 2007, someone asked “when did you have your eyes opened?” This was the earliest recorded history of the term. The two most famous answers were “after the September 19, 2006 coup” and “after drinking Coke.”"457 “Drinking Coke” here implicitly stood for reading this Same Sky’s Coke issue. This can be seen as the early era when linguistic metaphor was utilized in a cyber-world to avoid direct references to something controversial to the monarchy. Additionally, people replied that they had their eyes opened after searching for information on the internet, reading books such as Jit’s Phumisak’s The Real Face of Thai Feudalism, Paul Handley’s The King Never Smiles, and Duncan McCargo’s article “Network Monarchy and Legitimacy Crises in Thailand.” For some, their eyes were opened widely when they took classes with Giles Ungpakorn, a Marxist professor at Chulalongkorn University.458 These answers showed that most of these “eye-opened” people belonged to well-to-do and educated upper middle class.

458 Giles Ungpakorn was charged with lèse-majesté and has lived in exile since 2009.
They were not only able to afford access to the internet, but also foreign literature and classes in the top university of the country.

In addition to a handful of Thai scholars whose work were published in Same Sky, Pichit Likitkijsomboon was another intellectual who opposed to royalist anti-Thaksin movements. Writing in the daily newspaper Bangkok Business, Pichit explained that anti-Thaksin forces were composed of minority elites and the upper middle-class who wanted to safeguard their political and socio-economic interests. Longing for a “royally-appointed” government, this movement was anti-democratic and favored traditional oligarchical rule.459

As the next section shows, Thaksin’s mass supporters did not frame the conflict the same way as did these few academics and netizens above. Neither Same Sky nor online media seemed relevant, let alone accessible, for most segments of the Thai population. “Royalist democracy,” “humanized monarchy,” or “traditional oligarchy” were, in Clifford Geertz’s sense, “experience-distance” concepts as opposed to “experience-near” concepts.460 As Frederic Schaffer summarizes, “experience-near concepts are commonplace words used in everyday contexts, whereas experience-distance concepts are words employed in extra-ordinary ways by certain kinds of specialists.”461 In other words, a gap in communication and political ideologies existed between urban intellectuals and the general Thai population. The former spoke in a language which the latter barely understood. As one Thaksin supporter recalled, “On Same Sky web board, the trend was anti-Thaksin and anti-coup, heavily referring to theories and looking down on the common people.”462 Furthermore, the irony was that the “Caravan of the Poor,” mobilized to support

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462 Puen lan sak นา, กรุงเทพไม่มีคนเสื้อแดง (Bangkok has (no) Redshirts) (Bangkok: Read, 2011), 51.
Thaksin in 2006, burnt the *Same Sky* issue and demanded legal action against the magazine’s editor. Critical views on the Thai monarchy were not only incomprehensible but also unacceptable for them. In short, while a structural critique of power existed in Thailand, it was narrowly circulated and lacked influential impact. Alienation existed within the Thai intelligentsia itself and between the academic and real worlds.

### 3.3 The Beginning of the Struggles of Thai Commoners

Despite the decision to dissolve the parliament and arrange a general election for April 2, 2006, Thaksin encountered pressures and “political deadlocks” made by the judiciary and political opponents. First, the opposition Democrat Party and other two parties boycotted the election. Next, the constitutional court nullified the April 2 electoral results. Last but not least, occupying public spaces and streets in the heart of Bangkok, anti-Thaksin protesters mobilized under the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD or Yellowshirts). The general election was planned to be held again on October 15, 2006; however, this solution was never realized.

On the night of September 19, 2006, army tanks were stationed in several spots in Bangkok. The military junta, led by General Sondhi Boonyaratglin, appeared on all national television channels, declaring the coup d’état, deposing Thaksin’s ruling government, and suspending the constitution. On October 1, 2006, General Surayud Chulanont, the King’s Privy Councilor, was appointed head of the interim government. The coup was welcomed by the anti-Thaksin forces, especially the Bangkok middle class and intellectuals. Thirayuth Boonmee, former leftist, sociology professor at Thammasat University, and routine Thaksin critic, expressed hope

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and constructive opinions regarding the junta and the upcoming draft constitution. For him, avoiding the “western-theory cult,” the new Thai constitution must rely on “Thai wisdom.” This renowned sociologist predicted that Thaksin’s power network would be easily dismantled. He asserted that, although many people were “addicted” to Thaksin’s marketing strategies, “populist ideology” was not yet deeply rooted in these grass-roots. Seeing people as passive voters, Thirayuth believed that if Thaksin and local leaders became disempowered, his supporters would simply comply with the country’s new reform direction. While for Thirayuth as well as many others the 2006 coup was the end of political crisis caused by corrupt dictatorial politicians, for others, the coup marked rather the beginning of Thailand’s chronic predicament.

Opposed to an optimistic forecast above, shock and anger were immediate reactions among many, especially “grass-root” voters. The most radical case was the case of Uncle Nuamthong Phraiwan, a taxi driver who drove his taxi head on into an army tank on September 30, 2006. Rejecting the coup and the military dictatorship, Nuamthong was not afraid of death. He fortunately survived the crash. In an interview, the 60-year-old man explained:

I want the world to know. I want the history to record that there was a taxi driver who died after hitting the tank with his car. This is because...Let me frankly tell you (paused few seconds and said with teary eyes). I no longer want to live under the authoritarian power.

However, after a military spokesman made a contemptuous remark that “no one can be so ideologically inspired that he or she was willing to lose a life,” Nuamthong responded with

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465 Nuamthong gave an interview with a reporter, Jom Petchpradub, on October 14, 2006 at the memorial of the October 14 uprising. The sad irony was that Jom indeed did not initially plan to meet and interview Nuamthong. He was there to make a report regarding the commemoration of the October 14 event. As Jom recalled, Nuamthong joined the event alone and walked around quietly. No one, neither former activists nor the media, paid attention to let alone admired this taxi driver who had fearlessly resisted the junta a month earlier. Jom decided to ask Nuamthong for an interview. It was Nuamthong’s last public talk. This interview was unpublished until Nuamthong committed suicide two weeks later.
another, this time successful, suicide attempt. He hung himself to death in public on October 31, 2006. His suicide letter began with “[I] admire the nation, religion, and monarchy. Military state and police state (must go).” Nuamthong wrote that he wanted to prove that he was willing to sacrifice his life for a political cause instead of just being crazy or getting paid.

The resistance and death of Uncle Nuamthong powerfully inaugurated the new round of Thailand’s political struggles. Having preceded those yet to die, he symbolized the insubordinate figure who was an ordinary individual with no socio-economic privileges, but who was stubborn, had no fear of death, and above all, could not stand being look down on by the elite. Praised as “the father of the anti-coup,” Nuamthong became a prominent folk hero to his successors.

While Nuamthong represented an extreme case, the 2006 coup undoubtedly enraged many Thaksin supporters, brought them to the street, and began political activism. For these people, as interview accounts show, Thaksin’s administration bettered their quality of life, empowered people in the lower sectors, and brought about national progress. For instance, due to Thaksin’s universal health care, Aunt Sao, a plant vendor born in Nakhon Ratchasrima, no longer had to financially support her niece. Thaksin made her life easier. As she put it simply, “He did a good job, launching the satellite, lowering the phone price, and improving the bureaucratic system... I’ve never seen anything like this since I was born.” When the coup makers toppled Thaksin, Aunt Sao thus literally cried and claimed that she was so sad that she wanted to kill herself.  

Likewise, Aunt Bo, a Bangkokian small business entrepreneur, dramatically called the 2006 coup a “hell on earth” and the coup makers and supporters, “devils (pisat - ปิศาจ).” As she explained, “Business was running smoothly. Out of nowhere, you [anti-Thaksin forces] asserted that Thaksin was corrupt. But I saw the opposite.”

466 Sao, interview by author, Bangkok, October 29, 2014.
467 Bo, interview by author, Bangkok, January 4, 2015.
Aunt Ju worked in education when the coup took place. She supported Thaksin because Thaksin’s educational welfare program concretely and radically transformed the lives of disadvantaged children. As she explained, “Previously, poor kids could not go to school. If they went, they could not afford school supplies.” Due to Thaksin’s policies, these children were given opportunities for education, food, and clothes. “Everybody had a chance all of sudden.” The former civil servant continued, “I thus wondered why they staged the coup...I must go out and find the truth at Sanam Luang.”

Another former civil servant, Pae Bangsanan, similarly disagreed with the coup. Based on his experience, he knew that there were other options besides unconstitutionally overthrowing Thaksin. A man who later became the Redshirts’ most favorite singer explained that there were various channels both institutionally and non-institutionally to check the government’s accountability. The 2006 coup thus transformed him from a “hedonist man (มนุษย์สุขนิยม)” to a doubtful man.

In addition to material benefits, Thaksin, for many, changed the ways people perceived themselves. Born in Surin Province, Aunt Kai humbly called herself, “rural (khon bannok - คนบ้านนอก)” who had never been aware of her rights as a Thai citizen. “I thought I was born like this, then I had to stay like this for the rest of my life. When there were problems, villagers had to take care of themselves.” She recalled that when she interacted with government officers, especially public nurses and doctors, she felt as if she were a little powerless person complying with their orders. “I became aware of my rights because of Thaksin. Universal healthcare enabled us to know that it is our right. Then, the awareness gradually expanded to others.” Similar to others, the coup stunned her. “They should not blame Thaksin, but the constitution. Thaksin won an election because of the constitution.”

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468 Ju, interview by author, Bangkok, October 31, 2014.  
469 Pae Bangsanan, interview by author, Bangkok, May 7, 2015.  
These accounts resonated with existing explanations regarding the Redshirts. Apichart Satitniramai and others point out that the socio-economic transformation and the 1997 constitution gave birth to “new citizens” who not only “have new needs and aspirations” to climb the social ladder, but to also actively participate in electoral politics.\footnote{Apichart Satitniramai, Yuktiruk Mukdawijitra, and Niti Pawakapan, โครงการวิจัย ทบทวนภูมิทัศน์การเมืองไทย (Re-examining the Political Landscape of Thailand) (Bangkok: Thai Health Promotion Foundation, 2013), 100.} Unintendedly, Thaksin’s so-called populism further fortified this new political awareness. Therefore, active voters furiously defended their voting rights robbed by the coup makers.

Most anti-coup participants who gathered at Sanam Luang, an open public field in front of the Grand Palace and Emerald Temple, did not embrace critical views toward the Thai monarchy as had Same Sky writers and readers. Their political activities in streets were sparked by the military coup which, in their view, was unjust and wrong. A few months earlier, on June 9, 2006, some of these same people wore yellow shirts with the King’s insignia, gathered at the Dusit Palace field, and celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of the King’s accession to the throne. This spectacular royal ritual had been organized under the Thaksin administration. Mon, a Redshirt woman later arrested and jailed for possessing war weapons, remembered that she was extremely upset with the anti-Thaksin Yellowshirts since their gathering blocked areas where the sacred ritual was held.\footnote{Mon, interview by author, Bangkok, March 7, 2015.} Nong, another Redshirt woman, recalled with a sad nostalgic smile, “I deeply loved him [the King]...In June, I went there, wearing a yellow T-shirt.”\footnote{Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, May 11, 2015.} In other words, the support of the people for an elected representative, such as Thaksin, could co-exist with worship and love expressed for the monarchy. After the 2006 coup, frustration was thus aimed at those immediate political figures who had deprived that which was valuable to the anti-coup participants, namely, health-care benefits, better education, country’s progress, and voting rights.
As Thongchai correctly observes, the early anti-coup protesters “fought the opponents of Thaksin, not the monarchy, because they were royalist too.”\textsuperscript{474}

3.4 Prem, the Enemy of the People: The Great Mastermind behind the Coup

The anti-coup movements’ identification of their political enemy started with the one who was visible and “criticizable.” This section presents various ways by which protesters articulated their resentment against the September 19, 2006 coup. Small-scale anti-coup activities were organized sporadically in the wake of the 2006 coup. There was diversity in terms of political ideologies among the anti-coup participants. Sombat Boon-ngamanong, an NGO activist, led a “flash mob” at Siam Paragon Department Store on September 22, 2006.\textsuperscript{475} This anti-coup group was called “The Anti 19 September Coup Network” and included NGO workers and university student activists. Despite this early resistance, they attracted few supporters due to the protesters’ critical positions toward both Thaksin and the coup.\textsuperscript{476} In a political memoir, a Redshirt Bangkokian wrote that he anticipated joining the activities, but was disappointedly confused by the sign saying “No Thaksin, No Coup” at the protest site.\textsuperscript{477} Sombat himself admitted that their events were attended by 10-50 participants, unlike those at Sanam Luang which attracted hundreds. To please the crowd, they later decided to avoid mentioning Thaksin instead of attacking him.\textsuperscript{478}


\textsuperscript{476} Many of them actually joined anti-Thaksin Yellowshirts led by Sondhi. They decided to withdraw from the movement as soon as the movement officially called for the king’s intervention and a royally-appointed prime minister. Pichit Likitijisomboon, interview by author, Bangkok, April 1, 2015; Anon Nampa, interview by author, Bangkok, April 2, 2015; Sutachai Yimprasert, interview by author, Bangkok, March 27, 2015.

\textsuperscript{477} Puen lan sak na, กรุงเทพไม่มีคนเสื้อแดง (Bangkok has no Redshirts), 16.

\textsuperscript{478} Sombat Boon-ngamanong, interview by author, Bangkok, March 17, 2015.
The Anti 19 September Coup Network went through internal transformations. For example, Sombat left the group, established a splinter movement, and allied with others at Sanam Luang. The anti-coup atmosphere at Sanam Luang was horizontal, poorly-organized, and chaotic since there were no dominant groups. Similar to the atmosphere in a market, whoever had ideas spoke with members of the crowd strolling around listening to each speaker. From the beginning, the 2006 coup urged ordinary people to go outside, turn into political speakers, and participate in new political life. Aunt Ju remembered that she went to Sanam Luang every day, listened to student activists and other speakers whom she had never known before, and often donated 100 baht (3.50 US dollars) to her favorites.

The anti-Thaksin Yellowshirts and military junta were openly attacked the most. As Sombat recalled, “Back in the early days, we had very narrow understandings about politics. We only directly reacted to the coup... It took a very long time for bigger explanations to develop slowly.”

The following poem was read by Anon Nampa during a gathering in front of The Commander Royal Thai Army Office on January 21, 2007. Pointing out the key opponents of the people, a young artistic law school student who was later known as a Redshirt lawyer and poet began each verse with a name:

Where is General Sondhi? (cheers) We come to reclaim democracy. Return power to us immediately! Stop plotting vicious plan, ‘Big Bang!’ (loud long cheers)

Where is General Surayud? You are a dying unlawful prime minister of Thailand (นายกเถื่องเมืองไทยไม่ได้รับเลือก). If you are unable to rule, step down. Don’t you dare keep on swallowing people’s taxes and robbing the land.

Where is General Prem? Take all your subordinates back to the barracks. Having killed the people indifferently, it is useless to deceive us cunningly!

Where are the people, brother and sister? (Anon asked the crowd twice. The crowd madly yelled “Here!”). Are you ready to move forward?

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479 Sombat Boon-ngamanong, interview by author, Bangkok, March 17, 2015.
480 Big Bang was General Sondhi Boonyaratglin’s political nickname known in the media.
Stand up and fight the oppressive bourgeois. The people will win soon. (Repeat. The crowd screamed.)

In this early political artwork, Anon explicitly declared war against the coup leader, the junta-appointed prime minister, and the head of Privy Council. Symbolically, he was climbing a ladder of power where “General Prem” was located above the first two figures. In the end, Anon asserted that the people were the most powerful and stood above everything. Notably, showing his left-leaning position, Anon urged people to fight not only the army but also the “bourgeois” regime.

General Prem Tinsulanond, the 86-year-old president of the Privy Council of Thailand, was the main target of criticism. He was believed to have interfered in parliamentary politics and “masterminded” the coup. This attack on Prem did not appear groundless in the eyes of Thaksin’s supporters. During the pre-coup era, the influential counselor acted unconstitutionally by his outspoken criticism of the Thaksin government. On July 14, 2006, Prem publicly stated that the Thai army could be compared to horses owned permanently by the King. The government, on the other hand, was just a jockey who temporarily and controlled the horse with limited power. Prem thus implied that, despite Thaksin’s election by a majority of Thai, he could not fully command the army since the latter was ultimately subject to the monarchy. Prem’s vision of the Thai political structure placed the royal institution instead of and the elected representative of the people at the top. Two weeks before Prem’s speech, Thaksin himself gave the public a hint that an “extra-constitutional charismatic person” plotted to overthrow him. Consequently,

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482 Ubonphan Krachangpho, การเคลื่อนไหวของกระบวนการแนวร่วมประชาธิปไตยแห่งชาติ (นปช.) ช่วงรัฐบาลกิจสิทธิ์ (The Movement of “United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship: UDD” under Abhisit Government), 37.
Prem, a former prime minister and a respectful statesman, became one among Thai elites whose charisma and authority were torn apart by the anti-coup movements.

Among anti-coup protesters at Sanam Luang, one group stood out due to its better stage equipment and mass support. This group was called “The Saturday Voice against the Dictatorship (henceforth “The Saturday Voice”),” which officially organized a rally on November 3, 2006. Suchart Nakbangsai, an IT shop owner at Bangkok Pantip Plaza, was a key speaker. The Saturday Voice owned a stage and were able to earn financial support by selling group merchandise such as a black T-shirt with a fist logo, stickers, and booklets. Moreover, they were the single group which provided systematic criticism of Prem. Among protest merchandise, they sold a booklet titled “Prem is not the Sky, Pa is just a man (prem mai chai fa pa ko khoe khon - เปรมไม่ใช่ฟ้า ป๋าก็แค่ คน)” (Figure 3.2). The cover image was Prem’s portrait over which a big X was drawn. A short description said this person was “an extra-constitutional charismatic figure who was behind the 2006 coup and moved the nation backwards.” Another booklet nearby had a big title “Over-ambitiously making himself equal to the royals (tisamoe chao - ตีเสมอจ้าว).”

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485 Suchart Nakbangsai, the co-founder of The Saturday Voice, explained that the name originated from the fact that most participants worked from Monday to Friday and rested with family on Sunday. Accordingly, they could only join political rallies on Saturday. Suchart Nakbangsai, “เดี่ยวโทรโข่งโดน112” “(A solo loudspeaker man charged with 112),” Red Power 2, no. 29 (October 2012): 37.


487 The term “Pa” is shortened from “Pa Prem,” which literally means “Father Prem.” Unlike “Por (พ่อ) which also means father, “Pa (ป๋า)” is more casual. Pa indicates Prem’s influential, respectful, and paternalistic role in Thai politics.

Prem had been a former army commander and prime minister (1980 - 1988) before he was appointed by the King to be His Majesty’s adviser since 1988. Anti-Prem discourse stemmed from the logic that Prem was an ambitious man falsely employing the King’s voice and attempting to arrogate himself to royal power. The epithet “Sky” thus alluded to the sacred realm of the monarchy where Prem did not belong because he was an ordinary human in this profane world.

On May 30, 2007, “The Saturday Voice” disseminated the so-called “Purple Book (samut pok muang - สมุดปกม่วง).” This small twelve-page document demanded Prem resign from his presidency and membership in the Privy Council. The reason given was that Prem not only conspired in the 2006 coup but maliciously intended to rule the country for his own benefit. As the booklet put it, Prem desired to establish “Premocracy (prem ma thip tai - เปรมมาธิปไตย).” Thus, according to this reading, although the King entrusted Prem with the care of his people and

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489 See Appendix 2.
democracy, Prem ungratefully betrayed His Majesty’s trust. The book repetitively glorified the King, “We are all well aware that his Majesty the King has unexplainably great mercy over his people and highly values the democratic regime.” Prem could thus be construed as acting against the King’s will by endorsing the coup, in particular, arranging a meeting between the coup makers and the King and the Queen on the night of the coup. From the *Purple Book*’s perspective, “The meeting displeased the King.” Furthermore, Prem’s vicious acts resulted in both “domestic and worldwide misunderstanding” that the King advocated the coup. Above all, Prem was criticized for acting as if he were a royal figure, in other words, “the Sky.” As the book questioned, “Why did people have to crawl on the ground and prostrate before Prem?” and implied that Prem was in fact anti-monarchist.

The antagonistic politics above can be summarized in one sentence, “Love Dad but reject Pa [Prem] (รักพ่อแต่ขอไม่เอาป๋า).” This statement was written on yellow shirts wore by anti-coup participants.\(^{490}\) In anti-coup protest dressing and accessories, the color yellow was commonly used as a royal symbolism. In other words, this was the period when the conflict has not yet been “color-coded.” While in 2005-2006, the PAD Yellowshirts protested against Thaksin, in 2007 anti-coup protesters also wore yellow shirts to oppose the coup and Prem. Appropriating royalist language and symbols, both political movements competed for love and loyalty for the monarchy, especially the Father king.

### 3.5 Institutionalization and Transformation of Antagonistic Discourses

Anti-coup protests became finally more unified and well-organized when Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai Party politicians started to mobilize big rallies under the name of PTV (People’s

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\(^{490}\) Puen lan sak na, กรุงเทพไม่มีคนเสื้อแดง (*Bangkok has (no) Redshirts*), 28.
Television) in March 2007. The pioneers of anti-coup political activism such as The Saturday Voice ceased organizing big rallies and transformed into PTV supporters.

Echoing anti-coup dissent voices above, key PTV leaders, namely Veera Muksikapong, Jatuporn Phromphan, Jakrapob Penkair, and Nattawut Saikua, reproduced royalist tropes. As Jatuporn talked to the crowd on stage, “General Sondhi, please don’t claim that you seized power for the King, you do it for yourself.” He continued that Thaksin had received royal approval to rule the country and it was thus disgraceful for Sondhi to depose Thaksin. Vehemently opposed to Sondhi, the crowd madly cursed, “the monitor lizard (ai hia -- ไอ้เหี้ยย),” sometimes rendered into colloquial English as “mother fucker.” Jatuporn concluded that all protesters were loyal to the monarchy, therefore they fought for democracy.\(^\text{491}\) PTV formal leaders were careful and defensive regarding the issue of the monarchy. PTV rallies ritualistically played the King’s anthem to mark the end of each gathering, while thousands of participants stood to pay homage to their beloved head of state.

Meanwhile, criticism of Prem expanded from his undemocratic and “anti-monarchist” political roles to unaccountable economic power. While presiding over the Privy Council, Prem was believed to hold important counseling positions in big corporations such as the Bangkok Bank Public Company and Charoen Pokphand Group. Questions were raised onstage regarding Prem’s sources of income and tax payments.\(^\text{492}\) Eventually, on July 22, 2007, the PTV led protesters to gather in front of Prem’s residence, Si Sao Thewet, and demanded Prem’s resignation. Wearing yellow shirts, PTV leaders again explicitly manifested allegiance to the throne.\(^\text{493}\) As 5,000


protesters were violently dispersed and injured by both Thai army and police, hatred toward Prem as a powerful cruel commander grew stronger. Jakrapob described the violence on that day as “shocking and unexpected.” It was manipulated by Prem, “a phrai (a commoner or a serf) who tries to climb up to the Sky and dares elevating himself above the people.”494 One year after the 2006 coup, the legitimacy and symbolic power of the head of Privy Council was severely damaged in the eyes of the anti-coup camp. Prem was no longer seen by many as protected by the royal aura. According to anti-coup discourse, Prem did not live in “the Sky World,” he lived in the phrai or the people’s world. His political and economic privileges thus had to be scrutinized as did other politicians’ and public figures’.

The anti-coup groups eventually allied and protested under the official umbrella of The United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) in August 2007. The UDD was dominated by former PTV leaders who gained massive support as sub-groups also organized independent protests.495 The movements became more institutionalized and ideologically developed as they encountered a series of events from 2007 to early 2008. Their perception of political rivals gradually expanded beyond a handful of coup makers and supporters.

First, on May 30, 2007, the Constitutional Court banned Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai Party. Its 111 members could not participate in politics for five years. As Eugénie Mérieau maintains, this judicial “empowerment” and “interventionism” became deeply institutionalized since 2006 to check and limit power of the elected politicians.496 No doubt, politicians from Thaksin’s camp was a primary target. According to the UDD, this verdict “killed the political life” of Thai voters.497

494 Jakrapob Penkair, บันทึกสีม่วง 22 กรกฎาคม 2550 (The Purple Diary: July 22, 2007), CD-ROM (Bangkok, 2007).
497 Jatuporn Phromphan, บันทึกประวัติศาสตร์ 9/29 แนวร่วมประชาธิปไตยขับไล่เผด็จการ (เดินขบวน) 1 กรกฎาคม 2550 (Historical Record 9/29: Democratic Alliance Against Dictatorship (marching): July 1, 2007), CD-ROM (Bangkok, 2007).
Second, the junta-backed new constitution was approved through a national referendum during which restrictions and prosecutions against anti-coup activists who campaigned to reject the draft were employed. The result showed a narrow margin in favor of the constitution, namely 56.69 percent “Yes” votes and 41.37 percent “No” votes. All 24 provinces in which “No” votes were outnumbered included Thaksin’s heartlands, seven from Northern region and nineteen from Northeastern. By empowering unelected political institutions, especially those in the judicial sector, the 2007 constitution was labeled “the constitution which resurrects ammattayathippatai (government by the aristocracy -- อัมมาตยาธิปไตย).”

Finally, after Thaksin’s proxy party – the People Power Party -- won a national election at the end of 2007, its two prime ministers, Samak Sundaravej and Somchai Wongsawat, were deposed by court decisions in 2008. Concomitantly, the Yellowshirt movement rejected yet another election’s results and seized the government house and airports, severing the government from effectively governing and isolating the country from the rest of the world. Eventually, due to secret deals and changes in the coalition, the Democrat Party led by Abhisit Vejjajiva were brought into power in December 2008.

Accordingly, antagonisms became framed into abstract group classifications, such as “dictators,” the “ammat (the aristocratic elite),” and “ammattayathippatai (the government by the aristocracy),” opposed to the “people,” the “multitude,” the “phrai (serf or commoner),” and “democracy.” Initially, the terms ammat and ammattayathippatai were circulated by anti-coup intellectuals. Emphasizing that the elite justified its ruling power based on its association with royal power, Sutachai Yimprasert, a historian at Chulalongkorn University, defined:

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499 “กกต.สรุปประชามติรัฐธรรมนูญ นครพนมไม่รับ-ชุมพรรับมากสุด” (The Electoral Commission concludes the result of the charter referendum. Nakhonpanom rejects- Chumporn accepts the most.), Manager Daily, August 20, 2007.
501 "สนามหลวงไล่เผด็จการ (Sanam Luang against Dictatorship newspaper), June 14, 2007."
Ammattayathippatai is deeply rooted in royalist belief. That is, it does not entrust the people with power since it views that the people lack political quality, were stupid, and subject to vote-buying. Therefore, just ruling is derived from bureaucrats, academics...or moral figures...This notion rejects the idea that sovereign power belongs to the people. The king possesses such power. The people are phrai who feel grateful to the king. They live in the land owned by the king. They live their life according to the king’s will without rights to appeal nor criticize. The king can do no wrong.502

Unlike Sutachai’s definition of the ammat regime, formal UDD leaders’ definition of ammat carefully and tactically omitted critical positions toward the monarchy.503 They maintained that the ammat included a group of people who used to be phrai or commoners but after having gained power, they prevented others from “climbing social ladders” as did they.504 The ammat, as protest leaders explained to their supporters, opposed Thaksin’s “populist” policies which not only “liberated” people from poverty but enabled them to be more equal and no longer subject to the ammat’s hypocrite benevolence. The ammat thus were the enemy of both party system and the people.505 Since the ammat was strictly understood as those who were commoners but acted as if they were royal, the monarchy, as leaders explained, was not the ammat. Prem, on the other hand, was no doubt the head of the ammat.506

504 Jakrapob Penkair, บันทึกประวัติศาสตร์ 9/29 แนวร่วมประชาธิปไตยขับไล่เผด็จการ (เดินขบวน) 5 มิถุนายน 2550 (Historical Record 9/3: Democratic Alliance Against Dictatorship: June 5, 2007), CD-ROM (Bangkok, 2007).
505 Jakrapob Penkair, บันทึกประวัติศาสตร์ 9/42 แนวร่วมประชาธิปไตยขับไล่เผด็จการ 16 กรกฎาคม 2550 (Historical Record 9/42: Democratic Alliance Against Dictatorship: July 16, 2007), CD-ROM (Bangkok, 2007).
3.6 Seeds of Anti-Royalism

By elevating the king, they prepared his destruction; and by humbling mighty subjects they made way for the rise of the humble, made way, indeed, for the new fictions of a world where all men are created equal and governments derive their powers from those they govern. Edmund S. Morgan

Far from challenging the royalist establishment, anti-coup protesters, either small autonomous groups or the well-organized PTV, perpetuated royalist ideology. That is, instead of challenging both “Sky/Father” and Prem, anti-Prem discourses purified the former by alienating the latter. In other words, resistance discourse turned only against particular individuals in royalist networks whereas it strongly affirmed faith in the royal institution. To put this in an analytical framework, this type of resistance, or “oppositional consciousness,” merely attacked certain “functionaries of the system” rather than questioning the entire group of powerholders or, more systemically and more importantly, the regime and its core principles. The royal position above politics and its ideological influences over everyday life, as several scholars had pointed out (see section 3.2), were left unblemished by anti-coup protesters. The Thai King remained a sacred uncontestable figure whom rally participants pledged to fight and protect.

Scholars focused on hegemony maintain that hegemony succeeded in containing “radical opportunities by placing limits on oppositional discourse and practice.” Mitchell explains that hegemonic power works “through the techniques of enframing,” constraining subordinate groups to decide which of several options for resistance is rational, realistic, and legitimate. Arguably, anti-Prem discourses, in a sense, resulted from royalist domination. Ultimately, anti-

coup protesters still identified their political goals and interests with the King’s. The monarchy, as a political institution, remained unchanged and neutral.

Looking at this issue from a different angle, questions, doubts, and resentment toward the coup and Prem, the King’s adviser, can be seen as seeds for the evolution of anti-royalism. In terms of the culture of Thai protest, peculiar forms of symbolic practices emerged and were exchanged among participants. Puen lan sak na, an anti-coup participant, noted that attacking Prem was similar to solving “the most important jigsaw puzzle in Thailand’s history.” Thus, the latest wave of anti-royalist criticism in Thailand did not originate from protesters’ disbeliefs or immediate loss of faith toward the monarchy. Rather, this criticism began in less-dramatic and less-revolutionary fashions, re-affirming, yet at the same time subverting, the monarchy’s greatness, divinity, and infallibility.

First, although the language in anti-coup protests worked within the royalist semiotic, these metaphorical terms were put in uniquely new antagonistic contexts. New webs of meaning were slowly budding in protest sites and becoming diffused through new networks. Metaphorical terms such as “the Sky” laid a common ground of understanding among the protesters when speaking of the monarchical realm of politics. The comparison of “the Sky” and the superior royal institution was not entirely novel in Thailand’s discourse concerning royalism. The King had been called “Lord of the Land (chao phaendin - เจ้าแผ่นดิน)” and “Lord of the Sky (chaofa - เจ้าฟ้า).” He could also be called, in short, “the Lord”, “the Land,” or “the Sky.” The metaphorical exaltation of King Bhumibol through songs, speeches, poems, and writings is common. As one verse of a song, titled “The Great Ninth King of the Land (phum phaendin nawa min maha racha - ภูมิแผ่นดินนวมินทร์มหาราชา),” describes the King:

511 Puen lan sak na, กรุงเทพไม่มีคนเสื้อแดง (Bangkok has (no) Redshirts), 26.
Ah, the Sun King is brightened by Dhamma, ruling with his great mercy. Like the Father, when the people confronted any hardships, the Sky grants rain to put out a fire.512

Even today, I can remember every word of this song because during my high school, we had to listen to this anthem every day before the class began. The song lauds the King as “the Land power nourishing every Thai’s life force and warming phrais’ hearts,” the righteous Sun, and the benevolent Sky rescuing those who suffer. However, the “Sky” appearing in anti-2006 coup protests were appropriated to serve the claim that some Thai elites did not belong to the monarchical sacred sphere. The aim was thus to create a conflictual distinction, not bring about harmony. By the same token, the term “phrai” was no longer understood as Thai happily overwhelmed by the King’s omnipotence, as the song depicted. Nor was it used to historically refer to a serf who worked for “Sakdina (feudalist lords)” as an unpaid labour during the ancient period.513 Rather, phrai stood for a particular group of people who found a coup d’état no longer acceptable in contemporary Thai politics. This sarcastic self-assertion implied that although the Thai people were de jure citizens in a modern democratic state equally bound by law, they were de facto phrai – a second-class citizen – living in a hierarchical society and subjected to abuse of power and violation of basic rights.514 As the next chapters show, the meanings of “Sky” and “phrai” changed dynamically. Used initially to attack Prem, the two tropes later re-appeared to serve other political causes. The semantic shift of Redshirt discourse went hand-in-hand with more radical implications.

512 ภูมิแผ่นดินนวมินทร์มหาราชา (The Great Ninth King of the Land), 1999. The song was written to celebrate the King’s 72th birthday on December 5, 1999.
513 See Jit Phumisak, โฉมหน้าศักดินาไทย (The Real Face of Thai Feudalism) (1957; repr., Nonthaburi: Sripanya, 2007).
Furthermore, the crowd became gradually familiar with insulting political figures without naming them. The gatherings unintentionally institutionalized particular insults and curses, such as “the monitor lizard/mother fucker.” Subsequently, as the conflict intensified, collective cursing and the term “monitor lizard/mother fucker” developed new disguised meanings in protest sites. In short, through informal channels such as commodities, speeches onstage, and scattered chat circles at Sanam Luang, over time new semiotic orders and anti-establishment culture were discovered and transformed. This process of subversive cultural production was likely to take place outside the powerholders’ surveillance radar. Unwittingly, linguistic and symbolic techniques accumulated and became convenient political weapons utilized by subordinate groups lacking both wealth and arm power. Initially, they were, indeed, deeply rooted in existing royalist belief.

Second, anti-Prem discourse eroded the legitimacy of what Duncan McCargo called the “network monarchy.” As mentioned in chapter two, according to McCargo, a “network monarchy,” is composed of a wide range of elitist loose groupings such as royally favorite military personnel and “liberal royalist” intellectuals. McCargo maintains that, rather than reliance on a strict hierarchical mode of governing, the palace uses proxies and network-based strategies to obtain legitimacy and secure power.\(^{515}\) He argues, “In a network monarchy, the throne would gain credit for successes, but failures of a ‘decadent system’ would be blamed on others.”\(^{516}\) McCargo’s thesis, on the one hand, suitably explains why the anti-2006 coup protesters exempted the King and royal family from criticism. On the other hand, blame was not placed on corrupt politicians but on Prem who, in McCargo’s reading, was the “lead proxy” or prime network manager.\(^{517}\) I argue that Prem’s incurable loss of political authority led to the destabilization of


\(^{516}\) Ibid.

\(^{517}\) Ibid., 506.
both network monarchy and the Thai monarchy itself. Put differently, Prem had been the monarchy’s ultimate immunity preventing dissenters from hitting the royal bull’s eye.

Third, the hyper-royalist myth that glorified the King as “the righteous King” and the genius of everything was undermined. Since Prem was handpicked by the King, rejecting Prem’s authority indirectly challenged the King’s reasoning and moral authority. The King and the Queen might not endorse the coup, but they blindly and perhaps gullibly let their subordinate take part in it. As Aunt Kai recalled her suspicion, “‘Number one (mailek nueng - หมายเลขหนึ่ง)’ might be sick. So his caretaker, the Privy Council gave him bad advice...I think the Council should have done better job instead of lying to him.”518 In this account, the genius powerful ‘Number One’ became an ailing old man deceived by his self-serving satellites. He might mean well to his people, but was misled by distorted information. For Michael Walzer, this perception helps to humanize the king and propagates the idea that the king can be misled by evil counselors. Still, the king remains a benevolent father for his people. Walzer points out that it took time for this notion to evolve into bad father and finally into the denial of fatherhood, in other words, the revolutionary politics.519

Walzer’s stages of revolutionary politics resonates with the development of Thai anti-royalism in general as the following chapters demonstrate. However, this ideological transformation does not have to always be gradual and linear in some individual cases. For instance, in an interview, Aunt Pinky aggressively called Prem a bandit who robbed the people of their power. Then she vaguely concluded, “People don’t associate with one another unless they share the same habits and attitudes. Accordingly, they are equally evil.”520 In other words, for

several people, it was clear that the palace and the Privy Council had an intimate relationship; therefore, it did not make sense to criticize only the latter while praising the former.

Fourth, the exaltation of the King in the *Purple Book* can be seen as the voice of a people subtly and humbly preaching about how a good king should act. As Scott argues, the hegemonic ideology created its own decadence. Promising unity, harmony, and happiness for the people, the elitist legitimacy was undermined when those promises were not minimally fulfilled. In other words, the royalist ideology contradicted the reality perceived and experienced by the king’s subjects. Articulating their desirable political imaginaries outwardly, anti-coup protesters asserted that the King was displeased to meet the coup makers and it was impossible for the monarchy to endorse the coup. Although royalist tropes were repeated and re-emphasized, they no longer operated in a politically consensual context. Rather, they arose at disruptive moments as a caution that henceforth the monarchy should act more carefully in order to meet expressed expectations.

In a sense, the seed of anti-royalist resistance was planted when the King’s subject – now frustrated and confused – had to remind the powerful royal figures of their idealized roles. Explaining the origin of popular sovereignty in England, Edmund Morgan emphasizes the moment when the Commons “presumed to know what the king wanted better than his appointed officials did, better even than the king himself did.” And as the next chapter shows, this seed continued to grow as participants found that their repetitive exaltations and expectations were unheard.

Lastly, since its inception, the anti-2006 coup movements subversively undermined traditional ideas of hierarchical and moral politics of Thailand. Calling for democratic election and respecting majority rule, protesters rejected the notion that the country should be guided by few

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morally superior elites whose sources of legitimacy came from birth, seniority, and socio-economic class. After the coup, moral figures in Thailand had their masks continuously ripped off. As Jakrapob, the PTV leader, declared to the crowd while onstage, “From now on, if anybody praises you as a good moral person (คนดีมีคุณธรรม), they are actually calling you a hypocrite (ตอแหล).” Jakrapob concluded that Thai politics was dominated by hypocrites who spoke evil against others, but concealed their own wickedness. Nattawut, another PTV speaker said, “We will tear apart their moral plastic masks.” “Unmasking moral figures” thus became the main theme of anti-coup protests.

This subversive theme was not entirely new to Thailand’s history of seditious politics. It can be traced back to Jit Phumisak’s The Real Face of Thai Feudalism Today (1957). Concealing its exploitative nature, Jit, the Thai Marxist, claimed that the feudalist class (sakdina - ศักดินา) indoctrinated people with their fairy tales to make the latter feel indebted and loyal to the royal power. After the brutal massacre of October 6, 1976, the underground leftist magazine, Prakaifai, labeled Prem, who at that time started building his military clique and later ascended to country’s premiership, “a saint with beast’s heart (nakbun chai sat - นักบุญใจสัตว์).” On a cover of one issue, there was a drawing of a grim giant in an official uniform whose human mask was falling and cut into two pieces by a sword (Figure 3.3). In other words, struggles against the Thai establishment have long been characterized as the politics of veiling and unveiling layers of reality. Similar critiques were revived in 2006. But this time, instead of underground writings, these criticisms were delivered from public protest stages and received cheers from more than ten

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525 Jit Phumisak, โฉมหน้าศักดินาไทย (The Real Face of Thai Feudalism), 63.
526 Thammasat University Archives, D32/10, Prakaifai, 24.
527 Thammasat University Archives, C32/2, Prakaifai, cover.
thousand Thai commoners. Another novelty was that the resurrected critique downplayed the Marxist framework and barely attacked American imperialism, greedy capitalists, or corrupt politicians. The primary enemy became the self-righteous elites – those who had rarely or never been subject to verbal assaults. No doubt, Prem was a respectful old man who became a target of this demystification. However, other figures and political institutions morally superior and more powerful than the Privy Council were also put in precarious positions.

Figure 3.3: Unmasking the powerful Thai elite. Cover of a leftist underground magazine (Source: The cover of Prakaifai magazine Vol. 1 No. 2, February 1978)

To conclude, Henry Giroux notes that power “represents both a negative and positive moment.” He continues, “As a negative moment, it strips ideology of its critical possibilities and institutionalizes it as a form of hegemony. As a positive moment, it refers to latent as well as

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manifest modes of critical discourse and practice which constitute the core of ideology.” I claim that Thailand’s political power during 2007 - 2008 comprised both moments. That is, the newly emerging ideology, formed by anti-coup camps, remained trapped within the royalist hegemony. However, it also possessed the potentiality of critical discourse and practice.

3.7 Cacophonic Voices underneath Protest Public Transcripts

After years and years, we no longer attacked Prem. We attacked ... (paused and laughed without naming) instead. The target had changed.

As this chapter has shown so far, at the mass and public level, personal narratives, protest speeches, and pamphlets showed that Prem was the primary enemy of the ammat camp. However, this section contends that there were also contested ideas and voices which were made by unbridle participants and deviated from movement’s official texts and speeches. Moreover, for several ordinary participants, their perception regarding political rivals shifted gradually away from Prem to the more powerful unnamable figures and institutions.

Outward expressions did not always reflect inward thoughts. Anon, a member of The Anti 19 September Coup Network, maintained that verbal and symbolic attacks against Prem were just tactics used by speakers to avoid lèse-majesté charges. Protecting the “reputation” of the King, the Queen, the Heir Apparent, or the Regent, the draconian law, article 112, does not include those in the Privy Council. Simply, dissent toward Prem relied heavily on the fact that Prem was criticizable.

Similarly, Sutachai Yimprasert, a Redshirt historian professor, opined that, while ordinary participants might truly believe that Prem masterminded everything, from the beginning

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530 Ju, interview by author, Bangkok, October 31, 2014.
531 Anon Nampa, interview by author, April 1, 2015.
experienced politicians and former leftists knew that what was happening was “not just Prem.” He explained that the 2006 coup was part of the long-standing political struggle of Thailand. Anti-coup politicians and intellectuals who had lived long enough to be part of previous conflicts, such as the October 6, 1976 massacre, could not take the monarchy’s political role for granted. Precisely because of their more complete understanding of Thai politics and full awareness of the lèse-majesté law, they regarded anti-Prem statements as purely practical tactics. Consequently, Sutachai argued that political speeches against Prem must be understood in two senses: 1) those that truly reflected dissatisfaction with Prem’s involvement in politics and 2) those that were just made in avoidance of the lèse-majesté charge. During this early period of 2006 to 2007, the former went hand in hand with the latter. But after the movement encountered a series of violent scenes, that they perceived as unjust, a critique of Prem was inclined more and more to be made strategically to avoid charges of lèse-majesté.

Contrary to this more sophisticated approach, a handful of inexperienced public speakers who had been politically awakened after the 2006 coup and did not subtly master the linguistic techniques of artful disguise, did appear. They criticized the monarchy usually in more provocative fashions in comparison to others. On the one hand, these speakers’ “radical” and progressive thoughts were appalled by general audience. Since the Sanam Luang era right after the 2006 coup, several participants remembered strolling through small scattered meetings and overhearing anonymous speakers fiercely attack Thailand’s most revered institution. However, these “beyond-Prem” criticisms rarely received mass support. The following interview with a sub-leader of Red illustrated general mass reactions back in 2006 well:

Sub-leader: We were born and raised by the idea that the King must be placed sacredly over our heads. So, I was truly mad when hearing whoever criticized the monarchy at Sanam Luang. I walked away immediately.
Interviewer: Were there attacks against the King since Sanam Luang era?

532 Sutachai Yimprasert, interview by author, March 27, 2015.
Sub-leader: Yes, they were rude. I grabbed my boyfriend’s hand and ran away.
Interviewer: Were they on small stages?
Sub-leader: They did not get on stages, but they formed chat circles which got bigger and bigger as more people gathered around each circle.\(^{533}\)

Despite marginal positions, some members of radical factions continued to have spaces to express their thoughts in gathering sites. As a result, they were the first victims of the lèse-majesté law.\(^{534}\) In Sutachai’s view, Daranee Chanchengsilapakul (Da Torpedo) belonged to this newly awake group. Da, a former independent reporter, had participated in anti-coup protests at Sanam Luang from the time when there had been no formal stages. Her furious speaking style made her an outstanding female rally speaker. As one person described her, onstage Da spoke “while clenching her teeth firmly and letting her voice pass through those teeth gaps as if rage was burning inside her heart.”\(^{535}\) Da was charged with lèse-majesté for three speeches delivered at Sanam Luang during June-July 2008 and sentenced to 15 years’ imprisonment. The following sentences spoken by Da on stage in Sanam Luang, were deemed, in the judges’ views, to damage the reputation of the monarchy:

Don’t you [yellowshirt Sondhi] dare wear a yellow or blue dog collar. I don’t give a shit. Wait until you see the red color. Remember this, you evil alliance, the people [prachachon] is the greatest in this land. No one is more powerful than the people...Where do taxes come from? Unless the phrai patronize them, the Ammat-Sakdina (aristocrats-feudal) cannot survive.

Until today, I don’t know whether that damned old man would regret his action...But you cannot deny that fifteen coups were made possible because of one man. Which action decided if the coup was accomplished or failed? An act of signing.

If you were a good person, you would have dismissed evil subordinates like the old Sī Sāo transvestite. Otherwise, you indeed endorsed him.\(^{536}\) (Emphasis mine)

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\(^{533}\) Redshirt sub-leaders, interview by author, May 9, 2015.
\(^{534}\) Boonyuen Prasertying and Da Torpedo were charged with lèse-majesté for their speeches at Sanam Luang in 2008. For cases’ details, see http://freedom.ilaw.or.th/
\(^{535}\) Puen lan sak na, กรุงเทพไม่มีคนเสื้อแดง (Bangkok has (no) Redshirts), 43.
\(^{536}\) Criminal Court’s Verdict, Same Sky 7, 3 (July-September 2009): 201-208.
Far from directly attacking the monarchy, Da’s speech featured coding and third-person references. Prior knowledge and interpretation were needed in order to understand the political meanings which would be understood differently by different listeners. First, an antagonistic symbolization of color placed yellow and blue opposed to red. Second, the terms “the people” and “phrai” were used interchangeably. Both were praised as the most indispensable and superior to the elites including the aristocrat and feudalist. Third, unlike other rally speakers, Da crossed the sacred line by stating that there was another influential “damned old man” behind Prem; she referred to Prem as “the old Si Sao transvestite (กระเทยเฒ่าสี่เสาร์).” This person, behind Prem, was not only unnamable but also un-specifiable. As opposed to Prem, he could not even be identified by the name of his residence. Da was aware that she had to walk a fine line between conveying her political thoughts and what could actually be uttered. However, the parameter of the permissible had become very limited in world of Thai royalism.

In the court’s view, defamation crimes against the monarchy did not have to feature the explicit naming of royal figures. They extended to those ambiguous symbolic phrases that were left for the audience to use their imagination to interpret by themselves. According to the court verdict, the “damned old man” and several “you” in Da’s speeches alluded to the King. Neither could playing with royal colors shield political speakers from lèse-majesté charges. The court interpreted that, since yellow and blue were His and Her Majesties’ personal colors, Da’s reference to them implied that the King and the Queen masterminded the anti-Thaksin movements. Without further explanation, the court ruled that her statements “injured” the royal reputation. David Streckfuss rightly argues that lèse-majesté speech-acts are “unprovable crimes.”537 In Da’s case, the court did not provide counter-arguments nor evidence that falsified

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the defendant’s alleged defamation. Here, the judges acted mainly as decoding experts who monopolized the meaning-making authority. From the outset, the members of the court were ready to detect any ambiguous symbolic expression and act as if they were telepathically omnipotent, capable of reading the speaker’s malicious intention against the monarchy.

At that time, Article 112 of Thailand’s criminal code was relatively unknown to the public. Since the number of lèse-majesté cases was still small, the law itself had not yet been publicized as it was a few years later. Public responses to Da varied according to political positions and strategies. On the one hand, the royalist Yellowshirts demonized Da as “lower than the monitor lizard/mother fucker,” deserving countless “slaps for the nation and for the monarchy.” On the other, Da received sympathy and support from her anti-coup comrades. At the leader’s level, however, there was hesitation to get involved in Da’s lèse-majesté case. As Aunt Sao recalled, she asked many protest leaders to help Da. Most nodded quietly but did not take further action. Some yelled back, “It serves her [Da] right since she talked too much.” In Aunt Sao’s view, although Da often used rude words, “She was the first one.” Aunt Sao explained, “She spoke on behalf of others. I was too afraid to do as she did.” Likewise, Aunt Pinky defended Da, “Da was indeed right about the signing.” Because of Da, Aunt Pinky came to realize that without the royal signature, “the coup would have not been fully accomplished.”

Da’s case symbolized the early wave of public expression of political awakening among ordinary Thais. Her political speeches had no academic terms, no sophisticated analysis of the

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538 According to David Streckfuss, during 1992-2004, the number of lèse-majesté case was averagely less than 5 cases annually. The number continued to grow significantly as political tensions intensified. During 2005-2008, the average rose to 60 cases per year. David Streckfuss, “The Intricacies of Lese-Majesty: A Comparative Study of Imperial Germany and Modern Thailand,” in Saying the Unsayable: Monarchy and Democracy in Thailand (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2011), 107.

539 Thanapol Eawsakul, “กี่ฟ้าแดดแผดเผาให้ไหม้เกรียม เบื้องห่วงหารเนื้อไม่ชอบธรรม: การต่อสู้ดารณี ชาญเชิ งศิลปกุลกับโทษที่ไม่เป็นธรรม” (“(No matter how burning hot the sun from the sky becomes, [She] challenges the unjust tradition: Daranee Chanchengsilapakul’s Struggle and Unjust Sentence),” Same Sky 7, 3 (July-September 2009): 192.

540 Sao, interview by author, October 29, 2014.

541 Pinky, interview by author, February 10, 2015.
regime, nor beautiful politically correct vocabulary. Yet, as Aunt Sao commented, Da was one among the few speakers who could bravely articulate anger on the audience’s behalf. Precisely because of her commoner-style vulgarity, she sacrilegiously shook the world of the royalist establishment and needed to be jailed. In 2009, a Redshirt poet dedicated one poem to her:

You are an iron red flesh flower,
Budding and singing songs of struggle.
Brave loud voice never withers,
But flourishes in the hearts of the people.

You are an iron bright red flower,
From which pollen grains will transfer sooner or later.
Into every village and district, it will spread over.
Rousing the mass to fight for a more equal future.

It did not take long time for Da’s dissent voices to become more sensible among several protesters. Uchane Chiangsen rightly points out that consecutive experiences of contradiction, violence, and defeats radicalized the political consciousness of protesters regarding the monarchy. Ordinary participants joined the movement in 2006 believing that victory could be attained within a brief period of time. At least, one might expect that their votes, easily outnumbering those of the Yellowshirts and ammat, would have enabled them to beat their opponents. They could not anticipate that their call for normal electoral politics would not have been adopted by the Thai establishment.

542 Da was not the first nor the last public political speaker whose words uttered at Sanam Luang put her behind bars due to the lèse-majesté law. Back in 1957, two men, in separate events, spoke on protest stages about the King’s involvement in the death of his brother – Rama VIII. Amidst the tension between the left and right in 1976, one man did not stand up when hearing the King’s anthem in the gathering. He then complained aloud, “What song are you playing? It sounds non-sense.” Da received far heavier sentences than the 1957 and 1976 Sanam Luang speakers; however, her name was not only remembered by many, but praised as a fighter for a more equal Thailand.

543 Mai nueng kor kun ti: The People’s Poet (The Declaration before the Court Group, July 2014), 50-51.

“We thought we just fought with Prem,” recalled Aunt Lek. Aunt Bo added, “If only it was Prem, we could have won long time ago.” Aunt Bo talked about her original doubts about the royal institution in the wake of the 2006 coup:

At that time, I was unclear about ‘that thing’ (she gave me a stealthy smile). I just wondered why no one protected a good person like Prime Minister Thaksin. I started to be a skeptic (whisper). Meanwhile, who let the Yellowshirts did whatever they wanted? Skepticism grew stronger.

However, since she had not yet fully realized that “the devil was behind everything,” Aunt Bo was willing to wager all that she possessed. Almost every night, she stayed at rally sites so late that there was no public bus available; therefore, she had to take taxis home. This was costly for this small entrepreneurial widow. In the end, she concluded that by the time that she knew that she was not just fighting Prem, she was completely broke. She exclaimed, “Holy shit! We did not expect to be blocked by a huge stump.”

Mon, an independent self-appointed front line member of the Redshirt unit, used a medical allegory describing her understanding of conflicts, “We thought it was chickenpox, not AIDS.” These remarks illustrated not only how views among ordinary participants changed over time, but also how Prem was no longer seen as the most powerful and manipulative enemy.

Aunt Ju, another informant, became more and more certain that the Yellowshirts had a “backup” since they could break the law with impunity. Since the 2006 coup, the Yellowshirts never encountered state brutality nor deadly dispersion, whereas the Redshirts experienced this interference numerous times. This pinned down the belief that the Redshirts were victims of a “double standard.” Consequently, the Yellowshirts were termed “a mob with the connection (mop mi sen - ม้อบมีเส้น).” The object of protesters’ anger eventually shifted from the Yellowshirts to

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545 Mon, interview by author, Bangkok, March 7, 2015.
546 Mon, interview by author, Bangkok, March 7, 2015.
547 Ju, interview by author, Bangkok, October 31, 2014.
the “connection” which, as mentioned above, was understood as either the _ammat_, the devil, those who were more powerful than Prem. As the popularity of the term “Premocracy” faded away, subversive discourses gradually moved from the visible, namable, and criticizable enemy to abstract group classifications and ambiguous unnamable figures.

3.8 Conclusion

In *The Two Great Charismas of the Sky*, a graphic novel sponsored by The Internal Security Operations Command, 548 “Khla,” the main character, is a nine-year-old boy from the northeastern region of Thailand. He travels to Bangkok on June 9, 2006 with his grandparents. The story begins with the boy tired and irritated since he has to stand in the middle of huge Bangkok crowd. Wearing yellow shirts, they wait for the King and royal family to make their public appearance on the occasion of the King’s 60th anniversary of accession to the throne. However, Khla’s boredom vanishes after the people in the crowd tell him stories of how the King and the Queen tirelessly work for people’s well-being and nation’s development. After seeing the King and the Queen on that day in 2006, Khla goes back to his hometown and completely changes. Appointed as a head student, he studies hard and behaves well because he wishes to meet His Majesty again. Meanwhile, Khla, together with the readers, are informed that the King and the Queen have initiated countless royal projects and admonished the philosophy of self-sufficiency. The story ends when Khla and his family return to Bangkok again in 2009. They tearfully shout “Long live the King and the Queen” while the royal vehicle slowly passes through the crowd at Siriraj Hospital. Khla’s estranged father tells his family that he will quit working abroad and plan to self-sufficiently earn his living from a small business at home. 549 Since 2006, Khla’s life cannot get any

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548 Panbua Boonpan, ed., คู่ฟ้าสองพระบารมี (*The Two Great Charismas of the Sky*) (Bangkok, Matichon, 2010).
549 Ibid., 200-201.
better. From now on, following in His Majesty’s footsteps, he and his family have a bright future ahead.

2006 was the year which marked the beginning of the Redshirt political journey. As with Khla, in June, many, who then turned into anti-coup participants, wore yellow shirts and celebrated the King’s longest reign. The splendid ritual was organized by their beloved Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra – the name which never appears in this royalist cartoon book. Nor does the book mention key political events that took place during 2006-2008 namely, the coup d’état, the rise of the Yellowshirt and Redshirt mass movements, political unrest that resulted in casualties and deaths of both sides, and the monarchy’s ambiguous roles in the conflicts. The book reflects on the Thai elite’s obstinate denial of its decadence and its continuing adherence to the perception that Thailand is a harmonious society full of happy poor people who are humbly grateful to Thai “traditional” institutions.

As opposed to Khla, since 2006, anti-coup protesters, who later turned into the Redshirts, started to see Thailand from new perspectives. Khla returns to his hometown and does research on royal development projects whereas anti-coup participants joined mass rallies and were exposed to alternative worldviews, conspiracy theories, and rumors. Their quest to unmask the “morally superior” elites was set in motion, although this quest was far from distant achievements involving academical structural analysis or republican aspirations. The language and symbols available in protest sites showed lingering emotional attachments to the monarchy. Sanam Luang was deafened by the voices of hope and expectation toward the benevolent Father and democratic King. However, there were also those who had already detached themselves from the royalist ideology. They either concealed their thoughts or blurted them out carelessly. Since subversive thoughts and new webs of language were not yet widely shared among mass participants, the latter became outstanding and easily stigmatized and criminalized.
CHAPTER 4

HALF AWAKE, HALF ASLEEP: THE DISTANT SKY AND THE UNHEARD PHRAI ON THE EARTH

The sky at dusk, have you forgotten a clod of earth?\textsuperscript{550}
Protest song, “The Free Red,” composed and sung by Nattawut Saikua

4.1 Introduction

From mid-2008 onward, Thailand was full of color-coded tensions and violent clashes on the streets. As the previous chapter mentioned, the Yellowshirts (PAD) staged big demonstrations against Thaksin’s proxy government. They occupied Government House, blocked several major roads, and shut down both domestic and international airports. The court forced two prime ministers to resign and banned Thaksin’s proxy People Power Party.

To defend their representatives, the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) and splinter groups re-mobilized after its brief dormancy. This was the second time in less than two years that the government they had elected was at risk of being deposed by the same group of people. As hostility against Yellowshirts grew, the UDD gradually quit using or wearing yellow symbols. To distinguish themselves from their nemesis, they turned to red. On October 11, 2008, the UDD organized a big rally at Muang Thong Thani concert hall and officially color-coded themselves as “Redshirt” people.\textsuperscript{551} Ten thousand Redshirts packed in the hall; some held red foot clappers, a popular protest accessory of the movement. Nick Nostitz says this was a crucial

\textsuperscript{550} ห้ามลืม คลองดินหรือเปล่า?

The red color was used during the campaign to reject the junta-drafted 2007 constitution. The campaign was led by Sombat Boon-ngamanong. Its original meaning was thus associated with general color coding used in referenda: Green means Yes and Red No. One year later, the red color no more signified rejection of constitution, but constituted broader political meanings. Before the big official “Redshirt” rally on October 11, 2008, the red color had already been politically adopted by movement leaders and participants. As the following paragraph shows, the red color was praised during the funeral of a UDD participant in September 2008. Ubonphan Krachangpho, “การเคลื่อนไหวของกระบวนการแนวร่วมประชารัฐต่อต้านเผด็จการ (นปช.)” (The Movement of “United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship: UDD” under Abhisit Government) (unpublished master’s thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 2010), 71.
moment during which the UDD and its alliances transformed themselves into a “large-scale mass” movement.\textsuperscript{552}

On October 13, 2008, the Thai Queen attended the funeral of “Nong Bo” – a Yellowshirt protester killed in an explosion during a clash between the Yellowshirts and the police. This caused a significant “shock wave” among Redshirts at every level regarding their attitude toward the monarchy. A few months later, Abhisit Vejjajiva, leader of the oppositional Democrat Party, became a new prime minister after winning a tense parliamentary vote. The UDD and Redshirts thus turned into forces opposing the ruling power. They organized mass demonstrations during March and April 2009 demanding Prem and Abhisit’s resignation. Known as songkran lueat (Bloody Songkran), clashes and violent crackdowns against Redshirt protesters took place on April 13, 2009.\textsuperscript{553} Although according to the official record no one was killed, the Redshirts were dissolved and again experienced a sense of injustice. Unlike the Yellowshirts, their political activism was ignored and became futile. In July 2009, the UDD, now having regional networks nationwide, submitted up to three million petitions to the King whom they hailed as their sole savior. As their appeals to the King were left unanswered, the Redshirts prepared for another round of mass demonstrations.

Both James C. Scott’s \textit{Domination and the Arts of Resistance} and Lisa Wedeen’s \textit{Ambiguity of Domination} use ethnographic and discursive accounts to reveal how subjects come not to live under the spell of a dominant or official ideology. Both concepts – “hidden transcripts” and “politics of as if” – emphasize that people, especially under authoritarian regimes, obey rules out of fear. People’s compliance constitutes empty gestures lacking passionate conviction, designed


to ensure that they will be left alone.\textsuperscript{554} Neither work discusses the transformation from one set of beliefs to another or from belief to disbelief. Thus, these authors are forced to assume that the actors are resistant to ruling ideas from the outset. Scott and Wedeen propose that actors produce various artful ways to challenge both the material and symbolic worlds of the powerful. This dissertation expands on this proposal to show how countervailing sets of beliefs and symbols are generated from and come to be adapted by an alienated population. Thus, while neither Scott nor Wedeen discuss the transformation from one set of beliefs to another, I chart how this has happened in Thailand over a period of years, to result in disaffected – even though now quiescent – people.

Applied to Thai royalism, Scott’s and Wedeen’s approaches suggest ways to understand how Thai royalist ideology, protected by the draconian lèse-majesté law, failed to create the monarchy’s legitimacy. As described in chapter one, everyday language and practices in a Redshirt showed a complete loss of respect to the Thai ruling elites, including the monarchy. In this chapter, however, I argue that a large sector of the Thai population did not initially see the emperor as “naked” while acting as if he were beautifully clothed. A series of significant catalysts set anti-royalism in motion and created a dynamism in terms of both consciousness and outward expression.

Mitchell’s critique of Scott is relevant here: anti-royalist thoughts resulted from “the effect of a set of hegemonic relations.” Mitchell explains that hegemony shapes how resistant actors calculate, estimate, and choose to act in particular ways against the dominant class. Their decisions are not contextually free from nor external to royalist ideology.\textsuperscript{555} As mentioned in the


previous chapter, anti-coup protesters’ hostility against Prem, the King’s adviser, was a result of and embedded in royalist domination. However, in this highly contentious context, oppositional discourses and practices, while limited, were not static. This chapter offers historical accounts which demonstrate ideological transformations.

If the Thais were to possess a revised version of *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, it would show the monarchy slowly stripped of its layers of magical aura. Sometimes, the ideological shift moved back and forth between the old and the new rather than in a linear one-directional fashion. Although this process occurred unevenly and diversely among participants with various backgrounds, personal narratives and Redshirt public transcripts show that the monarchy was, in the view of protesters, half-clothed and thus half-naked from late 2008 to early 2010. This was a peculiar period full of contradictions. At one moment, expressions of loss of faith and rejection of monarchical authority occurred. Political awakening was articulated through code words, jokes, curses, and poetry which spread contagiously. At another moment, desperate attempts were made to hold on to the old traditional ideas of the benevolent Father King. The movement leaders and formal media were inclined to adhere to these royalist repertoires whereas radical factions and intellectuals demanded more radical moves.

Mid-2008 to early-2010 could be seen as the last period when the Redshirt movement exhausted royalist rhetoric and symbols which turned fruitless. Amidst ideological contestation, rhetoric diversity, and drained hope within the movement, the May 19, 2010 massacre of Redshirt protesters caused a massive and drastic shift in popular attitude and expression toward the monarchy. And precisely because anti-royalism went through this period of “half awake, half asleep,” the following wave of eye-opening or political awakening subsequently exploded in an emotionally traumatic fashion.
4.2 October 13, 2008: The National Eye-Opening Day

Queen Sirikit, accompanied by Princess Chulabhorn, presented robes to monks in the royal patronage funeral of “Nong Bo – Angkana Radappanyawut.” Nong Bo’s family were allowed to have an audience with the Queen. Before leaving, Her Majesty kindly greeted “Sondhi Limthongkul” with a smile on her face. “Nong Bo’s father” revealed that the Queen admired his “daughter” as a good girl who helped the nation and protected the monarchical institution.556

“Nong Bo,” a Yellowshirt protester, was not the first victim of the 2008 unrest. On September 2, 2008, Narongsak Korbtaisong, a Redshirt, was beaten to death in a chaotic confrontation. The Redshirtness of Narongsak was emphasized at his funeral. A sign underneath his image read, “Redshirt is a symbol of the struggle to obtain democracy. The red color symbolizes the Thai nation in which freedom and liberty have to be maintained. The red color symbolizes the blood of democratic fighters. And the tear symbolizes sadness regarding the fact that Thai end up killing each other.”557 However, this Redshirt participant’s death did not make a big newspaper headline as did another death one month later.

“Nong Bo’s funeral” was the moment of rupture in Thailand’s political history. Somsak Jeamteersakul, a close observer, called the incident the “watershed” of Thailand’s political crisis which created a political “shock wave” and eventually led to the Redshirt radicalization of political consciousness.558 Amidst deeply divided and violent contexts, the monarchy publicly emerged through the Queen’s corporeality. Yet this time, Thai royalty, as personified by The Queen, no longer symbolized national unity, benign parents of all Thais, nor the sacred Sky above the dirty politics of earth. Showing political preference for one side over another, the Queen/monarchy’s


public performance contradicted her/its idealized propaganda. More importantly, her/its behavior betrayed the Redshirts’ hope that the monarchy would help restore the “democracy” and punish the Yellowshirts and Prem for their false identification with the palace.

[I] used to doubt. Yesterday confused. Today depressed. Tomorrow no more. (เคยสงสัย วันวาน สับสน วันนี้ หดหู่ พรุ่งนี้ ไม่มี)559

Too little too late to realize. Before it is almost too late, almost to the extreme, and almost have nothing left to live as a man, I will say Goodbye to Love. Don’t want to give [my] heart. Let the old karma call it even. But this time...no way. No more tears. No more farewell. No more bliss. No more bond. No way to go back.560

You must be thinking similarly as I am. It was crystal clear before our eyes. Bodily full exposure. But we cannot say anything. All we can do is pray. Sad561

The broken statements quoted above were written in a comment section of Prachatai – an online newspaper website popular with the anti-2006-coup activists – one day after Nong Bo’s funeral. Prachatai closed a comment section underneath the news regarding the Queen’s attendance at the funeral ceremony. These comments were made under other news published the same day; the comments and the news hence barely related to one another. These messages illustrated how people reacted to Her Majesty’s appearance at the Yellowshirt’s funeral. Containing rawness and spontaneity, they showed strange mixtures between the past, present, and future; realization and confusion; dark depression and strong determination; and ambiguity and clarity. On the other hand, serious tones sometimes appeared along with humor. Another

559 Khon muang (Urban people), comment, October 14, 2008 (2.05 p.m.), on “เก็บตกเสวนา ’คุ่ม 51 ทางออกสังคมไทย’มองเงื่อนไขใหญ่ที่ ’พันธมิตร’” “(Recap the discussion ‘October 2008: Thailand’s way out.’ [Discussants] believed the ‘PAD’ was the key.),” Prachatai, October 13, 2008, accessed September 11, 2015, http://www.prachatai.org/journal/2008/10/18568.

560 Mai mi wan (Never ever), comment, October 14, 2008 (2.07 p.m.), on “เก็บตกเสวนา ’คุ่ม 51 ทางออกสังคมไทย’มองเงื่อนไขใหญ่ที่ ’พันธมิตร’” “(Recap the discussion ‘October 2008: Thailand’s way out.’ [Discussants] believed the ‘PAD’ was the key.),” Prachatai, October 13, 2008, accessed September 11, 2015, http://www.prachatai.org/journal/2008/10/18568.

561 Khon yak sadaeng kwam hen (A person who would like to share opinions), comment, October 14, 2008 (11.07 p.m.), on “เก็บตกเสวนา ’คุ่ม 51 ทางออกสังคมไทย’มองเงื่อนไขใหญ่ที่ ’พันธมิตร’” “(Recap the discussion ‘October 2008: Thailand’s way out.’ [Discussants] believed the ‘PAD’ was the key.),” Prachatai, October 13, 2008, accessed September 11, 2015, http://www.prachatai.org/journal/2008/10/18568.
comment posted in *Prachatai* on October 15, 2008 took the incident lightly, but more specifically and blasphemously from the Thai royalist perspective. The comment read, “The Blue Mama Sister (che ma ma blu - เช็้มาม่าบลู) showed her face at Nong Bo’s funeral so openly that the [Yellowshirt] People’s Alliance dogs were happily moved to tears while all the *phrais* of Sarkhan country suddenly had their eyes open...Eventually, the great feudalist has entered to play the game. Hahaha.”

The sentences were full of fictional characters and places such as “Blue Mama Sister” and “Sarkhan”

except “Nong Bo.”

Few years later, the funeral incident was recalled in a satirical tone and with key codewords. Someone made an internet meme using the headline image of the Queen and adding his or her short description: “I feel overwhelmingly grateful for Her Majesty’s compassion and generosity which enable your people to ‘eye-open’ completely.” The background is blue, the description is written in white and only the term “eye-open” is in red (see Figure 4.1). This internet artwork showed its fluency in a sarcastic commentary on royal discourses and symbolic subversion.

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On the Same Sky web board – another cyberspace – a statistic shows that the number of page views surged sharply from averaging 33,681 per day to 195,710 on October 13, 2008.\textsuperscript{564} Previously, this website provided space for academic discussions among a narrow group of left-leaning and progressive intellectuals including Somsak Jeamteerasakul. As mentioned in chapter three, the term “eye-opening” had been shared among a handful of the Thai literati and internet users, especially in this web board, since 2007. However, after the incident, the website operated

poorly and had to expand its web server because it was overcrowded by new members – “the curious new generation” and “the old generation who were seeking for the answer.” The gap between those in the online and offline worlds narrowed. The October 13 event triggered a massive eagerness to find alternative sources of information, rooms for political debates, and places where people could truly speak their minds. These widespread reactions were called “eye-opening (ta sawang – ตาสว่าง)” and October 13, 2008 “The National Eye-opening Day.” The eye-opening reactions taking place online were so manifest that the Minister of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) made public remarks about it. As he stated, “the number of websites deemed to be insulting to the monarchy had increased sharply following the Oct.7 [2008] clash.”

Outside the online world, the incident heavily influenced Redshirt participants’ perceptions toward the monarchy. An internet user who went by the name “Homo Erectus” commented that the “eye-opening” not only took place in the cyber world but also at the Redshirt protest sites. His mother who, in his view, was “an ordinary Redshirt commoner (daeng thammada chaoban - แดงธรรมดาชาวบ้าน),” had her eyes opened because of this incident as well. In an interview, Aunt Chan recalled, “My eyes were open when the Red Lip (ปากแด่) went to Nong Bo’s ceremony.” She added, “Actually, before that incident, they’d already opened. But on that day, [my eyes] became widely open. It was all clear. No more doubt.” For Aunt Chan, what

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565 Puen lan sak na, กรุงเทพไม่มีคนเสื้อแดง (Bangkok has (no) Redshirts) (Bangkok: Read, 2011), 52.
566 Ibid.
568 This online name subtly criticizes the traditional idea that the lower class have to crawl and prostrate before the upper one. The internet user thus claims that he is an “Upright Man” with a straight upward spine. He not only challenges the kowtowing culture but mocks its primitiveness.
569 Homo Erectus, interview by author, Bangkok, April 24, 2015.
happened on October 13, 2008 added up to her previous suspicion and enabled her to move from being “uncertain” to “certain.”

A couple who led a Redshirt sub-group in Bangkok went into detail. Keeping up with the news all day, they remembered hearing the announcement from one Yellowshirt television program that there would be a “surprise” on the October 13 evening news. The Redshirt couple was eager to know what the surprise was. After they had found out, they said, “It was as if my heart was broken. We had been deceived.”

Unlike Chan’s case, the couple’s eye-opening appeared more emotional. It involved a painful realization of having been deceived. On the other hand, Aunt Ju viewed that the Nong Bo’s incident contributed to a crucial change from targeting Prem to attacking the unspeakable enemy.

In short, for many, in particular members of Redshirts, their royalism underwent the first hint of major rupture on October 13, 2008. Confusion, disappointment, and curiosity plagued the movement. They were articulated diversely and quite spontaneously. Notably, the political meaning and appropriation of “eye-opening” now went beyond the intellectual and cyber world. The term no longer linked to the Same Sky magazine, the Marxist analysis of the monarchy, or foreign writings critical to the monarchy as mentioned in chapter three. Rather, it involved people’s direct experiences of being treated unfairly or, in local understanding, “double standard.”

4.3 Resentments Transgressing into Public Spheres

One day after “National Eye-opening Day,” anti-royalist sentiments were articulated publicly on Redshirt protest stages. In Chiang Mai, Thaksin’s hometown and a Redshirt heartland, one local protest leader declared that Chiang Mai people worshiped (napthue - นับถือ) only the

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570 Redshirt sub-leaders, interview by author, Bangkok, May 9, 2015.
three ancient kings including Mengrai, Ramkamhaeng, and Ngam Muang and continued by stating that “the rest” were underneath the Chiang Mai people’s feet. Here, the speaker subversively reversed the dominant idea that Thai commoners are as worthless and undignified as the dust underneath the royal feet. Formal Thai court language, when beginning and ending an address to the King, states, “May the power of the dust on the soles and the dust under the soles of your royal feet protect my head and the top of my head.” Implicitly, this northern activist refused not only to be a little subservient person who let big men step on him, he aggressively asserted that elites or the rulers had to humbly be under the people’s control. Speaking in his northern dialect, he emphasized the North’s independence from the central power in Bangkok, “We had our own kings...We were independent for 500 years...We are living in their land...Our kings remain in our heart...I cannot say much.”

On the same day in Bangkok, the UDD organized a rally at Sanam Luang under the theme “The 35th anniversary of the October 14 Incident: Democracy has been under whose claws when the traitors are under protection?” While most leaders talked about how the ammat conspired with those in the judicial sector, Suchart Nakbangsai, the Saturday Voice leader, went on stage and cursed that the “blue color” was “evil, doomed, and damned.”

According to interview accounts, Aunt Sao and Aunt Pinky remembered that they listened to Suchart’s speech with excitement. “Sitting there, I was stunned. There was a lump in my throat,” said Aunt Sao. Aunt Pinky added that she was also there and able to see how the next speaker waiting backstage hesitated to take his turn. “Standing on his feet, the guy was shivering. Hahaha,” She went on, “he [the next speaker] almost fainted.” Despite its symbolic usage of color,

571 “ผก.เชียงใหม่ผุดบังเอิญประกาศนับถือแค่อนุสาวรีย์3กษัตริย์” “(Chiang Mai DAAD members boldly stated that they only respected the three monumental kings),” Manager Daily, October 16, 2008.
572 The event started from October 12 to October 14, 2008. “ผก.ชี้ “ผู้ร่วมรัฐประหารต้องระพุ้งดิน” “(UDD threatened Redshirt mass demonstration if the coup took place),” Thairath online, October 15, 2008.
the speech, in Aunt Pinky’s view, was referring to the palace as blue was the Queen’s personal color. Previously, both Aunt Sao and Aunt Pinky had already been familiar with this kind of speech. For several times, they had listened to Da Torpedo, another fierce speaker charged with lèse-majesté at small stages. Therefore, the surprise and emotional feelings were not caused by the speech contents but by the fact that it was delivered from an open public site like the official UDD stage. This can be seen as one among Redshirt early “open statement of a hidden transcript.” In other words, the abovementioned speech on big stage carried “the force of a symbolic declaration of war.” Suchart spent one year in exile, then was arrested, and spent one year and ten months of imprisonment for the words he uttered that night.

The post-national-eye-opening-day era welcomed countless “radical” discourses which transgressed into public spheres. The situation was similar to a cracked dam in which accumulated frustrations were slowly transfused. Notably, these kinds of public statements received louder cheers from the Redshirt audience than did others. For instance, one UDD leader announced that nowadays people removed the portraits of some formerly respected members of the elite (phu lak phuyai -ผู้หลักผู้ใหญ่) from the walls of their house. Ten thousand protesters stood up and cheered loudly. The speaker did not specify whose portraits he meant. He subtly played with the existing royalist mantra that portraits of the King and the Queen were pictures that every household must have (rup thi mi thuk ban - รูปที่มีทุกบ้าน). As one popular song sung by Thongchai McIntyre goes, “There is always one portrait which all Thais, rich or poor, urban or rural, must have at home.” This protest speech, I argue, was neither an invitation nor a demand for action. Rather, it captured what had already taken place in some Redshirt households. Despite its (semi)private locality, this

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573 James C. Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance, 8.
574 Puen lan sak na, กรุงเทพไม่มีคนเสื้อแดง (Bangkok has (no) Redshirts), 61. For case details, see http://freedom.ilaw.or.th/case/96#detail.
trivial practice of “removing the portraits” symbolized how eye-opened ordinary Thai emancipated themselves from the King’s and Queen’s personal cults and royalist ideology.

The term “eye-opening” was mentioned repetitively on stage without providing specific meanings, as if the audience already shared minimal understanding. Or the speakers wished to leave the term open to various interpretations. The reference to “eye-opening” was sometimes accompanied by structural critiques of the existing political system. For instance, Jakrapob Penkair, the UDD leader, declared that Thailand currently encountered an “eye-opening outbreak” and the Redshirt mass was spreading this “disease” across the country. He then explained that Thai had to choose between “the regime of the commoners (rabop samanchon - ระบอบสามัญชน)” and “the regime of the privileged (rabop aphisit chon - ระบอบอภิสิทธิ์ชน).”

This “eye-opening” trend was not only diffused within Redshirt communities. The novel language and symbols were not intended just to facilitate Redshirt communication. Occasionally, these words were meant to be felt by the royalist establishment in order to shake their world. Standing in front of both Redshirt and royalist artist fellows in March 2009, the late Redshirt poet, Mai nueng kor kun ti (henceforth “Mai nueng”), powerfully read his renowned piece, “Constituting the Institution of the People (sathapna sathaban prachachon - สถาปนาสถาบันประชาชน).” The verse began with a list of people who, in the poet’s view, deserved homage, namely, the enlightened people in every household, brothers and sisters who dare to wear red shirts, awaken people who raise their heads on high and face glaring lights, ordinary people who pour into the streets, and finally the eye-opened people who “have no infatuation left, are firmly aware of men’s rights, and refuse to be the dust under the soles of feet." For Mai nueng, eye-opening

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576 บูชาคนตาสว่า จงกระจำเกี่ยวกุญแจ รู้สิทธิ์ผูกมิตร ไม่ใช่ผูกใต้ตีน
stood in opposition to the idea of being “dust.” Again, the royalist rhetoric, “dust under feet,” was challenged. Then, in a solid loud voice, the poet pointed out that Thailand had failed to protect the legacy of the People Party’s 1932 revolution; therefore, Thai people had never enjoyed full rights and democracy. But now, it was the grass-root lower class who became the major drivers of progressive politics. The following verses reflect the poet’s views on the principles of popular sovereignty and socialism:

The demise of commoners’ bones seeps in rice roots.  
They turn into abundant ears of rice.  
Their golden yellow color brightens and paints the paddy fields,  
Feeding the ungrateful warlords and aristocrats.

This land belongs to all Thais.  
It nourished every generation of slave masters and lords.  
1932 ended the absolutist era.  
The king, you were born from the people’s mercy. (คุณเกิดจากราษฎร์การุณย์นะภูมิ)...  

Whom do you count as the people?  
Are they unclouded healthy Yellowshirts?  
Or dusty impoverished Redshirts?  
Or undressed desolate homeless men?

Where do you count as the nation?  
Is it the prosperous beautiful mountain?  
We are the popular base of the pyramid.  
If you eat us away, you will collapse disastrously! 577

Although Mai nueng’s manifestation of people power can be seen as uninventive, perhaps dogmatic and naïve, from the perspectives of Western liberal democracy or leftist politics, he was indeed (re)constituting something new in Thailand. As mentioned in chapter two, the doctrine of royalist democracy had preached that Rama VII kindly granted democracy to the people and the Thai monarch was the great democratic patron. Having the royal charisma which the people could always turn to, democratic kingly power stopped the violence such as the clashes on October 14,

1973 and May 1992 (see chapter two, section 2.3.2). Here, Mai nueng vehemently proposed a new challenging logic: The people, especially the lower class, are the most superior body since they are the creator of the rest. Their labor and paddy fields have long nurtured the ruling class. Under the constitutional monarchy, the monarchy was allowed to exist not only because of popular consent, but also because of the “people’s mercy.” This constituent power logic resonated arguments written by Stephenus Junius Brutus the Celt against absolute monarchy in 1579 (see Introduction). He states that the king is not only a constituted product of the people, but his continuing power also derives from the monarchy’s constant reliance on the people. Therefore, it is no wonder that the former is inferior to the latter.578

Responding to resentment and contested voices, Prime Minister Abhisit set a protection of the monarchy as the government’s top priority. Surveillance and legal measures were tightened, particularly in the cyber world. Thousands of websites were blocked by the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology due to their lèse-majesté contents. Moreover, the website called “Protect the King” offered a channel for any internet user to monitor and report lèse-majesté activities online.579 In an interview with Far Eastern Economic Review, Abhisit compared lèse-majesté crimes to those committed by religious extremists. Stressing Thailand’s socio-political uniqueness, he insisted that offensive comments against the Thai monarchy, “a revered institution that should remain above conflict,” were unlawful rather than an exercise of freedom of expression.580 The government’s alarming degree of legal prosecution was made to counter and suppress the growing discontent toward monarchy.

578 Stephenus Junius Brutus, the Celt, Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos: or, concerning the legitimate power of a prince over the people, and of the people over a prince, ed. George Garnett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 76.
From the “Blue Mama Sister” to “Constituting the Institution of the People,” these works suggested diverse ways by which the people understood and articulated the idea of eye-opening during 2008-2009. Some aimed to ambivalently ridicule the Queen as an individual. Some vaguely played with royalist symbolism and rhetoric, such as royal colors and portraits. And some, as in this poem above, overtly destabilized the legitimacy of the monarchical institution. Remarkably, Mai nueng’s poem escaped the royalist surveillance radar which had become highly alert. Political satires and insults using plain language such as the “Blue Mama Sister” or “taking down the portraits” were the main targets for lèse-majesté persecutions. Arguably, the Thai royalist regime found unsophisticated expressions more threatening to the monarchy than Mai nueng’s poem. The former had the potential of reaching mass audiences due to their simplicity, humor, and vulgarity. Or the regime just simply failed to understand meanings beneath the artistic and philosophical articulation.

4.4 Voices of the Abandoned Dust

Despite the “eye-opening” trend among protesters, protest speeches on stage generally lagged behind what was occurring on the ground. Since there were some participants and leaders, as the previous section has shown, who openly “spilled out” their inner revelations regarding the monarchy, other official leaders, especially Thaksin himself, defensively repeated the same old discourse that the Redshirts were no doubt His and Her majesty’s loyal subjects. They denied the Yellowshirt’s accusation that Redshirts were anti-monarchists who aimed to overthrow the monarchy (lom chao - ล้มเจ้า).

There is no certain way to prove if the leaders’ statements

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regarding the unchanged loyalty reflected the inward thoughts of both speakers and the majority of the audience.

However, one protest speech stood out as the best speech of the year. It was delivered on December 30, 2008 by Nattawut Saikua whom Benedict Anderson called “the first brilliant orator in modern Siam.” Nattawut was a young politician-turned-Redshirt leader who at first was famous for being only a stage entertainer. Unlike his previous speeches, this 2008 speech brought about tear instead of laughter. The term “Sky” re-appeared again and became central to this powerful speech. This time, it was not appropriated to mark a distinction between the monarchical realm and the Privy Councilor Prem. Rather, the Redshirts were now directly asking the “Sky” to at least recognize their worthless existence. According to Nattawut, every word which he uttered came earnestly from his heart without a script.

There is no justice left in this country.... We do not get fair treatment from [the state]. There is no space for us in the media either (clapping). No opportunity for us to announce what we fight for or why. Definitely, we do not have “connections” (clapping) ... We were born on the soil, growing up on the soil, and walking on the soil. When we stand on the soil, the distance from the sky is so vast. (roars, screams, cheers) Standing on the soil, looking up high above, we know that sky is so far away (cheers). Looking down, we know we are worthy like dirt. But with the increasing power of the Redshirts ... even when we stand on earth, speaking from the earth, the sky will hear us. For sure (emphasized) (louder and extensive cheering). The cheers right now, from people who are on the soil, grew up on the soil, will be heard by the sky. For sure (emphasized) (Cheers continued and, finally ended. Nattawut paused for few seconds).

The Redshirt people will tell the soil and the sky that “we have hearts too” (emphasized) (A burst of loud roars and cheers. Protesters stood up, clapped, and raised their two arms in the air) ... The Redshirt people will tell the soil and the sky that “we are Thai people too (emphasized). The Red-shirt people want to ask the soil and the sky, if there is no place to stand, they want us to find our own

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place, don’t they? (louder roars and cheers) ... These cheers will be heard by the sky (The whole crowd stood up and continued screaming).... No matter what happens, we already have the greatest thing in our life ... the democratic spirit. For this great spirit... for the greatness of all of you [the crowd], the only thing I could do is this.... [He then kneeled down to the floor, bent his body down, paying respect (wai) to the crowd; very loud and lengthy cheers from the crowd]... The people’s power is so great! [584]

This is not a revolutionary declaration; however, it revealed how far the Redshirt political journey had come since the anti-2006 coup and the beginning of the anti-Prem era. Without mentioning any specific names nor institutions, Nattawut’s metaphorical speech pinned down a great contrast between the powerless resentful dirt-like Redshirts on earth and those powerful in the sky far away. Rather than aggressive attacks on the opposition, the speech was clouded by feeling neglect and abandonment. But at the same time, as with Mai nueng’s poem, it firmly believed in the power of the people – the Thai commoners whose feet touched the ground – despite their awareness of their disadvantageous position and uncertain future. This multitude of people deserved respect from movement leaders as well as Thai elites. Nattawut surely spoke the protesters’ mind and touched their hearts because he received overwhelming cheers from the crowd and the speech was repeated many times in the Redshirt media. Aunt Wan recalled that she was sitting in front of Nattawut on that day. She was so moved and tearful. Having joined the movement in 2007, the former school teacher claimed that this was the first time she heard this kind of speech from Nattawut. [585] Aunt Pinky also sat among her Redshirt comrades. She described the memorable moment:

Nattawut said...we wanted our voices to reach the sky (whispering the last word). We were worthy like dirt. His words impressed me very much...I cried. It was like,

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father and mother did not love us and had deserted us. Something like that. Very moved.
Each Redshirt responded with different emotions. For me, it was overwhelming. That was true. We were not different from dirt...(we) were neglected. Some shouted out loud, “Yes! Yes!” We all knew what the message was but reacted to it differently. Some stood up and yelled, “I do not want you! (ku mai ao mueng - กูไม่เอามึง)” But I sat still.586

These personal reflections show that in order to be tearfully moved by Nattawut’s speech, one had to have had, to some extent, a strong belief in the “Sky.” One had to internalize the self-perception of a humble inferior at the mercy of the powerful “Sky.” In this sense, “eye-opening” can be understood as the realization that the “Sky” no longer loved and meant well to its people. Although Aunt Pinky claimed that she was the first one who took off a yellow shirt, she still had an emotional attachment to the idea that the Redshirts were the King’s and Queen’s unloved children. The awakened Redshirts hence had to confront difficult questions: Should we continue begging for love from the distant indifferent “Sky”? Or should we reject it? Most important, the term “Sky” needs more clarification. Does it include only several individuals who clearly and enthusiastically took the ammat’s side?

4.5 Eye-Opening at an Individual Level, Popular Appeal, and the King’s Last Call

‘He who speaks of desperation to his sovereign, threatens him.’ A petition of desperation is therefore likely to amalgamate two contradictory elements: an implicit threat of violence and a deferential tone of address.
James C. Scott587

As this chapter has shown so far, there were no unified homogenous political ideas and voices among the Redshirts after the National Eye-opening Day. This section shows that the first “shock wave” of political awakening either remained partially attached to the old ideology or had

not been articulated in the form of total rejection of the royal authority. Many ordinary Redshirts defined their eye-opening experience by focusing strictly on “what they saw on the funeral day.” Accordingly, for some, it was only the Queen, the Mother of the Kingdom, whose magical charismatic power was stripped off. As Aunt Kai explained, “People started to know. They felt resentful, but rather against ‘Number Two’.” Developing from the anti-Prem discourse, the Queen, or “number two,” was now believed to be the great mastermind and excluded from the sacred realm. Individual attacks on the Queen occurred together with the belief that the King, in a sense “number one,” remained blameless and stood above chaotic politics. Pichit Likitkijsomboon also offered similar observations:

People believed based on the news. Who showed up and who did not at the funeral? Eye-opening at that moment possibly targeted those who showed up...Those who did not show up were left out. They were seen as irrelevant [to the conflicts].

As a result, eye-opening also generated different kinds of reactions – an obstinate attempt to be rescued by the only savior of the people, the Father King. In other words, the dirt-like Redshirts insisted on shouting and hoped their voices reach the “Sky,” now understood narrowly and individually as the King. Under this paradigm, the speakers felt that they were less liable to be charged with lèse-majesté law. Passionately begging for royal attention and favor thus became safe alternatives by which Redshirts could voice their dissents during this episode of the struggle. This trend was usually led by Redshirt leaders. Ousted Thaksin, for instance, made a phone-in address to his supporters that the King’s graceful charisma (phra barami thi metta - พระบารมีที่เมตตา) and the people’s power were the last two resorts which could bring him home. This remark

589 Pichit Likitkijsomboon, interview by author, Bangkok, April 1, 2015.
590 ทักษิณอ้อนไม่มีใครช่วยกลับบ้านได้นอกจาก"พระบารมี"หรือพลังของประชาชน (Thaksin pleaded that no one could bring him home except “the royal power” or the people power), Dailynews, November 2, 2008.
eventually sparked a massive Redshirt mobilization to sign a petition for a royal pardon for Thaksin during July-August 2009.

Copies of the three-page petition were systematically distributed throughout the country.® Redshirt participants signed on the last page and returned the document to regional sub-leaders. The petition started with the formal “dust underneath the soles of royal feet” rhetoric and then carefully explained the reasons why one had to sign the petition. First, since the 2006 coup, both the military and Abhisit government lacked the capacity to fix economic problems. Second, Thailand was now in need of someone like Thaksin who, despite having great capacity, had been unjustly deposed. Third, the 2006 coup also destroyed the rule of law. Ordinary people suffered from “double standard” treatment. Therefore, the King was the last pillar which the people could rely on “since your majesty has long been working for the welfare of the people, the righteous king, and farsighted.”

“Sending the Petition to Put Down the Whole Land’s Sufferings (thawai dika dap thuk thang phaendin – ถวายฎีกาดับทุกข์ทั้งแผ่นดิน)” was the key Redshirt slogan publicized in rallies, magazines, and newspapers. As opposed to Mai nueng’s declaration of popular sovereignty, another Redshirt poet, Wisa Kanthap, lamented that there was nothing left for the Reds to turn to and begged the King to glance at his people who “were downhearted and could not endure any longer.” Justifying their action, the Redshirts appropriated the ideas of the King’s paternal power and the metaphor of father-son rule (pho pokkhrong luk - พ่อปกครองลูก). As His Majesty’s unhappy children, the people had a right to complain to the Father. As one columnist maintained, “During our childhood, when we were bullied and no one helped us, we told our father. It does not matter if we were right or wrong. We had a right to tell him.” He added, “Telling him because we love and

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® See Appendix 3.

Pleading to the King was thus the Redshirts’ expression of love for the King. In contrast to the principle of constitutional monarchy, the King was regarded as the highest sovereign who had the final say and could untie the political deadlock. Within this semiotic web of meanings, the objective was not the right to be equal among men, but rather rights as the King’s children, to be recognized and heard by the Father.

Although the UDD collected up to three million signatures, there was no sign of feedback from the palace. On the one hand, awaiting desperately for any signal of royal response, the Redshirts believed that their voices would be heard. While campaigning at Sanam Luang, when the dark cloudy sky suddenly became clear and brightened by moonlight, Jatuporn Phromphan, the UDD leader, wrote that the crowd started screaming, “The Sky has laid eyes [on us].” On another day, while the Redshirts were carrying petition boxes on the street, they heard a roar of thunder. Nattawut described, “The Sky recognized [us]. The Sky saw [us], The Sky opened [to us]!” However, royal grace was nowhere to be found or felt by the Redshirts except in their own fantasy regarding natural phenomena. Another way to make sense of the palace’s unresponsiveness was to blame it on ammat. Namely, the Abhisit government and Prem blocked the petition. Thus, the Redshirts kept on asking, “When will the petition be submitted to His Majesty?” However, the deeper such beliefs went, the sooner one realized that the sky at dusk had indeed forgotten a clod of earth.

On the other hand, the royalist language used in the petition might or might not have been related to the participants’ authenticity of intention. As many commented, ordinary Redshirts

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597 Jatuporn Phromphan, “เมื่อไหร่ฎีกาจะไปถึงพระเจ้าอยู่หัว” “(When will the petition reach the king?),” Voice of Taksin 1, 6 (October 2009): 12.
participated in the petition campaign only because UDD leaders including Thaksin wanted their cooperation. Personally, many had already had their “eyes opened” and did not expect much from this activity.\textsuperscript{598} For them, the goal was not the royal pardon, but rather to show the opponents how many million Redshirts could be mobilized. In this reading, the campaign was a strategic opportunity for the Redshirts to demonstrate its potential in terms of numbers of people as well as to see how the palace would respond. Therefore, as Scott points out, the petition indeed “carries a threat.”\textsuperscript{599} The petition not only addresses “rights’ to which subordinate groups feel entitled” but also “carries an understood ‘or else’ with the precise consequences of a refusal left to the imagination of the lord.”\textsuperscript{600}

Echoing the notion above, Aunt Sao explained that the reason why she joined the campaign was that she really wanted Thaksin to come back to Thailand by all means. Furthermore, she added, “I thought they would stop after realizing how many people participated [the campaign]. They would have been afraid. Unfortunately, they were not.”\textsuperscript{601} The petition campaign, for Aunt Pinky, was the way to prove whether “it was him who caused all these disastrous messes.”\textsuperscript{602}

Accordingly, the Redshirt petition in 2009 was the King’s last call to prove whether he was a good patriarch and great savior of nation. It politely cautioned, “The King should not let his subjects drown into dark misery for too long.” If all royalist means were exhausted and became fruitless, it might finally be the time to stop appropriating royalist figures of speech and decorum.

At the same time, ideological fragmentation and tensions within the movement and leaders were observable. Several independent Redshirts and intellectuals, refused to join and

\textsuperscript{598} Pichit Likitkijsomboon, interview by author, Bangkok, April 1, 2015; Sutachai Yimprasert, interview by author, Bangkok, March 27, 2015; Homo Erectus, interview by author, April 24, 2015.
\textsuperscript{600} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{601} Sao, interview by author, Bangkok, October 29, 2014.
\textsuperscript{602} "เขาใช่ไหม ทุกอย่างที่มัน พัฒนาเข้า เช่าไรไม่." Pinky, interview by author, February 10, 2015.
heavily criticized the campaign. Surachai Saedan, a former communist fighter and member of UDD leaders, for instance, left the UDD and formed a splinter group called “Red Siam” due to his strong disapproval with the UDD petition campaign.\(^{603}\) According to his interview in *Red News*, he directly attacked the passive and servile positions of the movement. He demanded that the Redshirts must quit “begging” and go beyond Prem. He provocatively asked, “What stands on the top of this country? Is it Abhisit government? General Prem? Or something higher?...There is no need to clarify because we already know. People in this country already know what the root of the problem is.”\(^{604}\)

On the other hand, Somsak, now gaining more attention and popularity from non-academic sectors, argued that the King did not obtain power to grant such pardon. Somsak did not unconditionally reject this channel. As he suggested, the petition should not serve the benefit of only one individual but rather a long-term political development.\(^{605}\) Somsak also urged Redshirt leaders to stop treating their supporters as “idiots.” He encouraged the leaders to start the systematic critique of monarchical power. For Somsak, it was useless, ridiculous, and disrespectful to the Redshirts to insist on “hitting Prem and his subordinates” because the constitution authorized the King to appoint and demote Prem’s position. “It is time to start discussing the monarchy’s problematic role and status according to the constitution.” Pressing the Redshirts, Somsak assured that this kind of debate was not unlawful.\(^{606}\) Both Surachai’s and Somsak’s comments reflected tensions between official royalist UDD discourses and those made by activists.

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\(^{603}\) Surachai asserted that the petition campaign was initiated solely by Veera Mucksikapong, the UDD leader who arbitrarily made the announcement on stage without consulting with other leaders including Thaksin. In the interviews, others shared Surachai’s accounts. Pichit Likitkijsomboon, interview by author, April 1, 2015; Sutachai Yimprasert, interview by author, March 27, 2015. See Surachai Saedan, “สุรชัย แซ่ด่าน ตาสว่าง @MVTV” “(Surachai Saedan: Eye-open @MVTV)” (video of rally speech, Redshirt protest site, Bangkok, December 30, 2010) accessed October 22, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eiR_awnJVEA.


\(^{606}\) Ibid.
and intellectuals who were ready and eager to push the limits of possibility. For them, the Redshirt mass was more than ready to welcome new ideas and protest discourses. In a sense, it was the leaders who obstructed rather than enhancing the eye-opening process.

4.6 Formal Ammat-Phrai Discourses

During 2009, the Redshirt movement as a whole developed systematic explanations regarding their political struggles, enemies, and causes. Official protest discourses were now circulated through new popular media including several Redshirt periodicals such as Mahaprapachon newspaper (June 2009), D-magazine (June 2009), and Voice of Taksin (July 2009). Above all, after the establishment of Redshirt schools in September 2009, Redshirt textbooks were written by key UDD leaders and disseminated to regional leaders and UDD members. Clearly stating the movement’s goals, leaders wrote that the immediate intent was to overthrow the ammat-patronized Abhisit government. Then, the Redshirts aimed to abrogate the 2007 constitution. The long-term objective was to bring down the ammattayathippatai, primarily composed of the army, the judicial sector, bureaucratic networks, and the Privy Council. The furthest that formal Redshirt discourses went was to state that these ammat opportunistically utilized royalist ideology to destroy their democratic opponent – the Redshirts.

According to their public statements, Redshirt struggles prioritized political inequality over economic one. The ammat thus did not only comprise the rich, especially capitalists but self-righteous groups of people including intellectuals, right-wing civil society, and mainstream media. In terms of ideological struggles, the Redshirts fought against the ammat’s way of thinking. They claimed that they, the Redshirts, were men with dignity, intelligence, and rights, equal to ammat;

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607 UDD, เอกสารประกอบการเรียนการสอน โรงเรียนผู้ปฏิบัติงานแนวร่วมประชาธิปไตยต่อต้านเผด็จการแห่งชาติ (นปช.) แดงทั้งแผ่นดิน (Teaching documents of UDD school for cadre members) (Bangkok: 2009), 10.
608 Ibid., 20-21.
Redshirts refused to be “little people” passively lining up for blankets or humanitarian bag donations from the latter.\(^{609}\)

Formal UDD leaders attempted to domesticate “risky” discourses which occasionally flared up when used by impulsive participants and local leaders. They preached a slogan, “Don’t hit the Sky (\textit{ya ti fa - อย่าตีฟ้า}), don’t start a fight with the Yellowshirts, and don’t provoke the government’s crackdown.”\(^{610}\) It is worth considering that the attempt to refrain Redshirt members from attacking “the Sky” was for the former’s own sake instead of the latter’s. From late 2008 to 2009, public figures associated with Redshirts namely Jakrapob Penkair, Chucheep Cheewasut, and Giles Unphakorn were forced to flee the country because of their speeches or writings allegedly deemed offensive to the monarchy.\(^{611}\)

Meanwhile, criticisms against Prem, the president of the privy council, dominated and were explicit in Redshirt media. Developing from the previous era (2006-2008), anti-Prem discourses comprised direct personal attacks and Prem’s association with the \textit{ammat} network. In the famous Redshirt magazine, \textit{Voice of Taksin}, Prem was labeled “the great gray-hair \textit{ammat},”\(^{612}\) “the big white-head \textit{ammat} at Si Sao Thewet,”\(^{613}\) and “the head of \textit{ammattayathippatai}” who, unlike politicians, never bowed to anyone nor was humble to the people.\(^{614}\) The attacks often consisted of ageist and sexist mockery at Prem’s elderly appearance and sexuality; this senior soldier had never married. As mentioned earlier, Prem was contemptuously called a “transvestite” and “eunuch.” On one cover of \textit{Voice of Taksin} (Vol. 1, issue 11), Prem was caricatured as dressed up in a flowery Chinese \textit{qipao} and adorned with a female Manchu hat

\(^{609}\) Fahroong Srikhao, สุภาพบุรุษไพร่ ณัฐวุติไสยเกื้อ (A Gentleman Commoner: Nattawut Saikua), 143.

\(^{610}\) Jaran Ditthapichai, “ยังไม่มีทางออก” (“There is still no way out), ” Thaipost, August 23, 2009.


(Figure 4.2). He was surrounded by Sondhi Limthongkul and Chamlong Srimuang, key leaders of Yellowshirt movement. Lastly, Prem was called “Tong Prem (Golden Prem - ทองเปรม).” Possibly, the name originated from that of the name of the famous dog owned by the King, “Tong Daeng.”

From sexual disorientation to dog, Prem could be ridiculed in various ways. Notably, the Chinese assignment regarding the eunuch and court lady as well as the allusion to King’s favorite dog seditiously hinted that the Thai royal institution comprised corrupt elements.

Figure 4.2: Prem’s portrayal as the head of the ammat on a Redshirt magazine’s cover. Prem caricature in qipao surrounded by Yellowshirt leaders (Source: Voice of Taksin 1, no. 11, December 16–31, 2009)

Regarding self-identification, Redshirts highlighted their inferior and disadvantageous positions in this political struggle. Redshirt sarcastic self-description as *phrai* (a serf under the feudalist rule or a commoner) stressed their lower social status and denial of political rights. “With one word, it [*phrai*] signifies oppression, lack of rights and freedom, and how men look down on others,” explained Nattawut. In the song *Free Red* (*daeng seri chon* - แดงเสรีชน), Nattawut well summarized the story of Redshirt struggles. This is a good example of Redshirt mainstream protest songs. This slow rhythm piece gained considerable popularity. During the crackdown on May 19, 2010, it was one among many songs Nattawut sang on stage at Ratchaphrasong amidst explosion and gunfire:

Let the wind blow my heart to you.
Floating like sleep flying birds, I care about you, the Redshirts.
You endure hot sunburns and cold rains even on the darkest day.
I wish red stars and the moon to protect you.
Upholding our faith, we walk on a tough road for real men.
Our blood turns into tears. But we stay unshaken.
We remain emboldened. Having no connections [backup], yet we had hearts.
Fighting for democracy, we have no worries no matter how hard it gets.
The Redshirts...ultimately Red will paint the whole land
and collapse the class difference. Everyone will stand equally on the land.
Let’s hold each other’s shoulders and stand side by side while going through hardships.
Erase the *ammat*’s remnants and emancipate the people from the oppressor.

In short, through their own media including magazines, political textbooks distributed in Redshirt villages, and songs, the Redshirts became familiar with the *phrai-ammat* discourse. Public transcripts expressed by the leaders usually problematized the Thai elite’s network which interfered Thailand’s normal politics and called for more equal political rights. The Redshirts came to see themselves as the oppressed class, having “no connections” and “fighting for democracy.” Meanwhile, ordinary Redshirts were told by their leaders not to “hit the Sky.”

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616 Fahroong Srikhao, พระศรีรักษ์ ณัฐวุติไสยเกื้อ (*A Gentleman Commoner: Nattawut Saikua*), 142.
4.7 Redshirt Version of Ramayana: Ravana is destined to be killed no matter what.

The movement leader’s golden rule preventing Redshirts from “hitting the Sky” was occasionally compromised by the leaders themselves. After the royal appeal received no feedback from the palace, the feeling of falling from grace was again articulated through metaphorical anecdote made by Nattawut in March 2010. Unlike his earlier speech regarding the dust and the sky, this time Nattawut emphasized elements of deception and disillusionment. As opposed to the voiceless and helpless dirt, Nattawut now compared the Redshirts to Ravana, the powerful villain in Thai folktale influenced by Hindu belief, *Ramakien*.

Every Thai knows the story of *Ramakien* since they had to study and memorize it when they were in high school. In short, the story depicts the battles between Rama, the hero, an avatar incarnated from Vishnu, and Ravana, the evil antagonist who has ten faces and twenty hands. Thai kings are named after Rama and thus inherit a devaraja’s divinity (see chapter two). As a result, teaching the *Ramakien* to every Thai child perpetuates the king’s superior power and status. Challenging the official discourse, Nattawut not only invented his own interpretation of this folktale but also subversively reversed its underlying logic and principle. Like Ravana, the Redshirts, for Nattawut, were destined to be the villain, deceived into thinking that they had power, and finally killed by “gods.” Below was his speech at the Redshirt rally in March 2010:

Who is Ravana? First, we need to know about the birth of Ravana. Ravana used to serve devas in heaven, washing their feet…. The great devas always bullied him. One day, he decided that he had had enough. He made a complaint to the great god of Siva. He was granted a magic finger. When he pointed at anyone, they would be killed.

Ravana abused his power. He killed almost every deva in heaven. But in the end he was defeated by Vishnu dressed in disguise as a beautiful woman who asked Ravana to dance with her. While dancing, Ravana pointed his finger at himself and was thus killed by his own weapon...

In his last breath, Ravana cried to Vishnu “If you want to kill me, why don’t you come openly; why are you in disguise? Since you have four hands, how can I fight against you?”
Vishnu thus replied “Ok, in your next life, we will both appear in the world down there and you will have ten faces and twenty hands. I will be just an ordinary human with two hands.” This is how the story of Ramakien began.

Of course, you may think Ravana is an evil man. He possesses lots of power. But the problem is that the promise is breached. Despite his appearance as an ordinary man, Rama is assisted by countless powerful gods and sons of gods, including Hanuman and three other monkeys who are immortal. Ravana, on the contrary, has no helper. Even worse, Rama steals Ravana’s brother to support him.

So, there are just death, death, and death!!! on Ravana’s side. No deva helps Ravana. Ravana lost and lost...he is left alone. At his end, Ravana again falls for a dirty trick. Hanuman flees to Ravana and lies that he has been kicked out from Rama’s gang. Ravana forgives Hanuman, adopts, and loves him as his son. This is how Hanuman discovers the way to kill Ravana. He finds Ravana’s heart hidden in a box. In the last scene before Ravana dies, Hanuman flies into the sky with Ravana’s heart in one hand and a kris in another.

Let me tell you, this is the saddest scene. It is so sad that the Thai Khon (dance) omits this scene. You know why? Because it contradicts our morality.

In school, I asked my teacher what lesson we learned from Ramakien. She said that dhamma (goodness) always wins over a-dhamma (evil). But I disagreed! This is how elites shamelessly bully and oppress the lower disadvantaged class. Ravana never has a chance to win. They [the devas] sent him to incarnate on earth just to be killed again. They already had a secret plan to help Rama.

I am afraid our fate is the same as Ravana’s. We have tried our best to cooperate with the elites; we paid respect to them because we believed they had sacred authority....(Nattawut mentioned that he was talking about the privy council). But one day we realized that he destroyed us, hurt us, and did not love us as we loved him. It was unbearably painful.

Ravana was given a magic finger and ten faces just like us, the lower class who was given democracy. We thought that we possessed these weapons and then we would be as powerful as they were.

But no.... They gave democracy to us just to destroy us later, over and over again. They said we have sovereignty just as Ravana has ten faces, but how can democracy be useful if our enemy is so undefeatable?

Ravana is no doubt evil because he belongs to the lower class who dares to fight against elites. This is why he is stigmatized as a villain. This is why the Redshirt commoners who fight against elites are labeled as evil guys who destroy the nation, burn the country, and are anti-royalists or anti-monarchists. These accusations are not true!

617 He repetitively stressed that he only wants to refer to General Prem.
All we want is just a right to be equal to them according to democratic principles.\textsuperscript{618} (Emphasis mine)

Nattawut’s interpretation of the \textit{Ramakien} illustrated his remarkable skills as a storyteller who could master plain language with powerful seditious implications. To elaborate, he not only told the “truth” through a fiction well-known to every Thai. Unfolding the “truth” of the real world, he also beautifully and emotionally turned the logic and principles of the fiction upside down. The angelic hero was unmasked as the great cheater and pretender, whereas the cruel villain turned out to be the victim of an unfair struggle who was repetitively deceived, defeated, and died in an undignified way.

Nattawut began the story with humor. The mass audience laughed when he mocked Ravana’s gullibility. However, the second half of the story was told with a serious and sad tone. What was deeply tragic was not the death of Ravana, but that he was betrayed by those whom he trusted. Far from simply a fight between two equal camps – good and evil - the \textit{Ramakien} epic became a tragedy of the latter – the supposedly “evil” – destined to be crushed according to the mandate of heaven. As with Ravana, the Redshirts falsely believed that they possessed rights and powers that they never had from the beginning. Having their eyes open, they painfully realized that they were put in a fight that they never had a chance of winning. Although from 2006 to March 2010, the Redshirts had not yet experienced massive losses of life, a series of political events, namely the coup, the violence against protesters, and the Queen’s attendance of the Yellowshirt’s funeral, enabled them to aware of their inferior position endorsed by no one from the royalist camp. The following 2010 crackdown, as the conclusion below and next chapter will

\textsuperscript{618}Nattawut Saikua, “2010 03 08@2249 ต่างใจ ผู้รู้สึก สงครามชนชั้น รามเกียรติ์ เพราะอะไรทศกัณฐ์ต้องเป็นผู้ร้าย” “(2010 03 08@2249 Aangthong, Nattawut: The class warfare, Ramakien, Why does Ravana have to be a villain?)” (video of rally speech, Redshirt protest site, Aangthong, March 3, 2010) accessed October 30, 2015, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUZgqH5n_ic.
demonstrate, confirmed that Ravana and the Redshirts shared the same fate. While insisting that the Redshirts were not anti-monarchist, Nattawut’s speech, directly and indirectly, cultivated collective feelings of bitterness waiting for an explosion when the right time came.

4.8 Conclusion

Prior to their massive demonstration in March 2010, the Redshirt movement solidified into mass political movements which were driven by diverse ideologies. On the one hand, political demands and identification of the enemy were clear and shared among participants and sympathizers. That is, ordinary protesters could fluently and publicly express their resentment against the ammat and call for democracy, understood as stable electoral politics and respect of majoritarian votes. On the other, new sets of ideas, language, and symbols were slowly circulated in both online and offline social worlds. Eye-opening experiences no longer occurred among the middle-class netizens who drank “Coke” as depicted in the previous chapter. Despite both state and UDD control, new political consciousness challenging the legitimacy of the monarchy spread horizontally through chat circles, small protest stages, poems, pamphlets, and magazines. Artists, intellectuals, and semi-autonomous Redshirt groups and individuals were main driving forces. Ironically, the UDD sometimes acted as state apparatus by surveilling and silencing their supporters. For instance, Wanchai, a former tour guide, printed out 6-page pamphlets criticizing the coup and gave them away in Redshirt gatherings. A UDD security guard handed over him to police. The court then ruled that his pamphlet contained lèse-majesté messages. Wanchai’s case illustrated how ideological tensions within the movement were salient.

The eye-opening phenomenon did not have to involve a sudden awakening at once. The perception of the enemy could slowly expand from one individual to another and finally to the whole institution. One could still have hope and faith in those who became the target of mocking and complaint. Although the splendid and divine royal power was undermined, the ruling elites were given chances to restore what had been lost. Unfortunately, the Thai royalist establishment responded in panic by exaggerating the threat, demonizing the Redshirts under the labels “terrorist” and “monarchy abolitionist,” and turning to legal and coercive suppression. These reactions could only fuel more doubt and frustration and radicalize the eye-opening diffusion.

During March – May 2010, ten-thousand Redshirts mobilized and occupied Bangkok. All chanted that they were phrai ready to fight with the ammat. The goal was to call for parliamentary dissolution and re-election. Royalist language once used in the petition campaign barely existed both on stage and in Redshirt media. The period when the Redshirts utilized royalism as either a strategy or as sincere voices was about to come to an end. The arts of saying the unsayable and naming the unnamable were ubiquitous even before violence broke out. On stage, a Redshirt leader covered his mouth and refused to mention who endorsed Prem. Similarly, in its April 2010 volume, the cover of Voice of Taksin was an image of three cards: Abhisit as a Jack, Prem as a Queen, and the blank squared space with a big question mark (Figure 4.3). The caption read “The Last Phrai/Card [Phai] Game, The Dusk of Ammat, The Struggle of Phrai in the New Age.” The cover urged viewers to recapitulate the hierarchy of power of the Redshirts’ rivals. Whose face hid

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620 Strolling around Redshirt protest sites during the 2010 demonstration, Somsak recalled that he was amazed by countless anti-royalist street graffiti. Somsak Jeamteerasakul, “สมศักดิ์เจียมธีรสกุล 10ธันวาคม2553” (Somsak Jeamteerasakul December 10, 2010) (video of Nitirat’s seminar, Thammasat University, Bangkok, December 10, 2010) accessed December 20, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-7T6doBIA.

621 This theatrical act of silence deemed offensive to the King and the speaker was sentenced to two years’ imprisonment. For case details, see https://freedom.ilaw.or.th/en/case/43.
beneath the last card next to Abhisit as a Jack and Prem as a Queen? The reason why the last card was left blank was either the answer remained unknown or it was impossible to utter them.

In the last issue of *Voice of Taksin*, published in May 2010, one columnist wrote that the ongoing clashes between Redshirts and military forces reminded him of Nattawut’s voice from the earth to the Sky speech. Then, he shifted the nostalgic tone to a bold declaration, “The fight between the earth and the sky will bring about the great transformation of Thai society in the next few years.”

All Redshirt media, including *Voice of Taksin*, ceased to operate as the demonstration.

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Figure 4.3: The mysterious last card on a cover of Voice of Taksin’s April 2010 issue

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was shut down on May 19, 2010. Almost a hundred Redshirt participants were slaughtered and thousands injured. UDD leaders were either fled or imprisoned. Redshirt protesters from the countryside were packed in buses and trains and sent back to their hometowns. The relationship between the “Sky” and the “earth” was again re-formulated. The next episode of Redshirt struggles involves the next “consensual” stage of eye-opening.
5.1 Introduction

The Redshirts looked at “the Sky” with new eyes after the violent clashes which culminated on May 19, 2010. Their three-month demonstration calling for parliamentary dissolution and national election ended with 94 deaths. This was the highest official death toll resulting from a demonstration crackdown in Thailand’s history. Around 14,000 were injured. According to official statistics, 117,923 bullets, including 2,500 sniper rounds, were used by the Thai army in their Redshirt crackdown mission. Those who were killed included a 12-year-old orphan, two foreigner reporters, nine taxi drivers, five security guards, and five volunteers from rescue organizations.

More important, there was no “divine intervention.” The Redshirts’ last stronghold, “Ratchaprasong” intersection, was destroyed. Protesters were disbanded and left to seek refuge on their own. Afterwards, those in power in the government who had ordered the crackdown were not pressured to step down. On the contrary, after sending the Redshirts back to the countryside, the authorities launched a campaign that urged Bangkokians to clean up the capital. Most UDD leaders were imprisoned for the next 9 months.

As the previous chapter showed, in 2008-9, Nattawut Saikua’s speech and the royal petition submitted by the Redshirts expressed the hope that “the Sky” would eventually listen to the Redshirts’ appeals. In the post-2010-massacre era, ordinary Redshirts no longer passively begged for recognition, love, and favor from “the Sky.” Neither hope nor expectation was

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exhibited. “You are not the Sky, but a pathetic dog,” read one anonymous street graffito. As a protest epithet emerging since 2007 (see chapter three), “the Sky” went through a drastic semantic shift. Tidal waves of discontent, of which “the Sky” was probably unaware, formed and became unstoppable.

This chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section (5.2) closely examines critical moments of “breaking” with the royalist ideology, beliefs, and myths articulated in various forms of emotional, linguistic, and symbolic speech-actions during 2010 - 2011. The ideological collapse was caused by the realization that the Thai monarch/y not only failed to meet the people’s expectation, but also turned into the enemy of the people. Therefore, unlike in the earlier waves, this “eye-opening” trend was expressed in the intense anger and hatred of Redshirt commoners after they directly encountered these life and death experiences. Section 5.3 explores how “eye-opening” discourses and ideas were gradually diffused, appropriated by Redshirt media, and suppressed by the government. Section 5.4 shows that radical Redshirt factions and a group of intelligentsia also took an opportunity to open protesters’ eyes wider. As opposed to the alienation between the literati and commoners mentioned in chapter three, from 2010 onward, the academic and protesters’ worlds became intertwined, constituting hybrid political spaces where radical thoughts were exchanged. Finally, the last section (5.5) examines the movement leaders’ various positions towards Redshirt subversive language and symbols. In February 2011, movement leaders were released and reassumed leadership of the movement. They were forced to acknowledge and appropriate “eye-opening” discourses. While some leaders welcomed and helped reproduce eye-opening ideas and discourses, some attempted to circumscribe the diffusion. The latter became the movement’s main direction upon the electoral victory of the

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625 Puen Ian sak na, กรุงเทพไม่มีคนเสื้อแดง (Bangkok has (no) Redshirts) (Bangkok: Read, 2011), 195.
Thaksin-endorsed Pheu Thai Party and the rise to premiership of his sister, Yingluck Shinawatra in July 2011.

Redshirt anti-royalism in the post-May 19 incident disrupted public normalcy amidst an atmosphere of despair. Besides the massacre, pro-Redshirt television channels, community radio stations, and websites were blocked. Rather than being traumatized, demoralized, and atomized, Redshirt participants responded to state violence with creative articulations of anger. Similar to Aristide Zolberg’s moment of madness, we witnessed popular attempts to push the limits of possibility.\footnote{Aristide R. Zolberg, “Moments of Madness,” \textit{Politics and Society} 2, no. 2 (1972): 1.} Untamed by movement leaders and not bound to an organizational structure, the explosions of anti-royalist language and symbols were generated by an “unauthorized and leaderless”\footnote{Nick Nostitz, “The Red Shirts: From Anti-Coup Protesters to Social Mass Movement,” in \textit{Good Coup Gone Bad: Thailand’s Political Development since Thaksin’s Downfall} (Singapore: ISEAS, 2014), 187.} crowd. They prevailed in informal gatherings, street graffiti, poetry, and music. These arts of the impossible were driven by emotion and passion rather than rational calculation. Serhat Ünaldi calls this period, the “first open strike against the sacred charisma of the Thai monarchy.”\footnote{Serhat Ünaldi, “Working Towards the Monarchy and its Discontents: Anti-royal Graffiti in Downtown Bangkok,” \textit{Journal of Contemporary Asia} 44, no. 3 (2014): 377.} Sidney Tarrow summarizes well Zolberg’s thesis. The moment of madness led to the emergence of new concepts and language diffused through new networks which usually featured spontaneity, improvisation, and lack of institutionalization.\footnote{Sidney Tarrow, \textit{Strangers at the Gates: Movements and States in Contentious Politics} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 142-3.}

However, as Tarrow maintains, this politics of rupture can also be put in a historical context or, in Tarrow’s words, “the evolution of larger [protest] cycles.”\footnote{Ibid., 133.} Despite its novel disruptive characteristics, Redshirt anti-royalism in the post May 19, 2010 era, I argue, was far from entirely unexpected and ahistorical. It did not arise from empty space. As previous chapters have elaborated, language and symbols with seditious implications had emerged, developed, and
transformed during the long course of political struggles. Redshirt participants were indeed to some extent familiar with certain ideological lines, subversive language, and symbols. Experiences in political participation had sown the seeds of anti-royalism and their flowers were now vividly in bloom. Intellectuals, artists, poets, movement leaders, and even Thai elites inevitably took into account the articulation of resentment made by the commoners. New spaces and forms of contestation over meanings expanded and diversified.

5.2 Moments of Rupture: Ordinary Redshirts and their Break with Royalist Ideology

This section captures the moments of demystification occurring on the ground and expressed in emotionally-embedded linguistic and symbolic forms. Through interview accounts, it shows how Redshirt participants recalled their “eye-opening” experiences in the wake of the May 2010 crackdown. This was the moment when the Redshirts became fully aware of the non-existence of the “benevolent Father” and “national savior.” Moreover, dominant royalist narratives were overturned. Instead of Privy Councilor Prem or the Queen, the people’s enemy, perceived by Redshirts, now expanded to include the King. Several participants even questioned the legitimacy of the whole royal institution. During gatherings, the nameless Redshirt crowd chanted or wrote ambiguous slogans alluding that the monarchy, including the King, was responsible for the killing in May 2010. Meanwhile, in private spheres, eye-opened Redshirts uprooted themselves from royalist ideology by taking down the “pictures every home has.”

5.2.1 The May 19, 2010 Massacre: “Dad, where are you?”

“Doctor, can I ask you something? Why do you come to sympathize with the Redshirts?”

San, a Redshirt taxi driver from Khon Kaen, asked me on April 25, 2015, five years after the
crackdown. I was sitting with Aunt Chan, a Redshirt pensioner, in the back seat of San’s taxi. He was driving us home after the routine meeting at the The rain worsened the traffic jam and San tried to break the silence. Aunt Chan also turned to me and was eager to hear my answer. I briefly told them that in 2008 I became more and more curious about how the elites stubbornly refused to accept the electoral results and used all means to take down the elected government. Both San and Aunt Chan mentioned that a girl with a background such as I had was unlikely to be interested in, let alone support, Redshirts.

San then shared his story, “I, myself, came to know about this damned power system and the ‘absolute’ in 2010.” He said “absolute” in English without further explanation. In previous discussions, San had used “absolute” and “royalist” interchangeably. Slowly shifting the gear to move the vehicle forward, he continued in a high-pitched voice, “Believe it or not, in 2009, I wore a red shirt to greet him at the hospital.” The taxi driver from Khon Kaen said that he prostrated on the ground as the royal car passed. He recalled, “I was the only one there who wore red. I took a sneak peek. He looked at me.” Due to his fragile health, King Bhumibol spent most of the time resting at Siriraj Hospital’s 16th floor. The hospital provided spaces for people to wait for His Majesty’s appearance and to sign letters wishing him well. Despite participating in Redshirt movements, San, like other loyal Thais, felt blessed to appear before royalty in 2009.

San then skipped from 2009 to 2010, “But after May 2010, I went home and burned all the portraits. Decadence.” Referring to the Yellowshirt funeral which the Queen attended in 2008, I asked, “What about Nong Bo’s incident?” Fixing his eyes on the street, San explained, “In my view, Nong Bo’s case was not uncommon. It was their duty to show up.” But in 2010, San explained, “I was enraged. My friend who was a limousine driver was killed. We shared the same

\[631\] Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, April 25, 2015.
\[632\] ผมกลับบ้านเผารูปทิ้งหมด

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workplace.” “Why didn’t he/she/they (khao -- เค้า) show up and do what he/she/they did in May 1992? We all knew that in the past if people got killed, he/she/they would show up.” San used khao (เค้า) as a pronoun for the third-person. The term did not indicate a gender of the referred subject although it was likely to be a singular one. It also designated the person referred to as a normal human, not an elevated superior being. So far, the whole conversation in San’s pink cab went on without mentioning neither royal positions nor names.

Despite the so-called “National Eye-opening Day” in 2008 (see chapter four), for San, it did not matter much whose funeral which member of the royal family attended. Rather, what was shockingly unexpected to him was the palace’s silence and inactivity in response to the brutal killings of Redshirt protesters at the heart of Thailand’s capital on May 19, 2010. Even those who had already become skeptical toward the monarchy shared San’s view. Aunt Kai recalled that she and her Redshirt fellows began to “be disheartened (that chai - ถอดใจ)” when the violence broke out on April 10, 2010. As she described:

I think “the upstairs (khangbon - ข้างบน)” knew what was going on. If he/she/they (khao -- เค้า) had come down (long ma - ลงมา), he/she/they would have won the people’s heart. People would have thought that at least he/she/they remained fair... But this time, there was no descent. Nor was there any sign of activity. People thus came to the conclusion. We began not to love [him/her/them].

Aunt Sao similarly expressed her frustration, “I was deeply sad. I hated the blind monitor lizard/motherfucker (kliat ai hia bot mak - เกลียดไอเหี้ยบอดมาก). Why didn’t you stop the killing? (yell aloud). People were dying!” Instead of “the upstairs” or “the blind monitor lizard/motherfucker,” Phupa, a Redshirt who lived in exile since 2014, gave a clearer account:

If the government used weapons to crack down on the Redshirts, I expected that the King and the Queen would stop them as they did in the May 1992 incident. But there was no sign. Completely silent. Because both the palace and the hospital were located nearby [the firing zone], they should have acknowledged

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634 Sao, interview by author, Bangkok, October 29, 2014.
[the situation] and prevented the violence...Previously, I thought it was just the “Red Lip (Pak Daeng – ปากแดง).” After [the April 2010 clash], I believed it was all of them. On the dispersal day at Ratchaprasong, the soldiers wore both blue and pink scarfs. These implied for whom they worked. The more I was in pain, the more widely my eyes were opened.635

During the clash in 2010, this kind of resentment prevailed among Redshirt participants. One Redshirt internet user was charged for posting lèse-majesté comments online saying “If Redshirt people die, the King must take responsibility...Children are fighting with each other. The Father must stop it. No father lets his children kill each other.”636 Right after the violence broken out on May 19, 2010, Claudio Sopranzetti, an ethnographer, was surrounded by smoke and saw one big sign hanging on the bridge columns. The message was written in red: “Dad, where are you? (pho cha pho yu nai - พ่อจ๋า พ่ออยู่ไหน)”637(Figure 5.1)

Figure 5.1: “Dad, where are you?” sign. Anonymous sign on the street on May 19, 2010

635 Phupa, e-mail message to author, November 16, 2014.
636 Thailand, Criminal Court of Bangkok, Court Decision, Black Case no. Or. 1986/2553, March 15, 2011.
The King’s non-intervention to cease the slaughter of Redshirts was central to protesters’ shift in attitude toward the monarchy. Duncan McCargo maintains that the Thai monarchy had been successfully securing legitimacy and power by adroit balancing between employing “proxies” and direct intervention. For McCargo, during normal politics, the monarchy built networks and alliances while portraying itself as having “a high degree of relative autonomy.” On the other hand, the King retained extraordinary power to intervene in a crisis. The two ideal images co-constituted and enhanced each other. As McCargo quotes the King himself, the monarchy needed to seek the middle way between “doing nothing at all” and using excessive influences.

It can be argued that Redshirt discontent toward the monarchy was a result of the network monarchy’s reversed and contradictory political roles. Back in 2008, amidst the color-coded tensions between Yellow and Red protesters, the Queen/monarchy discarded its public image of depoliticized autonomy and overtly showed support to the former. However, royal legitimacy had not yet been gravely eroded until the King failed to exercise his exceptional power when mass protesters were slaughtered at the heart of Bangkok in 2010. For the Redshirts, the 2010 violence was no doubt an extraordinary crisis in which the King should have been obliged to intervene.

I contend that far from springing from progressive republican or socialist ideologies, anti-royalist sentiment among Redshirts should be seen within the existing paradigm of the paternal and exceptional power of the King over his subjects. When the King fails to act, the subjects face an ideological contradiction which is at its heart of their allegiance. In other words, the most recent wave of anti-royalism in Thailand emerged and was shaped by the Thai royalist regime and

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639 Ibid., 502.
its idealized roles. Hence, Redshirt anti-royalism resulted from the system itself instead of alien political ideas from outside.640

Chapter three and four noted that resentments against the King’s councilors and the Queen could be seen as types of resistance hemmed in by royalist domination. They thus accommodated to the hegemonic form of thinking. However, Thailand’s political conflicts had escalated to the point at which hegemonic power encountered its limitation while new possibilities opened up for the opposition. The 2010 massacre significantly shifted the modes of resistance enframing Redshirt oppositional consciousness. The massacre re-defined realistic, possible, and legitimate opposition to power.

The immediate reactions of Redshirts to direct experiences of violence initially took on an interrogative form: Where was the benevolent Father when his children so desperately needed him?641 After May 2010, however, this question no longer required a reply. Events offered a clear answer. “There is no more deva in the Sky (mai mi laeo thewada bon fa ni - ไม่มีแล้วเทวดาบนฟ้านี้),” declared one anonymous poem.642

One sign made of newspapers in one Redshirt gathering offered another possible answer on behalf of the Father: “I don’t know, I am sick (ku mai yon ku puai - ยุ่งยาก...ป่วย)”643(Figure 5.2).

This famous Redshirt slogan, at first glance seemingly politically irrelevant, directly challenged the power of the monarchy. It implied that, because of his ailments, the King was ignorant of the deaths of his people; thus he was unwilling or unable to rule justly.

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643 In Thai, there are many words which stand for “I.” This slogan appropriated the most impolite “I” which was “กู (Ku).”
Above all, this statement regarding the King’s illness summarized the Redshirts’ second round of “eye-opening,” the realization of royal impotence and imposture. In less than a year, this slogan, which originally appeared on a handmade placard, was replicated widely on protest T-shirts and stickers (Figure 5.3). Its sarcastic humor, vagueness, and decontextualization disturbed several royalists. A Democrat politician pressured the Redshirts to clarify “who” exactly “doesn’t know.” A Redshirt spokesman simply replied, “I don’t know either.” So far, no one has gone to jail because of this slogan.

Figure 5.2: “I don’t know, I am sick” protest sign. A banner at Ratchaprasong intersection on January 9, 2011 (Source: Anonymous Facebook account, January 9, 2011)

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644 “เสื้อแดงพร้อมเจรจาธุรกิจราชประสงค์” “The Redshirts are ready to talk with Ratchaprasong businessmen),” Dailynews Website, January 12, 2011.
Figure 5.3: “I don’t know, I am sick” protest shirt (Source: Author)

5.2.2 Leaderless Redshirts’ Anti-Royalism: From the National Savior to the Commander of Mass Killings

According to Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, the eruption of mass protests can be caused by the collective transformation of both consciousness and behavior.\(^\text{645}\) The former entails the change in perception regarding the legitimacy of the authority. Seeing the ruling power as “unjust and wrong,” people are inspired to alter the existing institutional arrangement. As a result, the latter involves collective acts of defiance which challenge legality and push the limit of the perceived social reality. Piven and Cloward argue that “transvaluation” and alternative worldviews replace the old one when unexpected traumas are collectively experienced and “when the dominant institutional arrangements of the society, as people understand them, are self-evidently not functioning.”\(^\text{646}\) This insight echoes Gramsci’s thesis on the “crisis of authority” mentioned in chapter three. As he notes, the crisis takes place when “the great masses have

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\(^\text{646}\) Ibid., 12.
become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously.”

Although the Redshirt movement had emerged and been institutionalized since 2006, the 2010 crackdown contributed to the movement’s major shift in terms of both consciousness and behavior. Previously, the Thai monarchy, particularly the King, was still perceived as a national savior capable of ceasing crisis, protecting his subjects, and restoring unity. Chapter four argued that the so-called “eye-opening” phenomenon that occurred during 2008-2009 relied heavily on this royalist logic. In other words, “accommodation” to power had dominated protesters’ mentality and been their main strategy. However, the mass killing of Redshirt protesters caused a drastic shift in protest discourse which not only illustrated “alienation” from and “rejection” of the powers-that-be but also was ignited from below and subsequently prevailed in Redshirt media and formal speeches.

As post-May-19 collective slogans and graffiti below show, the disappointment and realization of the non-existence of the Father/Deva/Sky came together with the transformation of the great savior of the people into the great commander of mass murder. By collectively shouting “the monitor lizard/mother fucker ordered the killing,” the Redshirts’ perceptions of their political enemy was expansively directed at the monarchy. At the same time, Redshirts instrumentalized linguistic ambiguity to avoid legal prosecution.

In his memoir, a Redshirt Bangkokian depicted his sensational experience at Ratchaprasong intersection on September 19, 2010. He wrote, “I tried to carefully listen to what the Redshirt mass was yelling repetitively because I was not sure. But it soon became clear. Ten

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648 James Glassman defines “accommodation” as “belief in the system with a sense of empowerment to act within it for personal gain.” See James Glassman, “Cracking Hegemony in Thailand: Gramsci, Bourdieu and the Dialectics of Rebellion,” 35.
thousand participants were shouting, ‘The monitor lizard/motherfucker ordered the killing. The monitor lizard/motherfucker ordered the killing (hia sang kha - เพื่อนฝูงฆ่า เพื่อนฝูงฆ่า).’” It was four years after the 2006 coup and four months after the crack down at the same location. Suddenly, he turned to his foreign friend and exclaimed, “The revolution has begun! The revolution has begun!”

The gathering was loosely organized by the Red Sunday group. Having been retaining a degree of autonomy from the UDD leaders, Sombat Boon-ngamanong, a group leader, was one among few Redshirt leaders who remained outside prison. The initial purpose of the gathering was merely to enable Redshirts to overcome their trauma by returning to Ratchaprasong intersection which was, in Sombat’s word, the “killing field (thung sanghan - ทุ่งสังหาร)” of the Redshirts. As Sombat explained, “The play or movie [about the Redshirts] must not end with the crack down. The movement needed to be resurrected in order to keep its stories alive.” Attempting to prevent Redshirt deaths from sinking into oblivion, the Red Sunday leaders urged its participants to shout, “People died here (thi ni mi khontai - ที่นี่มีผู้ตาย).” Young activists dressed up in ghost costumes painted with gunshot wounds lay on the pavement. However, far from being traumatized victims, the Redshirts healed quickly and actively attacked their enemies with inventive symbolic weapons.

Sombat admitted that he underestimated the morality and potentiality of the mass. He did not expect the number of participants who arrived there. Above all, beyond Sombat’s control, the mass started shouting and writing their anger on the street and walls. The contents of this shouting and writing went far beyond the acknowledgment of the Redshirt deaths. There was no official leader and everything was unplanned. Someone shouted and the others repeated the slogan. Redshirt participants welcomed any amateur artist who wanted to sing or read a poem.

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649 Puen lan sak na, กรุงเทพไม่มีเสื้อแดง (Bangkok has (no) Redshirts), 205.
Sombat compared the event to “the fierce storm in the ocean.” “All I could do was to wait until it came ashore and abated.”

The slogan “The monitor lizard/motherfucker ordered the killing” was followed by “The damned bitch ordered the shooting (ai hia sang kha i ha sang ying - ไอ้เหี้ยสั่งฆ่า อีห่าสั่งยิง).” In addition to shouting, this slogan was written everywhere: on protesters’ faces, to the streets, to the walls (Figure 5.4). Its popularity deserves special attention.

Figure 5.4: Anti-royalism in a theatrical form. A participant wore makeup to look like a living dead and painted her face “The monitor lizard ordered the killing.” (Source: Worapoj Panpong, สถานการณ์ฉุกเฉิน (Emergency Situation) (Bangkok: Banglumphu, 2011).

As mentioned in chapter three, the Redshirt crowd was familiar with collectively cursing their political enemies as a “monitor lizard/motherfucker.” They had shouted this term every time UDD speakers finished attacking the ammat, whether it was Prem, Abhisit, Sondhi, or the army.

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650 Sombat Boon-ngamanong, interview by author, Bangkok, March 17, 2015.
651 Worapoj Panpong, สถานการณ์ฉุกเฉิน (Emergency Situation) (Bangkok: Banglumphu, 2011), 118.
The royalist Yellowshirts also employed this term frequently to dehumanize particular members of the Redshirt camp. However, this time, the term was uttered loudly and collectively without specification of the culprit. When the speakers onstage asked, “Who ordered the killings?” or “Who are at the root of the problem?” the anonymous crowd collectively shouted, “the monitor lizard/motherfucker.” This protest culture was designed to render multi-layered protection against lèse-majesté prosecutions. First, an anonymous crowd is, by nature, the politics of disguise. James Scott rightly points out that a disorganized mass assembly could lower “the risk of being identified personally for any action and word that comes from the group.” Therefore, it was impossible for the authorities to single out the individual who cursed.

Second, the swear words were too ambiguous. Amidst unorganized gatherings, it was not the crowd’s duty to explain whom they meant by “the monitor lizard” and “the damned bitch.” But if they had to explicate, they would probably name those “criticizable” political opponents, namely Prem, Abhisit, and Suthep Thaugsuban. Their hatred toward these individuals was real and could be found widely at the protest sites. The faces of the latter two were explicitly printed on flip-flops sold in Redshirt rallies. In Thailand, it was considered disrespectful to place things at feet’s level. Wearing these flip-flops, faces of these powerful figures were underneath Redshirts’ feet. It became one among overt ways to vent frustration and anger toward their “namable” and “identifiable” rivals.

However, looking closely into Redshirt graffiti, we can find further descriptions made by anonymous street artists (Figure 5.5-5.7). These accounts hinted at other figures than Prem, Abhisit, or Suthep. For instance, someone wrote “the blind on the 16th floor (bot chan 16 - บอดชั้น 16)” next to the term “monitor lizard/motherfucker.” Implicitly, the former and the latter were

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653 Anusorn Unno, “ฉันมีรองเท้าเป็นอาวุธ” “[I have flip-flops as weapons],” Mahaprachachon (October 8-14, 2010).
understood as the same person. The term “Sky” appeared again in another graffiti on the wall. In blue ink, the first line said, “The monitor lizard/motherfucker ordered the killing.” The second line added, “the Sky has no eyes since the Sky is blind (fa mai mita phro fa tabot - ฟ้าไม่มีตาเพราะฟ้าบอด).” The word “blind” was underlined. Lastly, on the white marking of the road surface, someone wrote, “I know that I am fighting with you. Sot Bat (ผลบัตร or Sot Bat means inserting the card). The murderer slept on the 16th floor.” Sot Bat could be read reversely as Sat Bot (สัตว์บอด or Sat Bot means a blind animal).654

Figure 5.5: “The monitor lizard ordered the killing. The Sky has no eyes since the Sky is blind.” (Source: Anonymous)

Figure 5.6: “‘The Monitor lizard,’ the blind on the 16th floor, ordered the killing of the people. (Source: Anonymous)

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The combination of unrelated terms such as “monitor lizard,” “blind,” “16th floor,” “Sky,” and “ordering the killing” demonstrates a collective political understanding of these Redshirt artists. This was made possible thanks to prior knowledge constituted through Redshirt informal webs of meaning. For instance, number 16 could be interpreted as the 16th floor of Siriraj Hospital where the King was hospitalized. As opposed to the idea of King’s divinity and immortality, “16” emphasized that the King was an ordinary human being subject to senility, illness, and inevitably upcoming death. It represented vulnerability, helplessness, and powerlessness, not found in the official and public portrayals of the King.

Terminologies regarding visuality were appropriated in an antagonistic fashion: the eye-opened Redshirts and the blind Sky. Although blindness was used possibly due to the common belief that the King had lost vision in his right eye, the term could also metaphorically allude to the monarchy and royalists living in illusion and blissful ignorance. Powerfully, the Redshirts

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655 On October 4 1948, King Bhumibol’s right eye was seriously injured from a car accident in Switzerland.
challenged the traditional idea of the omnipotent righteous king capable of seeing “through the illusory façade of people and worldly events.”

Contrasting their open eyes with their opponent’s blindness, the Redshirts refused to be guided by “enlightened” rulers and declared that they were capable of “truth.”

On the contrary, the latter, in the Redshirts’ view, lived in the dark abyss of ignorance and superstition.

Consequently, without a direct naming and clarification, several signifying terms could evoke double meanings which several Redshirts understood. That is, the monarchy, especially King Bhumibol, was believed to have been behind the killing of the Redshirts in 2010. As a result, new friend-enemy lines were drawn. The realm of the enemy was expanded to the “Head of State” – the supposedly most revered traditional institution in the Kingdom. As Phupa’s accounts showed, his first eye-opening had specifically involved the Queen, known as the “Red Lip”; however, the second, 2010, eye-opening expanded his perception of the enemy to both the King and the whole monarchical institution.

Remarkably, this was not the first time the Thai monarch was conferred to the disgusting status of “ai hia or monitor lizard” -- a low-life animal which was also the strongest term of abuse in Thai language. During the 1920s, under King Vajiravudj’s or Rama VI’s absolutist regime, popular discontent with absolute monarchy prevailed among urbanite literati middle-class. Unlike today, criticisms and challenges took in more blatant forms. Sem Sumanan, a newspaper cartoonist, drew several caricatures which satirized Thai nobles and royal rulers. In his cartoon series titled “the hia trade,” Sem continued introducing six different types of “hia (monitor lizard)”

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including high-ranked royal officers. Finally, on November 22, 1925, Sem drew himself saying, “Here it is, that red-tailed monitor lizard/mother fucker number six” while pointing the finger at a man who looked like the sixth monarch of the Chakri dynasty -- Rama VI (Figure 5.8).

Figure 5.8: The monitor lizard/mother fucker number six on an anti-absolutist newspaper. Anti-royalist caricature during Thailand’s absolutism in Kro Lek newspaper, November 22, 1925 (Source: Matthew P. Copeland, “Contested Nationalism and the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam,” 112)

The return of “monitor lizard/motherfucker” as a derogative reference to the monarchy in 2010 Thailand could be seen as a continuous part of the almost century-long history of Thai anti-royalism. However, differences between the old and the recent anti-royalism were prominent when taking political contexts of the two eras into account. First, the element of deception and disillusion was less emphasized in the former since it was normal for the absolutist king to be held responsible for country’s problems. Second, the greater restriction of freedom during the current era forced the latter to take in far less explicit fashions. It was too risky to openly reveal that “the monitor lizard’ motherfucker” was the king as did Sem.

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Sometimes, omitting the name or any reference of their political rivals, Redshirt protesters simply stated, “I know with whom I am fighting (ku ru ku su yu kap khrai - กูรู้กูสู้กับใคร)” or “I don’t care about losing or winning. I will fight you everyday (phae chana mai ru ku su kap mueng thuk wan - แพ้ชนะไม่รู้กูสู้กับมึงทุกวัน).” These slogans found in gathering places reflected the Redshirts’ determination to keep on with the struggle despite the realization of their subordinate position and the unbeatable power of their opponents.

5.2.3 Removing Royal Symbols from Daily Life

In addition to anonymous graffiti and shouting, another immediate spontaneous reaction after eye-opening experiences entailed destruction or removal of royal symbols. As mentioned in chapter four, an act of removing “the portrait” had been to some extent commonplace among the Redshirts; therefore, one UDD leader talked about this action onstage in 2009. However, after the 2010 massacre, accounts show that violence against royal symbols expanding from “the portrait” to other royal commodities and became even more widespread.

The King had long been the embodiment of Thailand’s unity, prosperity, and security. According to the royal semiotic universe, the existence of every Thai was made possible and meaningful because of the King’s magnificent power. As the King’s anthem hails, “Thanks to his royal ruling, [our] heads are peacefully secured.” Put metaphorically, the heads, lives, and households of all Thais were protected under His Majesty’s feet. Going beyond the ceremonial domain, the royal representation of power expanded to a cultural one including daily commodities such as shirts, songs, and TV shows. As Sarun Krittikarn argues, the King’s divinity and its representation could be seen as modern phenomena. For him, the utilization of “the

661 Puen lan sak na, กรุงเทพไม่มีเสื้อแดง (Bangkok has [no] Redshirts), 194.
televisionary bond between royals and commoners” generated a new type of sensation -- “entertainment nationalism” -- in which the king became “a logo” for “pleasure-seeking commoner.” In an ideological sense, the King was the embodiment of social norms and order which offered its members a sense of comfort and security. It was thus impossible for royal subjects to imagine either Thailand or their lives without him. One royalist actor declared on a television show that whoever did not love the Father must leave Thailand; furthermore, he said he was willing to sacrifice his head to protect the Father. His bold speech brought tears to many and received a standing ovation.

It was easier for this Thai actor as well as many Thai royalists to put their lives at stake to defend the King than it was for those who took a leap of faith to risk everything to fight him. For several ordinary Redshirts, the process of unplugging oneself from royal power did not involve just declarations through speeches or writings, but both self-transformations and violent acts inflicted on royal symbolism omnipresent in everyday life. The removal and destruction of royal iconography that used to be sacred and meaningful was of vital importance.

On May 19, 2010, a man walked out from a chaotic Redshirt crowd in central Chiang Mai and headed to the bridge across the Ping River. His face was calm and his lips firmly sealed. He quickly walked toward the bridge railings which were beautifully decorated with Thai national flags and the King’s yellow flags. Without hesitation, the man grabbed a stick of the latter and threw it into the river. “Bang!” A firecracker or grenade exploded. People screamed with panic. The man did not shudder, paced up, and threw away the second yellow flag. Another man did the same. The act of throwing this flag, I claim, is one among many examples of how Redshirts

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664 See Slavoj Žižek, Tarrying with the Negative (Durham: Durham University Press, 1993), 235.
uprooted themselves from existing ideology and leaped into the world of uncertainty. The act was emotional and done without calculation. The man was not a protest leader. This vendor at a fresh-food market was later charged with lèse-majesté and suffered from a stroke.665

Others did not encounter a tragic end as did the northern vendor, since their acts occurred in less public spheres. San recalled that he cried like a crazy man before he “burned” every royal portrait that he had at home. Depressed and refusing to talk to anyone for a while, a Redshirt nurse remembered tearing apart the “calendar” – another royal home decoration.666 Aunties at the namely Aunt Sao, Aunt Chan, Aunt Pinky, and Aunt Bo had vivid memories about what they had done to their royal collections. Most of them used to be loyal customers of royal products. Aunt Pinky laughed to herself when talking about how royal she was in the past. “I was willing to pay up to ten thousand bahts (279 U.S. dollars) to buy those things,” she claimed. But the old royalist self no longer existed and the new emerging self had to be built on new habits. It began when they put royal products such as calendars, clocks, portraits, and wristbands in garbage bags. Giggling, Aunt Chan added that she cut “their” faces into little pieces before disposal. Some placed the bag far away from their houses so that neighbors or the police were unable to identify where it came from. In this sense, while the community where they lived remained embedded in the royalist world, individuals were ready to break with traditional ties and embrace a novel uncertain self. At least in their private spaces, it was unbearable to acknowledge any sign of existence of royal power. These ordinary people no longer wished to live under the royal grace/gaze projected from the wall, desk, or on their body. In one radical case, a Redshirt took down a royal image and put it under a doormat.667 Objects which were previously worshipped now deserved physical assaults. These stories illustrate how emancipation occurred...
at the most everyday level without organizational mobilization and captured the moment when
adoration turned into intolerable scorn.

These acts epitomized the breaks with what Étienne de La Boétie calls “the habituation
to subjection.”668 As the French theorist asserts, since a tyrant’s power come from the people’s
support, to resist him simply means to withdraw consent. For him, “There is no need of fighting
to overcome this single tyrant, for he is automatically defeated if the country refused consent to
its own enslavement: it is not necessary to deprive him of anything, but simply to give nothing.”669
Rather than focusing solely on attacking the opposition, Redshirts realized that they were parts
of the perpetuation of the “voluntary servitude” to the regime. Hence, they knew that they had
to give up “the bait toward slavery” or “the price of their liberty.”670 Although de La Boétie’s
proposal appears non-violent, it is indeed the most violent in the sense that it unplugs a tyrant’s
subjects from existing identities, habits, and world-views.

Three years later, the act of removal of royal symbols became so common that one
Redshirt musical band called “Faiyen (Cool light or sparkler)” dedicated a song to celebrate it.
Playing in front of a Redshirt crowd, the song describes, “The portrait that every household must
have suddenly disappears. Losing faith, people start to understand. Whatever house we go in, no
more picture, no more picture.” This protest song does not specify whose picture. Nor does it
utter any word related to the palace. It merely gives background stories: “Previously, I used to
hang and worship it. They said it would protect us from harm. Time passed. I am certain that it is
not sacred. I had mistakenly given my love, but today there is no more faith. What is left is only a
valueless picture. It was so irritating that I had to take it down from the wall.”671 In an interview,

668 Étienne de La Boétie, “The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude,” in Politics of Obedience and Etienne de La
669 Ibid., 116.
670 Ibid., 133.
671 Faiyen, “เสื่อม” “[Decadence)” (video of a Redshirt concert), posted January 10, 2013, accessed September
the composer said that he was inspired by the real experiences of many people after May 2010. The song’s title is “Decadence (sueam - เสื่อม)” – the exact word San, the Redshirt taxi driver, used (see page 258) while telling his life-changing experience.

5.3 The 2010-2011 Eye-Opening Outbreak: Diffusion of New Ideologies and Discourses

Radical thoughts and discourses needed sustainable driving forces and shared basic narrative structures to disseminate, diversify, and form long-lasting collective political consciousness. The 2010 eye-opening trend was initially expressed in ordinary protesters’ impromptu actions including mad shouting, street graffiti, and individual acts in private sites. However, its subsequent diffusive mechanisms went beyond realms of spontaneity, informality, concealment, and anonymity. As a consequence, the royalist establishment increasingly resorted to both legal prosecution and indoctrination to suppress the dissent voices.

“Have you had your eyes opened?” This was a short convenient question people asked each other during Redshirt gatherings in late 2010. Initially circulated in the cyber-world, this question slowly moved into protest sites during 2009; “eye-opening” finally became commonly used at every Redshirt level. Both Sutachai Yimprasert and Pichit Likitkijsomboon, Redshirt intellectuals, observed that during 2006-2009, the “eye-opening” trend spread unevenly among participants. But the trend became “consensual” for the majority of Redshirts after the 2010 crackdown. Sutachai defined it as the moment when “attachment was completely gone (mot yueayai kan loei - หมดเยื่อใยกันเลย)” among the Redshirts; Pichit said that 80 and 90 percent of the Redshirts had had their eyes opened. Prevailing in mass gatherings, “eye-opening” became part of the definition of the Redshirts’ new political being. The term carried meanings of how one used

672 Jom, interview by author, Laos, November 24, 2014.
673 Sutachai Yimprasert, interview by author, Bangkok, March 27, 2015.
674 Pichit Likitkijsomboon, interview by author, Bangkok, April 1, 2015
to be in the past and how they were transformed into the present’s new person. For example, in the middle of a casual conversation in which no one had known each other before, one Redshirt declared, “All people have their eyes open. In the past, we knew how evil they were. But we forgave them. This time is too unbearable. [They are] too cruel to deserve forgiveness.”

Through conversations and graffiti, people were eager to announce their discovery of their new sense of being. They became more courageous and emboldened when they discovered that they were not the only ones who went through this emotionally transitional experience.

5.3.1 “Eye-opening” as the Movement’s Official Language

Although one could not estimate how widespread the eye-opening outbreak had become after the 2010 crackdown, significant shifts in language and symbols among formal Redshirt media and leaders could indicate the degree of its popularity. Resonating with the crowd’s mood, “eye-opening” was appropriated into the official protest language. This new symbolic field of struggle moved to another level. When the Redshirts gathered in Ayutthaya province in October 2010, the event was called “The October 17 Rally: More Eye-opened than Before (17ตุลาแ rateิลตาสว่างกว่าเดิม).”

At night, the participants enjoyed colorful fireworks. These were described as “shooting fireworks into the Sky to challenge injustice (จุดไฟตะไลทะลุฟ้าท้าอธรรม).” In a memoir, one commentator wrote that these fireworks symbolized the “official inauguration of a new round of struggle.”

Meanwhile, the Redshirt media had to keep up with the politics of the street. “The monitor lizard/motherfucker ordered the killing” first appeared on the cover of Red Power at the end of 2010. Welcoming the year 2011, the magazine chose an image of a large eye with a

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675 Worapoj Panpong, สถานการณ์ฉุกเฉิน (Emergency Situation), 143.
676 “จริงวิถีคริสต์” (Red Square), Mahaprachachon (October 29 – November 4, 2010).
677 “จริงวิถีคริสต์” (Red Square), Mahaprachachon (October 22 - 28, 2010).
678 Worapoj Panpong, สถานการณ์ฉุกเฉิน (Emergency Situation), 126-7.
679 Redpower 1, 7 (December, 2010): cover.
headline saying “People [have their] Eyes Open: [There are] Nine Dangers (pracha ta sawang : 9 antarai - ประชาชนต่าง: 9 อันตราย)” on its cover (Figure 5.9). In the mainstream Redshirt weekly newspaper Mahaprachachon, “Eye Opening” became the title of one column concerning reflections on process of Redshirt political awakening. The columnist took the reader back to October 6, 1976, when student activists were shot and lynched to death in the name of the monarchy. The author noted that, at that time, people had not yet had their eyes opened. Then, he mentioned that the 2006 coup and the October 13, 2008 incident enabled people to realize, “Oh, that’s what this is all about.” Finally, after the 2010 violence, the author concluded that everybody knew that it was not Prime Minister Abhisit “who ordered the killing.”

The widespread utilization of the term “eye-open” in speeches, songs, and poems shared the same narrative structure. These references often began with a description of what one was in the “past” and what a person became “now.” Deception and living in illusion had been key characteristics in the past; elements of knowledge and disillusionment were crucial in the present.

One poem illustrates this well:

I had been mistaking a vicious wheel for a lotus flower all my life. Wrongly misled, I was willing to sacrifice even my life. I followed the wind of deception wherever I went. But now Thai have their eyes open, capable of seeing the righteous path. 681

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681 คำว่ากล้ำเป็นสัญลักษณ์ของชีวิต เกี่ยวกับมิตัสสึ:] หมายถึงการถูกหลอกลวง หลงหลุมในเวลาส่วนตัวเรา dernier

Figure 5.9: “People,[have their] eyes open: [There are] Nine Dangers” on a Redshirt magazine cover
Eye-opening discourse in Redshirt media (Source: Red Power Vol. 1, no. 8, 2011)
This poem was well-known among Redshirts as “Samak’s Poem (klon samak - กลอนสมัคร),” circulated in a cyber-world and re-read publicly after 2010.\(^{682}\) Endorsed by the Redshirts, Samak Sundaravej was elected and became the 25th prime minister of Thailand. Yet he was deposed by the constitutional court in 2008. He passed away in November 2009. Although the poem was not written by Samak, an anonymous poet put him or herself in Samak’s place and emotionally spoke on behalf of Samak. As a politician, Samak had been a right-wing royalist despite allying with Thaksin and gaining the support of the Redshirts. Samak’s tragic break with the establishment was an instance with which Redshirts could easily identify. Most of them used to be the “misled Samak” and then slowly woke from that illusion. People circulated this poem in the guise of Samak’s voice. One rumor suggested that Samak wrote this poem on his deathbed and left it to his wife. All the fictive stories regarding Samak’s disenchantment and death became one among many fugitive channels to express political frustration.\(^{683}\)

“Eye-opening” was mentioned several times onstage during Redshirt gatherings from 2010 to 2011. Since official UDD leaders were detained, Surachai Saedan, the head of the radical fraction Red Siam, arose as an outstanding speaker. Substituting for the leaders, Surachai was invited to talk at Redshirt gatherings both in Bangkok and other regions. His popularity grew as he became a major focus to spread and institutionalize the “eye-opening” discourse. Expanding on the boundary of the speakable, Surachai brought what was ubiquitous among common

\(^{682}\) Although it is difficult to tell when exactly this poem was written and circulated due to its anonymous origin, existing evidence shows that it could be traced back to June 2010, one month after the crackdown. This poem was first publicized in the cyber-world. See “บทกวีสุดท้ายของท่านสมัคร สุนทรเวช…” (Samak’s last poem...), Thai UK Press, June 13, 2010, accessed April 6, 2015, https://thaiuknews.wordpress.com/2010/06/13/%E0%B8%9A%E0%B8%97%E0%B8%B1%E0%B8%A7%E0%B8%B5%E0%B8%AA%E0%B8%B8%E0%B8%94%E0%B8%97%E0%B9%89%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%A2%E0%B8%82%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%B7%E0%B9%88%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%A4%E0%B8%A1%E0%B8%B1/. See also Somsak Jeamteerasakul, “ความเป็นมาของคำว่า "ตาสว่าง" " (The origin of the term 'eye-opening'),” Somsak’s notes on his Facebook account, January 8, 2011, accessed April 6, 2015, https://www.facebook.com/notes/170178049692099/.

\(^{683}\) Jakrapob Penkair maintains that the “Samak’s poem” was not written by Samak. See Jakrapob Penkair, บางทีมีสัมผัส รวมงานเขียนกลอนช่วงหลังรัฐประหาร 2549 และในช่วงลี้ภัยการเมือง (Occasional Rhyme: A Collection Writings and Poems during the post-2006 Coup and while living in exile), 102-109.
Redshirts to the protest stages; he offered systematic explanations proposed what should be done. In Chiang Mai, Surachai defined the meaning of “eye-opening”:

In the past, we were told that our lives were under the patronage of the deva (god). But “eye-opening” means that the deva’s life depends on us. We feed the deva (loud cheers)...In this country, can the deva live without the people? (“Cannot!” one female Redshirt answered loudly) What about the people without the deva. (Yes! Yes!) 684

Again, metaphorical terms stressing hierarchical power were appropriated. In addition to “the Sky” or “the upstairs,” the monarchy as well as royalist elites were indirectly called “deva.” Here, the deva, as Surachai and the Redshirt audience understood, was not a benefactor of the people but vice versa. Surachai went on to explain the principle of popular sovereignty using a plain and simple allegory. Comparing the Kingdom to a Buddhist stupa, the nation has the “lower class” at the bottom as the base, whereas the deva are located at the top of the spire. Surachai declared, “The stupa remains unshaken without the spire. It just becomes unattractive.” He then engaged in a systemic economic description. Surachai -- the former communist fighter -- asserted that Thaksin’s deposed administration had grievously disturbed the old Thai elite because his policies socially and economically empowered the grassroots sector. The lower class, instead of passively receiving humanitarian alms, had become transformed into a middle class which was no longer subject to the upper class’s humiliation, exploitation, and patronage. This transition deprived the old elite of traditional power and privilege. To Surachai, this was the root of the ongoing conflict.

In a similar vein, two poets went on one Redshirt stage and read their political arts which emphasized equal rights instead of being passive impoverished subjects to benevolent elites. They

refused to love, to be patronized, and be grateful in exchange for handfuls of charity from above.

As they sharply pointed out:

I am sick of donations. Let me exercise the rights of human beings.\textsuperscript{685}

One piece of blanket is an exchange for an infinite return of favors. Can one drop of sweat shower the entire land? With our two hands, we will reach those broken dreams. Rice in our mouths every meal; we did not buy it with someone else’s perspiration.\textsuperscript{686}

While declaring the refusal to love, this poem criticized Thailand’s regime of love and royal patronage which reduced its citizens into helpless royal subjects. It claimed that the people could stand on their own and feed themselves without seeking favors from above. After the two poets had finished reading their political poem, the host went onstage and said, “At first, while listening to the poem, our eyes were full of tears. But afterwards, our eyes were open.”\textsuperscript{687}

Karl Marx once wrote that “A being only considers himself independent when he stands on his own feet; and he only stands on his own feet when he owes his existence to himself.”\textsuperscript{688} In a sense, by stating that Redshirts have been feeding both the deva and themselves was a Redshirt declaration of independence from the Thai monarchy. Redshirts did not owe anything to the King and royal power. They rejected the latter two as “the source” of their life – their “creation.”\textsuperscript{689}

In less than one year, “eye-opening” discourse which initially disrupted public spheres with its intense anger and vulgarity directed to the monarchy was supplemented with proper explanations and understanding regarding Thailand’s political regime as offered by Surachai and Redshirt poets above. Eventually, five lèse-majesté charges were filed against Surachai in

\textsuperscript{685} เบรื่นสลายความเบื่อ
\textsuperscript{686} ผ้าห่มหนึ่งคืนแลกบุญคุณใครไม่หมด
\textsuperscript{687} กวีตีนแดง (Red-foot poet group)，“กวีตีนแดง น้องตั้ง อาชีวะ 10-04-54” (video of Red Siam gathering, Bangkok, April 10, 2011), accessed May 6, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JDBGwPgNggQ.
\textsuperscript{689} Ibid.

Upon the arrest of Surachai, UDD formal leaders were released on February 22, 2011. Although these leaders did not have a chance to closely observe the outbreak of anti-royalism driven by ordinary Redshirt participants, they had to quickly adopt both the language and ideologies prevalent among their supporters. For instance, “eye-opening” became one of keywords of Nattawut’s public speeches. Attending the funeral of a Redshirt in April 2011, Nattawut spoke on a loudspeaker. He described how sad he was although the deceased was praised as a martyr. “We [the Redshirts] do not wish to be great. Nor do we want to be heroes… All we want is simply to be the people who are entitled to dignity; however, the powerful in this country refuse to give it to us.” Some Redshirts attentively listened while some chitchatted in low voices. Suddenly, the tranquility was broken and audience’s muted sound was replaced with mad cheers after Nattawut uttered following words:

We never expected that the powerholder would be this cold-blooded. The surprise was not caused by our previous ignorance, but because we had loved them too much [cheers and applause exploded]. Today, what I would like to say in front of the lifeless body of Therdsak Foongklinchan⁶⁹⁰ is that love had made us blind but death has opened our eyes [The crowd screamed in unison]. And we will never close our eyes and forget the death of the people and the loss of the innocents. We will open our eyes and fix them on every dark corner in this nation. To whoever who is hiding, we will tell them that we all have our eyes open and already know. ⁶⁹¹ (Emphasis mine)

Again, the Redshirts, including the leader, declared publicly that they had their eyes open because of the death caused by their enemy. They no longer blindly adhered to “the love” in the past but instead looked forward to the upcoming struggles in the future.

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⁶⁹⁰ Therdsak was shot dead at Kok Wua intersection on April 10, 2010.
5.3.2 Countering the Eye-Opening Outbreak

In response to the unexpected horizontal spread of eye-opening discourses, the Thai royalist regime employed unplanned measures, legal suppression, and extravagant propaganda. First, they immediately removed sacrilegious texts and symbols from public surfaces as soon as possible as if this would extinguish protesters’ anger and return Thailand to its harmonious state. As one observer described the Ratchaprasong intersection in the early morning of the day after the Redshirt gathering in September 2010:

After the Redshirt gathering had ended around 8 p.m., cleaning staffs were mobilized to erase everything as quickly as possible. The next morning, one could not even imagine that last night this place was crowded by twenty thousand protesters who came to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the coup and four months after the crackdown. All messages that people wrote to speak their minds on the streets, walls, banners, and placards brought from home were sanitized and removed within a few hours.692

Sometimes, soft measures such as persuasion were utilized. However, the goal was not to make the eye-opened Redshirts change their minds, but simply to have them refrain from expressing political thoughts in public. For instance, one man was detained and interrogated by the police a few days after May 19, 2010. In front of men in power, he fearlessly explained how the monarchy was entangled in the conflict and how he and the Redshirts had their eyes open. The police let him talk as much as he wanted before they concluded, “You must understand that this is illegal. If you want to talk, talk to your friends. Don’t post them online.”693

Also, the government authority established harsher legal measures after the 2010 crackdown. Two-hundred volunteers were recruited to join the state-sponsored “Cyber Scout”

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692 Worapoj Panpong, สถานการณ์ฉุกเฉิน (Emergency Situation), 119.
693 Pruay salty head, "จะจับผมยังไง เขาสอบสวนผมยังไง" (How did they arrest me? How did they interrogate me?)," Read 3, 3 (April-September 2011): 86. This outspoken man soon left Thailand after the police confiscated his computers and investigated his home twice.
project to surveil websites which contained lèse-majesté messages or symbols. The number of arrests increased and sentence became more severe. According to David Streckfuss, from 1992 to 2004, the number of lèse-majesté cases was fewer than five per year. However, from 2005-2008, the number rose to an average of more than 60 cases annually. This number continued to skyrocket: 164 in 2009 and 478 in 2010. As mentioned in the previous section, Surachai, the leader of a radical Redshirt group, was jailed. Furthermore, an editor of Red Power magazine, Somyot Pueksakasemsuk, was also charged with lèse-majesté. Lèse-majesté prisoners included not only well-known public speakers, but also Thai commoners such as a 62-year-old man of Chinese-descent (later known as Arkong or “grandpa”) and a poor shoe repairman. Creating fear and preventing anti-royalist expression from contaminating the public sphere, the royalist establishment attempted to make an example of several lèse-majesté prisoners.

In addition to legal suppression, the Abhisit government increased the degree of indoctrination and state propaganda by setting up a new strategy and expanding its spending. According to the national budget for the 2011 fiscal year, the government initiated a new specific “programme on creating value to protect the monarchy and unity among the people.” The report explains, “The amount of 243 million baht [7,295,165.36 US dollar] will be allocated to organize public relations campaign to the people in order to create the value of loyalty to the monarchy and its protection, and instill the consciousness on unity and reconciliation among the people.” This apparently royalist initiative replaced the previous program on “promoting reconciliation,

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694 Alastair Carthew, “Thaksin’s twitter revolution — how the Red Shirts protests increase the use of social media in Thailand,” in Social Media and Politics: Online Social Networking and Political Communication in Asia (Singapore: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2010), 38.
unity among the people, and political reform” which cost 113.5 million baht [3,407,412 US dollar] the previous fiscal year.\textsuperscript{698} Aware of a significant erosion of popularity and legitimacy of the monarchy, the government invested a huge amount of public expenditure to restore the ideal royal image.

Despite these various attempts to curb anti-royalist sentiments and expressions, Thai authorities stubbornly refused to publicly acknowledge that the discontent was widely shared by Thai commoners and triggered from below instead of well-organized and well-funded networks of anti-monarchism. They fostered the belief which ignored the fact that the recent wave of anti-royalism derived from feelings of bitterness and disappointment which prevailed among a huge sector of populations. Tough measures and excessive indoctrination of royalist ideology could thus become a double-edged sword since they further fueled frustrations.

5.4 The Converging Worlds of Thai Intelligentsia and Redshirts

Redshirt commoners were not only the group who experienced radical breaks because of the 2010 crackdown. Several urban middle classes including intellectuals, journalist, novelists, and artists went through similar experiences. Rather than sitting in comfort zones defined by classrooms and bookshelves, a handful of scholars stepped out, engaged with political activities, and interacted with Redshirt commoners. Similar to independent Redshirt leaders such as Sombat and Surachai, they took more active roles in mass political movements after the bloody clash. From 2010 onward, university auditoriums and conference rooms turned into gathering spaces for “uncles and aunties” who were far older than students. For many Redshirts, this was the period when they first set foot in prodigious universities such as Thammasat. This could be seen as a process and result of the 2010 eye-opening trend. The academic world and commoners’ world

\textsuperscript{698} Bureau of the Budget of Thailand, \textit{Thailand’s Budget in Brief Fiscal Year 2010} (Bangkok: Bureau of the Budget, 2010), 7.
were brought closer together and even overlapped. While Redshirts were exposed to new types of knowledge and information through long and sometimes boring historical and legal discussions, literati activists were also forced to get used to loud cheers and claps, interrupted opinions, and swear words from the audience. A novel political site was constructed and became another channel to facilitate and endure anti-royalist sentiment and expressions.

5.4.1 The Case of Read Journal: “Riam has had enough. Riam has taken sides.”

If this is what you can think, you don’t have to read my magazine. Very disappointing. What is the point of watching a movie or reading literature if we turn out to be this kind of human? An editor of Read magazine

While the Same Sky journal had been offering critical academic writings before the 2006 coup (see chapter three), Aan (Read) journal, starting its publication in 2008, was another academic periodical critical to the Thai tripartite dominant ideology of “nation, religion, and the monarchy.” Through a sophisticated discursive analysis of literature, films, and architecture, Read attracted urban intellectual readers whose main interests were in a cultural domain. Routine writers ranged from university professors, novelists, to social critic whereas analyzed subjects included both Thai and foreign, contemporary and historical cases. For example, Read revealed how the “dictionary that every household must have” -- The New Model English-Siamese Dictionary (1937-1940) — originated from the desire to oppose the 1932 revolution and effectively disseminated the royalist ideology. It also revealed how the so-called profound “Thainess” in a modern building design was governed by four simple architectural rules. Finally, Read showed

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700 Nattaphol Chaiching, “ปทานุกรม สอเสบทุ่มในฐานะวรรณกรรมทางการเมือง” “(Sor Sethabut dictionary as political literature),” Read 1, 1 (April-June 2008): 75-82.
701 Chatri Prakitnonthakan, “ฮาวทูดีไซน์ความเป็นไทยในสถาปัตยกรรม (แบบผู้เชี่ยวชาญ)” “(How to design Thainess in architecture (like the expert)),” Read 1, 3 (October - December 2008): 117-127.
how Benedict Anderson’s main ideas in *Imagined Community* could be summarized and represented in colorful infographic forms.\(^{702}\)

Initially, ordinary Redshirts were not *Read’s* target group. Nor did their stories occupy most spaces of this periodical. As Ida Arunwong, as editor of *Read*, commented, “I had been very careful since I knew who my readers were. We were dealing with a new generation of intellectuals (*panyachon run mai* - ปัญญาชนรุ่นใหม่), not Redshirts. This group of people read *Read*.\(^{703}\) Although, *Read’s* position no doubt opposed the Yellowshirt royalist nationalism, it avoided taking sides explicitly in the color-coded conflict. Ida had hoped to form new progressive forces among the young well-educated. However, *Read* changed its direction after the 2010 crackdown. As Ida recalled, “The last straw was torn apart. I could no longer slowly persuade them. What was more deplorable than the soldiers shooting at people was the middle class who condemned [the Redshirts] and thought that their deaths were well-deserved.”\(^{704}\)

Thai intellectual communities had been polarized even before the bloody 2010 clash and became even more deeply divided afterward. Three hundred three university lecturers and professors, of which 35 percent were affiliated with Chulalongkorn University, signed an open letter to show support for Abhisit’s government on April 8, 2010. They strongly opposed the parliamentary dissolution and demanded immediate law enforcement against the “insane violence” from the anti-government side.\(^{705}\) No scholars specializing in peace studies or non-violence condemned Abhisit’s orders to disperse which resulted in civilian deaths and causalities. In their views, violence inflicted on the Redshirts was justified since Redshirts were not political


\(^{703}\) Ida Arunwong, interview by author, March 19, 2015.

\(^{704}\) Ibid.

agents fighting for a just cause, but, in their view, had been hired or deceived by Thaksin and his satellites. Images of burnt department stores and a movie theater at the heart of the capital city fueled the hatred and disgust toward the Redshirts. Seeing the Redshirts as terrorists or the “uneducated mob,” most of Thai academics chose to be silent if not enthusiastically support the bloody crackdown.

Instead of the loss of life, renowned artists and poets mourned for the loss of buildings and nostalgically longed for an idyllic conflict-free Thailand. Chiranan Pitpreecha, a former leftist student in the 1970s, collaborated with members of the famous “song for life” band – Carabao – and produced a song in response to the deadly chaos. The song was called “Time is Up (หมดเวลา).” For these artists, it was time for every side, no matter “which color or faith,” to stop fighting because everything had vanished when Thailand was burned and covered with smoke. Without mentioning the deaths of real people, the song metaphorically emphasized the need to “put down the fire” with our tears, compassion, reason, and wisdom. It ended with the line: “Tomorrow, loving each other in Thailand might finally be possible.”

Chusak Patarakulwanich sharply pointed out that several artworks produced in the wake of the May 2010 incident not only tacitly served the powers-that-be and the status quo, but revealed how the Redshirts were dehumanized and their deaths were devalued. It was Thailand – an abstract entity – which became an object for lamentation rather than the people whose bloody bodies were full of bullet holes. In contrast with the Redshirts, these conservative artists were incapable of uttering politically disruptive terms such as killers, justice, and rights. For them,

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the post-May 2010 era was not the time to ask who ordered the killings and to express “hate speeches.” It was time to restore “love” and to enable “Thailand” to “stand up” again.

However, the time was also up for several members of the literati, but in an opposite sense. Numerous university professors and artists began to show explicit sympathy and support for the Redshirts. Read stood out from the others. During a meeting, Ida told her writer-colleagues that the main objective of Read’s upcoming 2010 special issue was “to revenge” the urban middle class.

In the 2010 issue called “Plae Mai (New Wound),” Read declared its new position as a Redshirt sympathizer, through the reading the romance-drama novel Plae Kao (Old Wound) (1936) written by Mai Muengderm. Chusak unfolded the alienation, both psychologically and materially, between urban and rural Thailand from this “Romeo and Juliet” novel.709 Kwan, the rural male protagonist who died tragically yet with integrity at the end, represented the Redshirts. At the same time, Riam, the female protagonist, went through a peculiar metamorphosis from rural to urban subject and committed suicide upon Kwan’s death. Declaring her love to Kwan at the end, Riam abandoned her urban upper-class self and stunned the rich and people with authority who surrounded her. “Riam has had enough – She has taken sides,”710 Ida wrote in an editorial of this special 2010 issue. Riam’s voice resonated with Read’s.

Being determined to no longer compromise, Read, since May 2010, offered spaces to Redshirt voices, especially those who were charged with the lèse-majesté law. In a sense, they included Redshirt stories into the world of Thai literature. Letters written from jail by people convicted of lèse-majesté were publicized to show not only the unbearable misery each prisoner had gone through, but also how they were capable of articulating things as poignantly and

710 Ida Arunwong, “เรียมเหลือทนแล้วนั่น” “(Riam has had enough),” Read 2, 4 (April-September 2010): 11.
poetically as so-called Thai intellectuals. In one issue, the story of Da Torpedo, the lèse-majesté convicted (see chapter three), was compared with the one of Ethel Rosenberg in the US who was executed for violating the Espionage Act of 1917, as an instance of “defiant women.” As a publisher, Read launched three books telling forgotten stories of the oppressed: The Heroes of April 10th: The Dead had faces. Those who were killed had life (2011), Bangkok (does not) have the Redshirts: The memoir of the Struggle of a Bangkokian Redshirt (2011), and Oh, Love (2012).

Additionally, Read magazine continued its subtle sophisticated critical stance against Thai royalism. Whether it was the Dreyfus affair in France, the Massacre of the Huguenots in 1572, or William Shakespeare’s King Lear, Read narrated stories in ways that cleverly reflected conflicts in Thailand. Appropriating contemporary Thai royalist rhetoric, Chaiyan Rachakul sarcastically explained that Charles VIII tried to “tell the media” that the Huguenots attempted to “overthrow the monarchy.” In another issue, Chaiyan depicted King Lear as the Father monarch who “always desired to be loved” and thus never “followed the self-sufficiency philosophy.” Without explicit references, the reader knew that these historical or fictional cases veiled aspects about Thai political truths. As with Nattawut’s interpretation of the Ramakien (see chapter four), these Thai literati attempted to speak truth and contested the existing power and ideology by using unrelated stories as points of departure.

713 Ida Arunwong and Warisa Arunwong, eds., วีรชน 10 เมษา: คนตายมีใบหน้า คนถูกฆ่ามีชีวิต (The Heroes of April 10th: The Dead had faces. Those who were killed had life) (Bangkok: Read, 2011).
714 Puen lan sak na, กรุงเทพไม่มีคนเสื้อแดง (Bangkok has [no] Redshirts).
715 Rosamalin Tangnoppakhun, รักเอย (Oh Love) (Bangkok: Read, 2012).
716 Chaiyan Rachakul, “ส าเหนียกให้จ งดี แผ่นดินนี้ใครครอก” “(Be well aware of) who rules this land,” Read 2, 4 (April-September 2010): 128-150.
Back in 2006, Thaksin supporters, proto-Redshirt protesters, burnt *Same Sky* journal and filed lèse-majesté charge against the editor. Now they became the magazine’s vendors and consumers. *Read* and *Same Sky* were two among many printing products sold at Redshirt gatherings and in bookshops. As mentioned in chapter one, the two magazines were placed in the middle of . In December 2015, the UDD leaders did not fail to include every issue of both magazines in the newly built Redshirt library at .

Notably, anti-royalism, articulated through the lengthy analysis of foreign and fictional incidents by university professors and well-educated writers, was immune to legal prosecution. So far, none of *Read*’s writers have been charged for defaming the monarchy. Thai authorities wiped out slogans like “the blind motherfucker ordered the killing” while taking no action regarding the satirical story of “King Lear.” Both did not feature explicit naming; however, the latter was possibly circulated less widely, might have been incomprehensible to many readers, and thus constituted lesser damage of the royal power.

5.4.2 Alliances between Redshirts and Academics: Universities as New Public Political Spaces

Gatherings led by university professors, poets, and artists built socio-political coalitions and offered novel spaces where Redshirt participants could meet friends and vent their anger as they appreciated artistic performances and listened to academic talks. Universities, particularly the top ones in Bangkok such as Chulalongkorn and Thammasat, were no longer sites of privilege nor solely of students enrolled in classes. The year 2010 marked the beginning of an era when a taxi driver like San, a former civil servant like Aunt Chan, and other seniors from the countryside had opportunities to enter top university class and conference rooms. Fulfilling these eye-opening experiences, Redshirt protesters were exposed to new linguistic and conceptual repertoires.
To begin with, a group of Thammasat University law school professors formed the “Nitirat (นิติราษฎร์, “Legal studies for the people”)” group on September 19, 2010. Led by Worajet Pakirat, Nitirat aimed to provide legal education to serve the people and revive the spirit of the People’s Party (Khanarat) – a group of civilians and soldiers which overthrew the Thai absolutist regime in 1932. Based on legal interpretations and historical and case comparisons, Nitirat offered solid explanations regarding how the 2006 coup could be illegitimate, how the Thai judiciary endorsed royalist ideology at the expense of democratic values, and the possibility of more a democratic constitution for Thailand. Holding seminars at Thammasat University, Nitirat’s popularity among Redshirts grew quickly within a few months after its formation. As a member of Nitirat stated, the sad irony was that Nitirat gained moral support from those in lower social classes such as university cleaners and janitors whereas they received no positive feedback from their fellow academicians. Even worse, “some fellow lecturers would no longer talk to the Nitirat members or even look them in the eye.”

On December 10, 2010, Nitirat held a seminar titled “The Monarchy, Constitution, and Democracy.” Packed into a conference room and standing for hours since all seats were occupied, the audience, most of which wore red t-shirts, listened to university professors on stage. The spotlight shone on Somsak Jeamteerasakul, a guest speaker, who gave his first public lecture on the monarchy. He began by stating that currently there was an “alienation between the

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monarchy and the people” in a significant way which had never existed before. He then confessed, “I am surprised that so many people attended this meeting. I thought it would be only students.”

Somsak argued that the current role and power of the Thai monarchy was fundamentally incompatible with the principles of democracy, reason, freedom, accountability, and human dignity. For instances, he cited the daily propaganda which reproduced only one-dimensional ideal image of the monarchy, the unchecked political and economic power of the royalty, and legal repression against freedom of expression. Unveiling the underlying causes of conflict, Somsak spent the first half of his talk problematizing ideological aspects of the Thai monarchy. For him, the anti-elected “corrupt” politician position derived from “unrealistic perfect images of the monarchy.” The former was thus always portrayed as lower and amoral than the latter. The Redshirt crowd cheered loudly when Somsak passionately asked, “Why don’t we wonder if those images we’re falsely constructed from the beginning?” Somsak provocatively asserted that there was no way to prove if the King was truly a hard-working ruler since the public was unable to openly check and debate anything in relation to this institution.

During the second half of his talk, Somsak showed how the royal institution including the Privy Council and members of the royal family had undeniably become key political players over the past decade. Quoting the King’s speeches made on several occasions from 2006 to 2009, Somsak concluded, “The royal institution has involved [itself] in political conflicts in ways that endorse one side and negatively affect other.” Speaking the audience’s minds, Somsak received a massive round of applause when stating, “Then, what do you expect the disadvantaged side to do? Do you expect them to act like a cow or buffalo accepting their fate?” For Somsak, the prevailing resentment against the monarchy among the Redshirts made perfect sense if we took into account both cultural and ideological conditions and the recent political roles of the
monarchy. Somsak attempted to transform public dissent from taking the form of angry yelling into open civilized debates, since this was the only way to prevent bloody clashes.

By the end of 2010, Somsak as well as members of Nitirat had turned into academic “celebrities” among the Redshirts. During early 2011, Nitirat held two prominent seminars under the titles “Army, Politics, and Democracy” and “Lèse-majesté Law.” The former demanded military reform and an end to military intervention in parliamentary politics with the ostensible aim of royal protection. The latter called for either amendment or abolition of Thailand’s lèse-majesté law. In a sense, these public intellectuals had pushed the limit of possibility of what could openly be discussed regarding the monarchy. In addition to the existing “plain and vulgar” linguistic repertoires Redshirts were familiar with, the intellectuals gave ordinary Redshirts novel weapons which they could appropriate to challenge the royal power. As Duncan McCargo and Peeradej Tanruangporn point out, “Nitirat did not invent anti-establishment dissent...But Nitirat did re-brand that dissent to make it appear 'educated' and middle class.”

Threatened by this novel form of challenge, the royalist establishment attempted to silence its critics. The Commander in Chief of the Royal Thai Army, Prayuth Chan-ocha, labeled the latter as “crazy” and “psycho” scholars who “destroyed the monarchy.” The army also filed lèse-majesté against Somsak in May 2011; however, Somsak’s case remained under investigation without further development for the next three years until the 2014 coup was staged.

5.4.3 Hybridized Protest-Academic Cultures

Since 2010, a new aspect of the Redshirt politics of resistance slowly emerged. Redshirt participants became more susceptible to modes of discourse formerly narrowly appreciated by

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723 “‘ป่ายง็าย’ของขึ้นซัด ‘ตู่’ไม่เคยตั้งวอร์รูมลต.” “(Prayuth’ got mad at ‘Tu’ and confirmed that he never set a group monitoring the election),” Dailynews Website, April 7, 2011.
the “educated” middle class such as academic debates, rock music, and short films. However, instead of playing a receptive role, ordinary Redshirts co-constitutively formed resistance culture with their intellectual alliances.

“We will not abandon each other (rao mai thotthing kan - เราไม่ทอดทิ้งกัน)” was the name of one gathering at Thammasat University organized by professors, students, and artists on September 25, 2010. The name implied a promise that from then on Redshirt commoners would receive support from parts of an academic community. Utterances both onstage and from the audience illustrated well how the two worlds, Redshirt and literati, had moved closer to each other.

Differing in background, cultural clashes inevitably occurred. On the one hand, the Redshirts had to enjoy the so-called “high arts,” such as abstract poetry mixed with sounds of acoustic guitar, mime, and theatrical performance. These languages were quite uncommon on typical Redshirt protest stages. Redshirt audience welcomed them and enthusiastically engaged with these subversive arts.

On the other hand, as Read had declared that “Riam had chosen sides,” some members of academic circles did not pretend to be “academically neutral,” and preached an ambiguous and difficult analysis from an ivory tower. Identification with the Redshirts was made explicit. During the September 25 artist/intellectual-sponsored meeting, “Red red red, love the Redshirts,” Redshirts’ most famous protest song was played as the crowd got up from their seats and started dancing frantically. A group of university students went onstage and waved red flags. “Our friends must not die in vain,” shouted one university student while reading his poem. Standing among the Redshirts, one female theatrical artist made a remark before her “experimental performance,” “The reason why I come today is that I want to know everybody better. I would

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724 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lw7TWEFSvxl.
like to understand how you feel. And I want to stand by you.”

New forms of friendship emerged across the boundaries between intellectuals and commoners, young and old, urban and rural, universities and streets.

What was remarkable was that Redshirt commoners did not embrace these “art shows” or “academic talks” in a manner of “typical” or “good” viewers. They brought their street protest culture into the artistic-academic world. Performers on stage had to get used to cacophonous yelling from the crowd, whether boos or cheers. Sometimes, the audience responded with unexpected comments which could make speakers feel uncomfortable. Below is an instance of how Redshirts participated in the artist and academic world. It happened when a female writer, Duenwad Pimwana, went on stage and read an abstract free verse poem named “The Continuous Criminal Emotion (atyaromtonueang - อาชญารมย์ต่อเนื่อง)” on September 25, 2010:

Poet: When criminal emotion made an appearance. Its heart was already burnt by fire of jealousy. Unfortunate victims were roasted for no reason. The only things of which can make sense is that “criminal emotion wants no one to outshine it.”

Audience: Loud cheers and applause

Poet: [It] chases and deprives people of goodness.

Poet: Criminal emotion has continued to exist since the time before time. Whose seed survives until today?

Audience: Monitor lizard/mother fucker (Scream repetitively)...

Poet: Love, if only it remains...

Audience: All gone! Nothing left! (The audience interrupted before the poet finished the whole sentence. With a half-smile on her face, the poet paused a few seconds.)

The hybridized atmosphere of academic seminar and “grass-root” rally was an outstanding characteristic of these public gatherings. In a sense, Redshirt commoners reversed the traditional Thai posture which placed speakers with academic backgrounds and higher social

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status at the top as the only knowledge producer capable of voicing and thus reinforcing top-down educational communication.\textsuperscript{727} Yelling, shouting, and responding to messages delivered on stage entailed a participatory politics which went against the intellectual monopolization of knowledge and was more inclusive and egalitarian. In short, Redshirt protesters to some extent brought democratic norms into the academic world.

Furthermore, ordinary Redshirts were given opportunities to go on stage and expressed their voices. Groups of artists and poets organized an event called “Free Write” which let non-professional artists submit their artworks, including poems, songs, and short movies, to compete for a “Free Write Award.” This award playfully satirized the traditional S.E.A Write Award annually given to Southeast Asian poets and writers since 1979. Under the topic “From Ratchadamneon to Ratprasong (จากราชดำเนิน ถึงราษฎร์ประสงค์),” the organizers welcomed artist participants regardless to their backgrounds. At first glance, the theme seemed to refer to the fact that the Redshirt demonstration in 2010 was initially held on historic Ratchadamneon Avenue and ended tragically at Ratchaprasong intersection (ราชประสงค์). However, a play on words was made to hint hidden political meanings. As with the names of other roads, hospitals, schools, dams, etc. in Thailand, these two sites possessed names associated closely with the royalty. \textit{Ratcha + damneon} literally means “royal + procession” whereas \textit{Ratcha + prasong} means “royal + will.” While leaving \textit{Ratchadamneon} intact, the organizers changed \textit{Ratchaprasong} (ราชประสงค์) to \textit{Ratprasong} (ราษฎร์ประสงค์). With a slight shift in pronunciation, the meaning changed from “royal will” to “people’s will.” A clever usage of a pun here contrasted \textit{Ratcha} (royal) with \textit{Rat} (people). With this ambiguous but provocative theme, each poet could create works according to their own interpretations. Below is the award-winning poem written by an unknown non-professional poet:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Ratchadamneon} walked past but did not come across
\end{quote}

Nor meet the expectation of Ratprasong. 
The middleman obstructed the way in the name of security 
And then chased the commoners away without mercy.

On one road, all men must crawl and prostate 
And always be tearfully overwhelmed. 
It is excessively full of merit, charisma, 
And praise deafening the whole land.

On another road, every step is full of suffering. 
There are many scandalous cruel stories. 
[Men] are blamed and pressed, charged so often 
That they almost run out of endurance...

The two roads are distant from one another. 
It is impossible for them to converge. 
The road heading to democracy is long, 
I wonder if I can see [its end] in my lifetime.²²⁸

This amateur poet began the first part with a personification of Ratchadamneon and Ratprasong. Then, he used a metaphorical technique to compare the two avenues to two opposite worlds where the residents had completely different ways of life and destinies. To summarize, the alienation and antagonism between Ratcha (royal, King) and Rat (people) were central to the poem. The former’s world was indulged in joy, glorification, and exaltation whereas the latter’s was in hellish agony. “Royal procession,” in other words, was never headed toward the people’s will or democracy.²²⁹ The poem offered both poetic and structural criticisms which were built on the two historical sites where Redshirts had shed tears and spilled blood. It became


²²⁹ In 1922, a cartoon in newspaper offered the same symbolic critique through visual graphic. It compared and contrasted between “the usual state of affairs” and the “royal world.” While the former featured chaotic commoners interacting to each other, the latter entailed the disappearance of commoners. Implicitly, the caricature implied that the royal world was at the expense of the absence of ordinary men. The environment was “sanitized, ordered, and controlled.” Scot Barmé concludes that this anti-royalist art revealed “the totally separate worlds inhabited by the upper and lower classes.” Scot Barmé, Woman, Man, Bangkok: Love, Sex, and Popular Culture in Thailand (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 103,
powerful because it depicted the collective experiences and emotions shared by ordinary Redshirts.

In short, this section has shown how anti-royalist voices became diversified in forms of academic discussions, literature critique, theatrical performances, and poetry in addition to “unsophisticated” and “vulgar” criticisms expressed by ordinary Redshirts. These new forms of resistance were made possible due to the willingness of both literati intellectuals and Redshirt commoners to open up to one another. Above all, they occurred when the official movement leaders were in detention and temporarily ceased their leading roles.

5.5 Eyes Opening but Lips Whispering

As I have elaborated in this chapter so far, discontent toward the monarchy and the loss of faith and respect for the royal authority, understood as eye-opening, arose from the accumulated experiences of Redshirt participants and was expressed horizontally in diverse creative ways. The articulation of anti-royalism in private, semi-public, and public spheres, sometimes individually and sometimes collectively, did not originate from the movement leader’s blueprint nor, from the perspective of contentious politics’ top-down, “master framing.” On the contrary, movement leaders and movement media not only had to catch up with the mass arts of resistance but occasionally had to circumscribe them. Each formal Redshirt leader dealt, however, with the politically awakened crowd and their subversive language differently.

First, the case of Apiwan Wiriyachai, a soldier-turned MP and UDD leader, was an instance to illustrate how formal leaders embraced the eye-opening discourse. On April 2, 2011 in Udonthani, Apiwan went on the UDD stage and greeted the Redshirts:

This field used to be pitch-dark. Now, it becomes bright since the Udonthani Redshirts have already had their eyes wide open...Clap your hands as hard as you

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can until the noise reaches the heaven in the sky. We are informing the heaven in the sky that we come to call for democracy.731

Ten thousand northeastern Redshirts screamed and roaringly applauded. Here, the “heaven” or the “Sky” was no longer the object to which Redshirts looked up and passively begged for mercy. Moreover, it was clear that Apiwan had been following Redshirt street politics. He informed the crowd with extremely popular Redshirt statement that “The monitor lizard/motherfucker ordered the killing. The damn bitch ordered the shooting.” He went on to state that opponents could criticize these phrases as rude and tasteless, so he proposed a new slogan, “The uncle ordered the killing, the aunt ordered the shooting.” The protesters laughed and cheered at Apiwan’s ambiguous sarcastic words.

Powerful was the fact that now any terms could replace “the monitor lizard” and “the damn bitch” so long as they were put into the existing narrative structure. This speech-act tacitly hit the core of the problem. That is, the enemies of the Redshirts were “unnamable.” They could be called anything but their real names.

Not all formal Redshirt leaders wholeheartedly and openly accepted their supporters’ shifted attitudes and strong resentments toward the monarchy. Some instead had a tendency to “domesticate” and “deradicalize” them. The new UDD chair, Thida Thawornseth, repetitively announced that Redshirt struggles aimed to achieve “democracy with the king as the head of state.” As she clearly drew the line, “Those who declare that the [Thai] political regime must move beyond [the current one] rejecting the King as the head of state are not UDD members although they self-claim that they are. So are those who do not respect the non-violence principle.”732 Thida

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was referring to the “revolutionary” Red Siam group led by Surachai whose popularity grew exponentially. Frictions between “formal” leaders and “informal” ones were explicit. While the former were colloquially known as “big stage (wethi yai - เวทีใหญ่),” the latter were “small stage (wethi yoi - เวทีย่อย),” located peripherally around gatherings. Nonetheless, at the mass level, interview accounts show that both shared the same audience. Suthachai observed that most participants walked in and out of both big and small stage areas. The boundary was not clear-cut from the perspectives of participants. Moreover, Pichit commented that the Redshirt masses were sometimes tired of hearing Thida’s mantra “fighting for democracy with the King as the head of state.”

In the end, the problem was regarded as a disagreement at the tactical level rather than an ideological one. Thida and other leaders, whom radical fractions labeled “reformists,” preferred to avoid attacking the monarchy and chose less challenging paths for the sake of what they alleged to be long term struggles. Indeed, the situation after the 2014 coup appeared to prove that they were probably right. Apiwan, Surachai, and those who actively and openly embraced “eye-opening” discourses were persecuted by the junta and fled Thailand. Apiwan died in the Philippines on October 6, 2014.

Finally, Nattawut was an excellent example of a Redshirt leader who stood in the middle between legal formality and sensitivity to mass feelings, long-term strategy, and emotional provocation. Unlike Thida, he did not completely neglect nor reject political awakening. At the same time, he carefully refrained both himself and Redshirts from crossing the dangerous line of lèse-majesté.

734 Pichit Likitkijsomboon, interview by author, April 1, 2015.
“Eye opening but lips whispering” was what Nattawut proposed to Redshirts as the direction of the movement ahead after he and other leaders were released in February 2011. As with other leaders who could not ignore sentiments among a vast sector of their mass, Nattawut earnestly declared that both he and everybody undoubtedly had their eyes open. But where should the movement move from this point? Playing with words, Nattawut suggested, “Eyes opening but not lips opening (ta sawang ya pak sawang -- ตาสว่าง อย่าปากสว่าง).” At one Redshirt gathering, he explained, “I have no problem with shouting. But in my opinion, we should whisper. Believe me.” Using an allegory which suited him, Nattawut continued, “It was like we drink whisky, whisky with soda or on the rocks. Those who prefer the latter, please don’t call the former a coward. I drink the same whisky but mix it with soda...because I am sure that this way I can keep on drinking until dawn.”

Without saying it explicitly, Nattawut was telling the eye-opened Redshirts the proper strategy to effectively and persistently fight the Thai establishment.

For Nattawut, “lips opening” was differentiated from “whispering.” He equated the former with “shouting.” “Lips opening,” in Nattawut’s view, was “risky” and “short-lived,” and could be interpreted as various speech-acts which took place in public, overtly confronted the authority, and included direct criticism of the monarchy. Openly throwing royal flags into the river at midday or making a telephone bomb threat at Siriraj Hospital could be classified as “lips-opening.” Preventing a number of lèse-majesté cases from surging, leaders urged the Redshirts to think carefully before articulating their anger in an explicit fashion. According to their linguistic rules, the caution was understood in short as “avoid lips opening.”

736 For case details, see http://freedom.ilaw.or.th/en/case/22.
Oppositely, Nattawut’s insistence on having his eyes open but not his mouth could be read as a response to emerging roles and pressures from intellectual allies. Since late 2010, the Nitirat group, Somsak, and others had expanded the boundary of what could be publicly criticized. They showed the masses that it was not unlawful to show how Thai royalism as an ideology, its monarchical roles and statuses, and the lèse-majesté law were incompatible with principles of democracy, equality, freedom, and the rule of law. Somsak, in particular, demanded more “audacious” actions from movement leaders. He was not satisfied with the leader’s mere appropriation of eye-opening discourses and refusal to seriously tackle the problematic roles and power of the monarchy. He repetitively sent this message to the UDD leaders. Nattawut’s speech-act thus could be interpreted as his decision not to take on the approach of the intellectuals – lips opening.

What could then be counted as acts of whispering – subversive speech-acts which were doable and safe? Although Nattawut did not give a concrete list of appropriate acts, it possibly included those private acts of removal of the portraits at home and indirect naming, such as “monitor lizard/motherfucker.” As for the latter, even if people did shout it aloud, it still could be considered as whispering. The boundary between “lips-opening” and “whispering” was always blurred, since it depended on how the ruling power responded. A particular act could shift from the latter to the former if it became too pervasive or was suddenly ruled by the court as a crime of lèse-majesté. For example, during 2006-2013, no one had ever gone to jail because of any reference to “blindness” in relation to the King; however, after the 2014 coup, the military court criminalized it and imprisoned at least three internet users.\(^737\)

\(^737\) In the wake of the 2014 coup, phrases such as “a blind uncle on a wheelchair,” “a car with one headlight,” and “a one eyed human” were interpreted as the allusion to the King.
Around 3-4 am on March 27, 2011 at a Redshirt massive gathering titled “The Dawn of Justice,” Nattawut went on stage and offered examples of what could be understood as “whispering.” Earlier that night, he had already delivered formal political speeches. Now, he just showed up to entertain the crowd, for they had to stay overnight outdoors. Probably having drunk several whisky-sodas, Nattawut’s face was as red as his shirt. From the inception, his drunken voice and sleepy eyes set a casual mood. However, underneath this light atmosphere and the jokes, Nattawut addressed something important:

(To the fans) The reason why you are all crazy about me is not because you love me. But because you think what I did reflects what is in your heart. In fact, you did not want this outspoken cute young man. I understand that you just want anyone who can stand out from the mass and talk to .... “those people” (opening his arms and lifting his hands up) whoever is looking down from above. You just want anyone who can speak on behalf of your heart [and say], “Hey! Man from above .... (He paused and immediately confirmed that) I am sure you all know I am referring to Prem, right? (cheers and applause, he continued) Hey! man from heaven, if you think that we are all equal, that’s ok. But if you think that you are so high and we are so low and cheap and that you can disparagingly look down on us, you are wrong. And we will fight to our deaths.

(Suddenly Nattawut lowered his voice) And certainly, the man I refer to now is Prem. You believe that I mean Prem, don’t you? (Crowd laughed and shouted back inaudibly) What is on your mind is what is on my mind. But I think I am talking about Prem. (cheers)”

Lots of people asked me… Saying quietly without shouting or ta sawang (eyes open) without pak sawang (lips open). Are these the right direction? I’m just gonna say, my dear brothers and my dear friends, no matter which direction you take, just go ahead, keep on going until you reach the destination of your heart. It does not matter which direction you take. If you want to shout out loud, go ahead. If you want to whisper, go ahead... If you want to slowly, tell people around you what you are thinking, and slowly send a message to them...go ahead. And...... the goal of these all directions - let me confirm – the goal is to take down General Prem. (Crowd laughed, the band behind Nattawut hit a drum, signaling jokes) ... I am the most honest guy......Do you understand me?

(Nattawut raised his hands up and raised his voice) I will fight!!! I will ta sawang. I may not pak sawang. I will whisper, do anything, resist against, destroy, abolish ....raise consciousness, anything I can!!!... (Intentionally lowering his voice) I will take down Prem.
TV cameraman, capture my face right now, please do. I will signal something.
Ok, have you all got me?

All of these that I just said. Look at me well. Alllllll of these..., we don’t want Prem (Nattawut winked his eyes to the camera and at the crowd) (crowd cheered loudly.) Do you think that sometimes, getting drunk and playing dumb can be an effective strategy to win?  

As chapter three and four have delineated in detail, during 2006-9, the anti-coup protesters used to “seriously” attack Prem mocking his sexuality and calling him the head of the ammat. Formal movement leaders had attempted to direct the crowd’s hatred and resentment to this old privy councilor. But now in 2011, meanings surrounding the figure of Prem changed as a result of the drastic shift in political consciousness. As Nattawut’s speech has shown, the term “General Prem” was used so superfluously that one could not be sure whether it was just Prem or something else which was higher and more powerful than Prem. Intentionally repeating that he only wanted to take down Prem, Nattawut winked his eyes and changed the tone of his voice every time he mentioned “Prem.” In this sense, Prem was instrumentalized in humorous ways for serious and risky political purposes. Hidden political messages were sent to the audience without explicit communication. Nattawut provided an example of how to “whisper” loudly onstage in front of ten thousand viewers. All of this was made possible on the condition that both the speaker and the audience shared a degree of “infrapolitics” in terms of belief and semantic systems.  

But how could acts of whispering enable the movement to accomplish its political cause; achieving democracy? Were they merely functioning as channels for venting frustrations and reproducing beliefs and discourses that Redshirts already shared in private and semi-public

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738 Nattawut Saikua’s speech on March 27, 2011 at Redshirt rally, Nakhonratchasrima, Thailand. The video clip is no longer available on Youtube.
spheres? Representing progressive intellectual voices, Somsak demanded something more than “whispering,” among the movement leaders and intellectuals. Below was his criticism:

The “symbolic” articulation has limited effects among “eye-opened” people psychologically. But the ideological cultural struggles require the attempt to build a new culture and ideology to substitute for the old one – the royalist cultural ideology (watthanatham udomkan kasat niyom - วัฒนธรรมอุดมการณ์กษัตริยนิยม) which dominates [the society] and serves as a “foundation” of the current undemocratic ruling.740

For Somsak, there was a need to build up the new democratic ideology which had to be slowly expanded in public spaces. He emphasized that direct debates and discussions critical of the Thai monarchy were not necessarily illegal. As Somsak suggested, “Rather than ‘whispering’ all the time, Nattawut and other leaders can ‘shout’ on particular issues without being prosecuted.”741 Indeed, in order to avoid random legal prosecutions against ordinary people, Somsak insisted that public criticism was indispensable now and was more effective. Having stronger social “immunity,” the so-called “progressive” and “democratic” movement leaders and intellectuals, in Somsak’s view, must take responsibility to set examples for ordinary people. He argued that because intellectuals were too scared to push the limits of possibility, ordinary people who did not know “proper” ways to express their feelings and thoughts became victims of Thailand’s lèse-majesté regime. Also, Somsak called for bolder moves in response to the cases of lèse-majesté, of which main victims were Redshirts. He later attacked Nattawut, who won an election and turned into a Member of Parliament in July 2011 and later a Minister, for not doing


enough to fight for Redshirt political prisoners. In this sense, Somsak attempted to play both educational and supervisory roles in association with the Redshirt movements.

Somsak did not criticize the Redshirt participants and their unsophisticated articulations of eye-opening. On the contrary, he positively viewed that the expressions of the masses were far more ahead than their leaders’. But in the end, Somsak, the former leftist student activist, believed that the masses still needed to be guided and that “significant” change was impossible unless the leaders and intellectuals started playing their public roles, ideologically and strategically. While Nattawut demonstrated how to “whisper” by repeating what had already thrived among his supporters, Somsak showed how to “shout” properly by paving the way in the new territory of criticism.

As opposed to anonymity, Somsak always used his real name, even on his Facebook page where controversial and critical writings against the monarchy could be found. For him, using real names generated real impact. The frontier must be adjusted openly, not behind the scenes. For these reasons, Somsak had long tried to set examples and prove that public criticisms and negative comments on the monarchy were possible. In contrast to Nattawut’s assessment, Somsak insisted that his solution would bear long-term results and prevent violent confrontation, if not a civil war. A direct critique did not have to be rude, elusive, nor codified. It could be a sincere public call for institutional reform of the monarchy. Known as the eight-point proposal, Somsak demanded an end to the following laws and customs:

1. Section 8 of the constitution, “The King shall be enthroned in a position of revered worship and shall not be violated.”
2. Article 112 of the Criminal Code or lèse-majesté law
3. The Privy Council
4. The Crown Property Act of 1948
5. One dimensional royal publicity and indoctrination in educational system

6. Royal power to make comments on politics
7. Royal power regarding all royal projects
8. Donation to the royalty and royal projects

Despite Somsak’s encouragement and pressures, most UDD leaders chose to keep their sound at “whisper” level. Arguably, March and April 2011 was a period during which popular UDD leaders such as Nattawut and Jatuporn delivered provocative speeches implicitly challenging the royalist establishment. The term “eye-opening” was constantly repeated and followed by cheers from exuberant Redshirt crowds. Unfortunately, this radical turn seemed to be a temporary rather than enduring direction for the movement. In May 2011, 19 UDD leaders were summoned to acknowledge lèse-majesté charges. This was a cautionary action made by the powerful that they would not tolerate any louder whisper. UDD leaders thus ceased to push further the limits since the effort was too risky. More importantly, election season was just around corner after Abhisit dissolved the parliament on May 10, 2011. While there was no guarantee that the eye-opened Redshirts would win in the battle against their royalist elite either by whispering or shouting, it was quite certain that they had the upper hand when it came to electoral politics. Therefore, organizationally and publicly, all energies and efforts were spent on electoral campaign.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored acts of resistance which gravely undermined the Thai royal power and legitimacy. The killings of Redshirt protesters in 2010 had opened the Pandora box of Thai politics. This critical moment transformed doubt into certainty, love into hatred, and

benevolent Father into motherfucking murderer. The latest wave of anti-royalism in Thailand was ideologically embedded, experiential, emotionally-laden, and semiotically flexible. Eye-opening was understood as a drastic shift from one set of beliefs to another caused by disappointment and senses of betrayal. This “emotion work” in relation to the popular uprising was neither cultivated nor mobilized from above. Instead of systematic and ritualized meetings in which people spoke bitterness and accusations, ordinary Redshirts created horizontal spaces where dissent feelings and voices could be expressed outwardly.

The post-2010-crackdown era contributed to significant changes in terms of movement’s organizational structure. First, progressive semi-autonomous sub-groups such as Sombat’s Red Sunday group, Surachai’s Red Siam group, and Somyot’s June 24 for Democracy gained more roles in the movement. Second, amidst the atmosphere of high curiosity and eagerness to vent and voice discontent, new spaces where ordinary Redshirts and Thai intellectuals could exchange and build up the common language of anti-royalism slowly emerged.

Redshirt official leaders not to mention the Pheu Thai Party, contrarily, often played roles in quieting and harnessing the crowd’s emotion. Arguably, the post-2010 Redshirt movements were, on the one hand, driven by the crowd’s passion, while, on the other, lacked a formal party to endure the collective madness of the crowd.

Finally, this moment of madness and testing the possibility of Thai royalism was disrupted by the Thaksin-endorsed Pheu Thai Party’s electoral victory in July 2011. Yingluck Shinawatra, Thaksin’s youngest sister, became the first female prime minister of Thailand. Despite the shootings and killings, the Redshirts were at least content with the fact that Thailand was again

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746 Ibid., 116.
led by their representatives and normal parliamentary politics seemed to return. The next chapter explores anti-royalism under more democratic context administered by the civilian government supported by the Redshirts.
6.1 Introduction

Please look down. The shameless people from the Sky.
The crowd is crying and cursing madly.
Rather than the noise of anarchy,
This is the roar of revolution.
We came to know what evils made us suffer.
We are no longer naïvely unaware of the problem.
Those filthy lying gnats could be named.
Our eyes became clearly open with no obscurity...
History must remember this battle.
Docile happy servants, there will no longer be.
Look down, look down! Thai lords.
The tormented phrai will stand up.

Anon Nampa’s Look Down poem

From late-2011 to May 2014, Thai politics can be understood from two different perspectives. On the one hand, looking at politics from a formal institutional perspective, the electoral parliamentary returned. In July 2011, the Pheu Thai Party won 265 of 500 seats and formed the government. Thaksin Shinawatra’s youngest sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, became Thailand’s 28th prime minister. Led by Abhisit Vejjajiva, the Democrat Party became the opposition as the second-largest party in the House of Representatives. Attempting to keep anti-Thaksin forces at bay, Yingluck chose not to make any political move which could provoke her oppositions. As Kevin Hewison observes, “compromise and reconciliation” had been Yingluck’s political strategies. Preventing another round of juridical intervention, mass mobilizations, political conflicts, and military coup, the Yingluck government made no concrete attempt to dismantle the

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748 Anon Nampa, posted to Anon Nampa’s Facebook account, February 25, 2013, accessed October 13, 2016.
ammat or royalist elite’s power network, not to mention undertaking a reform of the royal institution or the lèse-majesté law. Prem Tinsulanond, the Redshirts’ key political foe, was publicly treated by Yingluck and Thaksin with respect. During a policy address, one Pheu Thai leader insisted that the government had no plan to amend the lèse-majesté law and the Pheu Thai Party and its supporters were all loyal to the monarchy. Another party leader even asserted that Prem did not play any political role in the 2006 coup.

Formal Redshirt organization did not make a royalist U-turn as did the Pheu Thai Party. Still, its public transcripts were limited to the attack against Prem, the King’s adviser, whereas the main focus was on the celebration of the first female prime minister of Thailand. The cover of Red Power, published after Yingluck’s electoral victory shows smiley Yingluck, whose nickname was Pu, dressed as a superwoman. The headline read, “The higher P. Pu, the lower P. Prem.” At the bottom left, there was an image of Abhisit and Suthep, the former prime minister and vice prime minister, being hung.

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750 “อนุดิษฐ์ถล่มปชป.ทำเว็บหมิ่น” (Anudit attacked the Democrat regarding lese-majeste websites),” Kom chat luek Website, August 23, 2011.
On the other hand, as this chapter will detail, this period can be seen as a continuation of the previous eye-opening outbreak. Never before in Thailand’s political history did the power and status of the Thai monarchy become topics for debate and discussion both public and semi-public. Underneath the political stability and the compromise at the elite level, anti-royalism expanded and multiplied horizontally among various Redshirt groups. Despite the absence of a strong institutional endorsement, I argue that 2011-2014 was the time when rhetoric and symbolic contestation against Thai royalism became highly salient. This political activism occurred outside the realm of administration and the movement’s formal structure. In a sense, the government and the UDD did allow certain kinds of “whisper” to exist and circulate. Criticisms of the monarchy were simplified, symbolized humorously, and subtly expressed on T-shirts, stickers, songs, and online visual graphics.
So far, chapter three to five have shown that Redshirt anti-royalism emerged as a response of the royalist ideology’s contradiction. They emphasize how repetitive feelings of disappointment and first-handed experiences of injustice played important roles in cultivating Redshirts’ resentments and new political ideologies. This chapter mainly discusses various modalities of anti-royalist articulation after the “eye-opening outbreak” resulting from the May 2010 massacre.

Anon Nampa’s poem above demonstrates that people from the “Sky” were urged to “look down” and listen to the “revolutionary roars” of commoners (phrai). Playing with words, Anon juxtaposed the former who “look down” with the latter who “luk yuen” (stand up – ลุกยืน). Here, the poet implied the impossibility of the former having clear insight and vision regarding reality in which the people not only had had their eyes wide open, but also had already bidden farewell to a culture of kowtowing, submissively paying respect to the superior class, and acquiescence to a lower position. The phrai had learned to stand upright.

Written in 2013, Anon’s poem did not talk about “revolutionary roars” uttered by formal movement and party leaders. Rather, anti-royalist voices of revolution were expressed in protest songs played on small stages and in poems, stickers on vehicles, laughter, numeric symbols, and visual graphics. In May 2010, Redshirt protesters had been defeated in the armed struggle against their royalist opponents. However, from 2011 to 2014, they launched another war, a war of language and symbols. Echoing James C. Scott’s idea of everyday resistance, this anti-royalism occurred in everyday life, was affordable to Redshirt commoners, and, to some extent, was safe from legal prosecution under the rule of the civilian government. Far from being ephemeral, this anti-royalism could be endured and reproduced for a period of time. As Scott rightly points out,

\[752\] In an interview, Anon stressed that the Sky and royals alluded to “Thai elites including Prem.” Anon Nampa, interview by author, Bangkok, April 2, 2015.
hidden transcripts such as “rumor…folktales, jokes, songs, rituals, codes, and euphemisms” can be operated as “infrapolitics” in upcoming overt and organized struggles.\footnote{\textsuperscript{753} James C. Scott, \textit{Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcript} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 19.}

Instead of taking arms and refuge in secluded mountains as did Thai leftist and communist fighters in the past, ordinary Redshirts hid beneath linguistic ambiguity, humor, and vulgarity. Their resistance entailed creative skills which enabled them to keenly pick particular non-political themes and signs such as “love” or “dinosaur” or specific sets of numbers such as 112, politicizing them with additional challenging meanings and employing them to address political agendas and undermine the legitimacy of royalist opponents. Developing to the mature stage, modalities of resistance could be expanded by acts of exaggeration, de-contextualization, and absurdist parody.

While Scott’s reconceptualization of resistance rather emphasizes on the continuation of the status-quo, the experimental challenges made by eye-opened Redshirts continued to radicalize themselves, re-draw the boundary of the permissible, and solicit responses from the powers-that-be. What distinguished the latest anti-royalism from anti-royalism in the past was that the former was not clandestine underground activities but rather public acts of contestation over meaning-makings. In fact, these challenges were similar to Patricia Thornton’s concept of “evocative transcript” -- a form of expression of dissent in contemporary China. According to Thornton, “evocative transcript” includes “texts that are ‘intended to elicit or evoke particular interpretation beyond the surface meaning’.\footnote{\textsuperscript{754} Patricia Thornton, “Framing Dissent in Contemporary China: Irony, Ambiguity, and Metonymy,” \textit{The China Quarterly} 171 (2002): 666.} Moreover, these evocative anti-royalist language and symbols could be seen as what Lynn Hunt called “the political culture of revolution.”\footnote{\textsuperscript{755} Lynn Hunt, \textit{Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 13.} For Hunt, the Revolutionary French attempted to break with the monarchical tradition through “new
political microtechniques.”  Revolution thus does not only involved a drastic transformation of socio-economic and political structure. Rather, as Hunt maintains:

During the Revolution, even the most ordinary objects and customs became political emblems and potential sources of political and social conflict. Colors, adornments, clothing, plateware, money, calendars, and playing cards become “signs of rallying” to one side or another...In this way, they constitute a field of political struggle.

“Revolution” used in Anon’s poem was the revolution in Hunt’s sense. While the royalist camps attempted to sweepingly criminalize new challenging political culture and accused those who created or circulated them of attempting to “abolish the monarchy,” I contend that Redshirt anti-royalism, flourishing during 2011 – 2014, rather strived for liberal politics in which freedom of expression, basic equality among people, and principles of equal representation were upheld. Taking a close look at Redshirt voices of dissent, it was not the monarchy itself which they wished to take down, but its divine, exceptional, and publicly uncriticizable characters.

Ultimately, this period of liberalization ended after the May 22, 2014 military coup d’état which brought about the relapse of full military dictatorship. Political instability originated from the ill-conceived amnesty bill passed by the lower house. The bill was perceived to whitewash all involved in Thailand’s conflicts since 2004 except lèse-majesté. Fearing the return of Thaksin, massive anti-Yingluck demonstration was mobilized in late 2013 and occupied several Bangkok’s landmarks. Explosion and chaotic violence broke out although Yingluck dissolved the parliament and scheduled for general election. The royalist-nationalist protests obstructed electoral process and proposed a political reform aiming to cleanse the nation of Thaksin’s influences carried out by the appointed “people council.” Finally, a group of Thai royal army, led by General Prayuth Chan-ocha, seized power on May 22, 2014.

757 Ibid., 53.
6.2 When the King turned into a Clown: Anti-royalist Humour

Laughter and humour can be political weapons – voices of opposition and desires for change uttered from the oppressed class.\textsuperscript{758} The more authoritarian the political regime, the more unlawful and powerful the laughter. Regimes embedded in the personality cults of leaders are vulnerable to the sense of humour of their critics. The Nazis, the Soviet Union, and Maoist regimes could not stand a joke.\textsuperscript{759} To laugh shows disrespect and disrupts the idealized images of the omnipotent ruler. Above all, it collapses hierarchical social norms since “all are equal when everyone can be reduced to the butt of a joke.”\textsuperscript{760} No doubt, in Thailand, direct mockery of the monarchy is a crime. In the previous chapter, anger, bitterness, and disappointment directed at the monarchy mainly constituted anti-royalist expressions made by Redshirt commoners. One year later, these emotions were gradually replaced with humor. Transformed into the object of laughter, the monarchy and its divine power were gravely undermined. This section explores how Thai royal figures were caricatured in powerful fashion through anonymous collective laughter, comic protest songs, and sarcastic visual graphics.

6.2.1 Anonymous Laughter of the Crowd

During Yingluck’s ruling era, there was a great difference between politics within and outside the formal realms regarding the issue of the monarchy. Debating in the parliament, Nattawut Saikua, now a Pheu Thai MP, received loud boos and objections when he simply stated that the monarchy, which he “undoubtedly revered,” had been instrumentalized for political


purposes and used to destroy too many innocent lives. To avoid chaos, he was eventually forced to revoke his statement. On the other hand, going beyond public political debates, another kind of chaotic situation emerged when discussing the monarchy. In contrast with Nattawut’s case, this time, the speaker was hackled and sneered when he praised the King.

In one meeting “Court and Justice regarding Article 112” convened by Nitirat, Piyabutr Saengkanokkul, a law school professor, was about to give a lecture which critically examined the judicial decision made by members of the constitutional court. Each judge had provided explanations supporting the idea that Thailand’s lèse-majesté law was not unconstitutional. Thammasat’s auditorium was crowded by Redshirt supporters. Piyabutr told the audience that he inevitably had to read the reasons given by each judge. In his calm soft voice, Piyabutr “warned” the active audience, “I am going to read the court decision which mostly praises the King (เนื้อหายอพระเกียรติ). I beg everyone here not to hiss (ขอความกรุณาทุกท่านอย่าไหว้) since, under the current regime, you might be able to think but cannot express it publicly.”

Knowing his audience well, Piyabutr could anticipate how the Redshirt mass would have reacted to the court verdict which, in his view, was merely an exaltation of the monarchy with no reference to legal principles. The content included phrases such as “to violate the head of state is to breach the security of the nation,” “an insult against the King leads to an assault against the feelings of all Thai,” and “the King embodies dignity, political neutrality, permanent head of state, and national unity.” Cautioned by the speaker, the Redshirts toned down their aggressive reactions. However, they still could not completely suppress their feelings. Loud boos mixing with laughter were made boisterously after Piyabutr read the following sentences:

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The Thai King has been the leader of the Thai people who enabled the nation to overcome many obstacles and disasters. Thailand thus retains her independence and Thainess until now. He has endorsed religious institutions, educational systems, and infrastructure. He built the streets, canals, electricity, postal systems, telegraph, telephone, banks, railroads etc.

As Piyabutr listed the King’s achievement, rumbles disrupted a quiet academic atmosphere. The speaker said politely, “Please be patient.” This public seminar took place on March 17, 2013. While it was a significant breakthrough that people could organize public debates which were explicitly critical of the lèse-majesté law, responses from the audience were as important as what was stated on stage. It told us how radically the popular belief regarding the monarchy had changed. In 2013 Thailand, at least one had to admit that there are a number of people who not only refused to be “moved to tears,” but found typical glorifications of the King so amusing and disturbing that they had to laugh and boo in the middle of a conference room.

The seminar and what was uttered on stage were not intended to evoke laughter. The university professors were not there to make fun of the monarchy. However, replication of royalist ideas itself appeared to be a joke for the audience. In a sense, what was frightening for the royalist regime was not a systematic ideological critique given by few well-educated intellectuals, since they could be identified and easily muted. Here the dissenters were the members of a faceless passionate crowd who were deeply engaged in the talks and ready to explode their disrespect toward the monarchy in ways that were unpredictable and uncontrollable.

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762 Piyabutr Saengkanokkul, “ศาลกับความยุติธรรมในสังคมไทย” “(Court and Justice regarding Article 112)” (video of an academic talk, Thammasat University, Bangkok, March 17, 2013), accessed May 12, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KfBY9knPNs.
6.2.2 The Birth of Faiyen: The Musical Band at “Eye-Opening Stages”

During 2012 – 2014, comic anti-royalist texts were expressed through street protest songs. Instead of criticisms taking the form of hour-long speeches or academic talks, the so-called Faiyen band simplified and presented their political ideas in four-minute songs. The protest songs contained radical yet indirect messages regarding the monarchy; but at the same time, they featured plain language and fun rhymes of pop and modern luk thung genre. Circulated via lived performance, online media, and VCDs, Faiyen’s music brought smiles to listeners’ faces while indirectly mocking the royal institution.

“Can you tell me how the band members came together?” I started asking an interview question to five members of Faiyen band. Chor, a band leader and keyboarder, immediately replied with a loud clear voice, “How we came? Some came by bus…Some came by…” The vocalist interrupted his leader, “No no no, she did not mean that.” Chor made an innocent face. Others giggled. Then, they informed me, “This is how Faiyen is.” I wonder if I was interviewing a musical band or comedy group.

The meeting and interview took place in November 2014 outside Thailand. It had been six months since five band members had left their beloved families and home country and lived in exile. Their names were on the junta’s blacklist. Unlike several fugitives, they decided not to cross the ocean to Western countries where they would benefit from a better quality of life. Jom, the vocalist in his early thirty, commented that he wanted to stay “nearby” Thailand since he hoped to return soon and keep on fighting.763 Still, despite hardships and hopelessness, the band members were able to tease me and made jokes anytime they had a chance.

In regard with the band’s history, the May 2010 crackdown was the turning-point for band members. Previously, these educated urbanites who fell in love with music sympathized, to some

extent, with Redshirts. They used to attend demonstrations occasionally, but merely as normal participants. However, the 2010 violence hit them at the core, “Why didn’t it help us?” similar question was raised. Chor continued, “Eye-opening means that people know who has been behind everything. The monitor lizard/mother fucker ordered the killing.” Suddenly, band members were inspired to use their musical talents and skills to serve political causes. December 31, 2011 was the date when they first played live music and became officially known as Faiyen.

For them, protest songs should be accessible to ordinary people. Chor used to work professionally in the Thai music industry, arranging songs and producing soundtracks. He even sarcastically bragged that he had written several “royalist songs.” Due to his lifelong experience in musical field, Chor knew how to insert catchy slogans into his music to attract the audience, for example, “Uncle Somchai Aunt Somjit” (ลุงสมชายป้าสมจิต), “Refuse to love, watch out for jail” (ไม่รักนะระวังติดคุก), “Why not grant bail” (ทำไมไม่ให้ประกัน)? These keywords were names and parts of lyrics of Faiyen’s popular songs played on “small stages” at Redshirt gatherings.

Faiyen’s most popular song is “Uncle Somchai and Aunt Somjit.” Somchai and Somjit are unknown public figures in Thailand. They are names substituting what is unutterable. Far from making serious political statements, the song tells the story of Uncle Somchai who has to go to the hospital to escape his messy family situation. First, his wife, Aunt Somjit, “is always ignorant and loves to dress up in sparkly clothes, play cards, and dance.” Then, his son, a womanizer, is notorious for changing lovers. Finally, the daughters are so annoying that no man can stand them. The song repeats the following phrase many times, “Uncle Somchai...Aunt Somjit, Uncle Somchai...Aunt Somjit. The most popular family whose story is known by members of every society.”

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764 Names of the three songs in English transliteration are Lung som chai pa som chit, Mai rak na rowang tit khuk, and Thammai mai hai prakan.
765 Faiyen played this song live for the first time on December 31, 2011.
In an interview, a Redshirt sub-leader in Bangkok recalled that they invited Faiyen to perform in their area. He further described that when the audience heard “Uncle Somchai, Aunt Somjit,” they danced along and did particular gestures that further specified who the uncle and aunt were. That is, first they covered their right eyes with hands and then they acted as if they were handing out invisible cards. These symbolic practices could be read that Somchai was a blind man whereas Somjit was fond of gambling. “Somchai” and “Somjit” were no longer demi-gods worshipped by people. On the contrary, their life misery gratified them.

Despite indirect naming, Faiyen was confident that Redshirt audience understood the hidden political messages. For instance, after singing “Uncle Somchai, Aunt Somjit,” the crowd shout “both are monitor lizards/ motherfuckers (hia thangku - เหี้ยทั้งคู่).” Afterward, feedback shifted to “the whole clan are monitor lizards/motherfuckers (hia thang khot - เหี้ยทั้งครอบครัว).” Improvisationally, anti-royalist language and practices, of which origins were diverse, were mixed, matched, and reproduced on the ground. They gradually constituted a seditious sub-culture which did not take the form of academic systematic critique, but rather entailed mockery, vulgarity, and entertainment.

From the beginning, Faiyen distinguished themselves from mainstream Redshirt musicians. In their view, existing protest songs unsatisfactorily served two main purposes. First, they aimed to hit the Democrats, Prem, and the ammat in a limited fashion. Second, most Redshirt songs were of the so-called “encouragement” type, praising and honoring the movement and leaders. Faiyen ambitiously wished to open up new territories of Redshirt music. Heavily influenced by Somsak Jeamteerasakul’s ideas, they put the monarchy and royalism at the center of their works. Chor explained this by using a metaphor, “The problem was that it was impossible

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766 Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, May 9, 2015.
to fight without mentioning the ‘upstairs.’ Either the army or the judiciary was linked to the ‘upstairs.’ It was like a clog in a drain. Faiyen helped unclog the drain and made things flow smoothly.”

They further clarified the goal of their political activism:

> Our goal is to change the society... Indeed if you carefully look at the lyrics, Faiyen has no intention of abolishing the monarchy. We just want them to stay away from politics and stop oppressing people and reproducing inequality. Our goal is different from the Communist Party’s [of Thailand]. We just want liberal democracy – the freedom to criticize. The main technique we use to attack opponents is desacralization and parody. We change fear into a joke. Ordinary people are often afraid when listening to these things. But when they listen to Faiyen’s songs, they laugh.

Although Faiyen’s popularity from 2012-2014 was far less than the UDD leaders’ and Redshirt artists, they were constantly invited to perform by Redshirt regional or independent groups. While they insisted that the audience welcomed them, enjoyed their songs, and never got confused or angry with their “anti-royalist” contents, UDD leaders attempted to marginalize and exclude them. Faiyen only had a chance to perform on the UDD stage one time at 4 a.m. with the secret help of mainstream Redshirt artists.

After the 2014 coup, Faiyen members were the only group of Redshirt musicians who decided to flee; others needed to report themselves to the coup makers and none of them were pressed with any legal charge. In an interview, Pae Bangsanan, the most famous Redshirt singer, did not hide his admiration toward his “progressive” artist fellows. Pae admitted, “[Our] struggle takes long time. At one moment in the future, people might still be talking about Faiyen’s songs instead of ‘Love the Redshirts.”’ The latter was Pae’s biggest hit. As Pae humbly stated, his works could only give moral support under specific circumstances while Faiyen “talked about the

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768 Chor, interview by author, November 24, 2014.
769 Jom, interview by author, November 24, 2014.
underlying problem.” As “Uncle Somchai, Aunt Somjit” has shown, Faiyen not only touched upon underlying problems but successfully transformed them into a joke.

6.2.3 The Comic Representation of the Royal Family

In Western liberal democratic regimes, all political leaders are subject to ridicule, in particular through the visual arts. As Italian artist Cristina Guggeri’s photomontage entitled “The Daily Duty” illustrated in 2015, Obama, Putin, Queen Elizabeth, and even the Dalai Lama were portrayed as sitting on the toilet doing their “duty.” Linking these world leaders with the most common activity of human beings, comic arts stripped off their exceptional power. Of course, censorship regarding certain kinds of humour existed in the so-called free society. Mockery regarding race and ethnicity can be condemned as political incorrectness or bad jokes, but not a seditious crime. Yet, these liberal rules, despite their limitations, were not applied in Thailand.

King Bhumibol’s recent reign was full of polarized cultural practices associated with royalism. On the one hand, the King was elevated to “a living Buddha,” “a deva on earth,” and “a hard-working Father who now deserved comfort and rest.” On the other hand, the King as well as other members of royal family also obtained several names invented by his eye-opened subjects. As the previous chapters have shown so far, some codenames were used just to avoid direct references, whereas others added overtones of contempt, desacralization, and mockery. For instance, the monarchy, as an institution, was referred to as “the Sky,” and “the upstairs.” The King was dubbed “number one,” “monitor lizard,” “Uncle Somchai,” and “the blind bastard.” The Queen was called “number two,” “damned bitch,” “Aunt Somjit,” and “the Red Lip.”

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770 Pae Bangsanan, interview by author, Bangkok, May 7, 2015.
Making fun of physical disability or appearance were central to these subversive representations of the monarchy. As mentioned in chapter one and five, the word “blind (bot – บอด)” undermines the fundamental idea of a monarch gifted with deep insight and wisdom. With this short simple word, Bhumibol’s sacredness was gravely violated. However, an overt usage of “blind” was too risky. “The blind bastard (ai bot)” remained hidden in private conversations, anonymous graffiti, and underground online media. Published in a cyber world, a series of audio clips titled “Banpodj (บรรพต)” provided information from within the palace and analysis regarding the royal family. They contained several codenames such as “the blind bastard,” “the whale,” and “the butch bitch.” Transgressing into public spheres, the articulation of “blind” as an anti-royalist concept took in many subtle humorous ways. As the previous section has elaborated, Redshirt participants playfully covered their eyes while dancing along with Uncle Somchai song.

On October 6 and 13, 2013, the now-defunct Prakai (spark) theater group performed a political play called “the Wolf Bride” at Thammasat University. With an incoherent plot, the play depicted a story of a beggar, a fictional protagonist, who became a monarch, married his wolf bride, and was poisoned by his Brahmin advisor. This imaginative king was portrayed as an indecisive and gullible ruler who was manipulated by his homosexual adviser. There were many scenes which made the audience, most of which were Redshirt participants, burst into laughter. According to Redshirt aunties at the , the most memorable and impressive


773 Around late 2011, a man who went under the name Banpodj started making audio clips and publicized via Youtube. These clips had not been banned for four years. Labeled by the Thai authority “Banpodj Network,” twelve men were arrested and charged with lese majeste law in early 2015 because they had produced and shared these audio clips. Banpodj audio clips were instances of Thai anti-royalism which contained several codenames such as “the blind bastard,” “the whale,” and “the butch bitch.” Catching up with royal codenames, in 2016, the military court ruled that the term “whale” insulted the Queen and constituted a lèse-majesté crime.

moment of the play was when the king gouged out his fake eyeball and washed it so that he could regain his “farsightedness.” This was not only another instance of subversive and humorous appropriation of “blindness,” but also of how the boundary of criticisms expanded during this period. No doubt, the play enraged many royalists. They filed lèse-majesté charges against the theater crew. Still, no immediate arrest and legal prosecution was made.

The King’s blindness was sometimes mocked in a very tacit fashion. In a cyber world, out of nowhere, one Facebook user posted a photo of Steve Jobs and his non-existent “iboard” device. Bigger than a phone or a pad, Jobs was holding a board. It was called an “iboard” of which pronunciation was similar with ai bot which meant “the blind bastard.” In Thai, the caption read, “I have already bought ai bot (iBoard)” (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2: Iboard. Indirect allusion to the King’s blindness through visual graphic (Source: Ruthless Facebook, 2012)

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775 Fiednotes, Bangkok, March 31, 2015.
776 The freedom situation drastically worsened after the 2014 military coup. Two activists involving in the play were charged with lèse-majesté and sentenced to two and a half years of imprisonment. Others fled the country and lived in exile.
While the King was mocked as an incompetent ruler who “lacked vision,” the Queen was rather caricatured of her lavish lifestyle. As Faiyen song described Aunt Somjit as an “ignorant person, who loves to dress up glamorously, play cards, and dance,” the queen’s rude nicknames similarly ridiculed her extravagant way of life, her weight, and rumors regarding the Saudi blue diamond affair. Her heavy makeup led to the common codename “Red Lip.” Teasing about the Queen’s appearance, the term “whale (plawan)” used to describe her plump figure, particularly in the cyber world. Occasionally, “the whale” was linked with “blue” and “diamond.” These two descriptions related to the mysterious case of the stolen Saudi blue diamond in 1989. According to the rumor, the reason why Thai authorities failed to return the stolen diamond to Saudi Arabia and why there were many murder cases involved was that the Queen had the diamond. The diamond swallowing whale (plawan om phet) thus became her nickname. Figure 6.3 showed how this symbolic representation of the Queen was comically visualized. The blue whale, wearing red lipstick, blue diamond necklace, and a crown, opined, “A woman must not stop being beautiful!!”
For the Redshirts in general, Princess Chulaborn, the youngest daughter of the King and Queen, was another royal member whose speeches and actions could be interpreted as anti-Redshirt. First, she accompanied the Queen during the funeral ceremony of a Yellowshirt on October 13, 2008. Second, when interviewed by Woody, a TV host, the youngest Princess called the Redshirts, “those who burned houses and towns”\(^{777}\) in a television talk show “Woody, Born to Chat.”\(^{778}\) Finally, before the 2014 coup, Chulaborn displayed several symbolic accessories which could be identified with the anti-Yingluck movement; for example, a Thai national color ribbon and whistle. Although Chulaborn was not protected by lèse-majesté law, people were refrained

\(^{777}\) พวกเผาบ้านเผาเมือง

\(^{778}\) For a footage of a princess, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TangU6fyChs. In response, Jatuporn Phromphan, an UDD leader, contended that “Redshirts were not born to chat” but “born to die.” Jatuporn made this speech on April 10, 2011. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtyHOhPcz4.
from making direct criticisms of her. Figure 6.4 was a satirical visual graphic published in the cyber world in response to Chulaborn’s stated political preferences. It read, “Bean saving the nation (thua ku chat).” In the middle, there were images of a big “broad bean” wrapped with Thai national flag cloth. “Broad bean (tua pak a)” is the Princess’s impolite nickname. Mocking her specific body part, many Thai find the shape of the Princess’s mouth similar to that of the broad bean. This obscene term was not recently invented. For decades, it has occasionally appeared in royal gossip among close friends. The term could be traced back to the 1970s when it was used in an underground pamphlet circulated after the October 6, 1976 massacre. However, this comic representation through simple visual graphic entailed creativeness and sense of humour of anti-royalist artists.

779 Thammasat University Archives, A1.6.2/5 “จดหมายฉบับที่ 2 ถึงผู้ใกล้ชิดสมเด็จพระบรมราชินีนาถ” *(The second letter to the Queen’s entourage),* 3 (Roneo document).
In short, laughter and caricature constituted forms of desacralization in Thailand. However, these had to take on concealed and ambiguous methods to avoid lèse-majesté prosecution. From the laughter of the anonymous crowd, comical references to blindness, to symbolic online visual graphics, there were instances of anti-royalist resistance during 2011-2013. In 2015, making jokes about the junta leader became a crime against national security.⁷⁸⁰ Above all, as the government declared one-year mourning for King Bhumibol’s passing on October 13, 2016, these kinds of subversive laughter will unlikely be found in Thailand soon.

6.3 Politics of Love

During the 2010s, the expression of love and not loving no longer concerned personal relationships in Thailand, but political acts with seditious meanings occurring in daily conversations, songs, slogans, and speeches. This section explores how different groups of Redshirts namely ordinary participants, leaders, intellectuals, and artists politicized the concept of love. It argues that what distinguishes the most recent anti-royalism from the anti-absolutism and leftist/Marxist anti-feudalism of the past is its deeply emotional aspects. This was because contemporary Thai royalism has invested heavily in a personality cult and the emotional attachment of subjects to royalty. King Bhumibol was the beloved Father of all Thais. The incantation of “We Love the King” was ubiquitous in everyday life commodities such as wristbands, pop music, and billboard signs located on highways. Redshirt anti-royalism thus did not emerge as a mere proof of disbelief. Rather, it was deeply embedded in the existing royalist ideology requiring Thai to love the Father King. In other words, Thai royalism shaped its opposite. Now the enemy that the Thai royalist establishment faces is neither Marxist nor cynical, but former passionate true believers or, in local language, “a person who used to love (khon khoei rak - คนเคยรัก).” And what they aimed to demystify was the Thai monarchy’s regime of love.

6.3.1 Love Discourse in Everyday Anti-Royalism

On the evening of April 10, 2010, Wasan Phuthong, a Redshirt participant, was shot dead during chaotic clashes between the army, protesters, and unknown “men in black clothes.” Wasan was among 20 civilians killed on that day. Apart from his disturbingly brutal death (his skull was open and his brain scattered on the ground), what Wasan was wearing made his story fit perfectly in anti-establishment Redshirt history. According to the image of Wasan’s lifeless body, he wore a red T-shirt which read, "[We] love the King [but] fear moral people (rak nai luang klua khon di -
Wasan, a Redshirt who loved the King, was not only killed in the wake of April-May 2010 crackdown, but also the love which Redshirts had in general for the monarchy. Wasan was dead. So was the abstract entity of Redshirts who “loved the King.”

From late 2011 onwards, the discourse of love made its appearance in Redshirt protest accessories. In January 2013, I participated in a Redshirt gathering at the King Taksin Monument in Thonburi, across the Chao Phraya River from Bangkok proper. As with other gatherings, small rectangular stickers with short messages were sold; three for 50 baht (1.4 US dollars). Some stickers ambivalently concerned love, for instance “Decadence, not love, no faith (sueam mai rak mai sattha - เสื่อม ไม่รัก ไม่ศรัทธา)” and “There will be jail where there is no love (thi dai mai rak thi nan tit khuk - ที่ใดไม่รัก ที่นั่นติดคุก).” The sticker does not specify who does not love or for whom one does not have faith.

Figure 6.5: “Refuse to love, watch out for jail.” “There will be jail where there is no love.” Political stickers on a car

781 Ida Arunwong and Warisara Kittikhunseri, eds., วีรชน เมษา: คนตายมีใบหน้า คนถูกฆ่ามีชีวิต (The Heroes of April 10th: The Dead had faces. Those who were killed had life) (Bangkok: Read, 2011), 65, 192.
782 Taksin was an ancient king who, according to the Thai official history, turned crazy, was executed, and succeeded by Rama I, the founder of the current Chakri dynasty. Prior to Bangkok, “Thonburi” was the most short-lived Thailand’s capital city governed by Taksin. As I will discuss later in chapter seven, Redshirt heronization of Taksin carried politically anti-royalist meanings in various senses. For instance, one could not ignore the name resemblance between Taksin, the king of Thonburi and Thaksin, the beloved Prime Minister of the Redshirts. More importantly, in contrast to the royalist Thai history, it was widely believed that Rama I betrayed Taksin, staged a coup, and killed the king of Thonburi brutally.
In Thailand, stickers with short messages are commonly found on the back or inside a vehicle. They often concern humorous everyday life mottoes or statements, such as “I am as much in a hurry as you are.” Famous catchphrases touch upon themes of flirtation, love life, and daily economic struggles, for example, “Car and husband, personal property. Not for loan” and “Losing direction because of getting drunk. Losing my mind because of being love drunk.” Politicizing these stickers to convey their political stances, ordinary Redshirts invented several slogans. As mentioned above, “love” turned into a popular keyword.

San, a Redshirt taxi driver, also decorated his car with a small rectangular sticker with political statement involving love. Posted above the gear shift, San’s sticker read, “A person who used to love (khon khoei rak – คนเคยรัก)” with a red heart cut into two pieces (Figure 6.6). He placed this sticker at a very explicit spot from 2013 until 2015. San’s passengers could be a Redshirt or Yellowshirt, a commoner or state authority, and they would all be able to see it. “Who would think that this one is political (อันนี้ใครเขาคิดว่าเป็นการเมือง)?” San made a short comment about his vehicle adornment. One need to be familiar with the protest culture in order to realize that this sticker carried political significance. Otherwise, it would appear to be merely typical complaint about one’s love life. The exact slogan was found on a shirt wore by Redshirt participants during 2012-13 (see Figure 6.7).
Thai linguistic rules provide an advantage for maintaining ambiguity. Unlike English, verbs expressing feelings do not require an identification of objects at the end of the sentence, especially in casual conversations. Thus, ones can express in short, “I like (that) very much (ฉันชอบมาก)” or “I don’t like (her) at all (ฉันไม่ชอบเลย)” without specifying whether the object is human or non-human, plural or singular. Sometimes, both subject and object can be omitted. When a couple is having a sugary cheesy conversation, they say, “Miss jang (ติ้งจึงจัง)” or “Love na (รักนะ)” omitting “I” and “you.” It all depends on mutual understandings which conversational partners had shared. Therefore, grammatically, there was no need to identify whom “a person used to love.”

In terms of the underlying logic, this short ambiguous phrase captured well who the Redshirts became after having had their eyes opened -- heartbroken royal subjects who used to love the monarchy and politically declared their refusal to love. The slogan did not dare to express hatred. Subtly toying with the royalist cliché “We love the King (rao rak nai luang - เรารักในหลวง)” or
“We love the Father (rao rak pho - เรารักพ่อ),” counter-discourses were created and spread by omitting the unspeakable object of past love.

This shift in emotion among a large sector of Thai population was politically significant not because it derived from republican aspirations. Rather, as Nattawut Saikua spoke on stage, “One day, when we knew that they did not love us like we had loved them, it was unbearably painful.” “We have loved them too much. Love made us blind but death opened our eyes.”783 Anti-royalism thus involved rights to express anger, verbal assaults, and criticisms toward the monarchy’s disappointing political roles; these do not necessarily lead to the overthrow of the monarchy. Eventually, when these emotional expressions were ruled as insulting the monarchy and a crime, the Redshirts demanded the rights to love and hate freely. As one Redshirt audience member commented in a seminar, “Freedom is our natural right which cannot be violated. Love is freedom. Therefore, I would like to announce that I have freedom to love and not to love.”784

6.3.2 Love the Prince Discourse

Redshirt politics of love not only emerged as negative reactions to the cult of King Bhumibol, but also, unexpectedly, shifted the object of love to another member of royal family – the Crown Prince, Somdech Phra Boroma Orasadhiraj Chao Fah Maha Vajiralongkorn Sayam Makutrajakuman. The slogan “We Love Phra Borom [the Crown Prince] (เราที่รัก بصورة)” circulated through Redshirt commodities, especially protest shirts printed around the end of 2011.785


January 2013, I found plain grey “We Love Phra Borom” T-shirts sold, along with “We Love Nitirat” T-shirts, at a Redshirt gathering. At first glance, it was paradoxical that a person who admired Nitirat because of their legal critique of the royal institution would still have affection for a particular member of royal family. Did the love for the former carry the same meaning as love for the latter? The love for the latter made sense if we took into account the growing popularity of Nitirat group since 2010. As chapter five shows, this group of law school professors stood by Redshirt commoners and equipped them with legal knowledge to delegitimize the coup, army, judiciary, and royalist ideology. However, no evidence supporting the supposition that the crown prince endorsed the Redshirt movement, let alone had played any significant political role in the past decade.

Eventually, just before the junta staged the 2014 coup, the “We love Phra Borom” discourse was elevated to the official Redshirt popular banner status (see Figure 6.8). Sometimes, “Phra Borom” was replaced with his number, “904.” (Each royal member had their coded number: “901” and “902” stand for the King and the Queen, respectively.)

786 The 904 coded number for the prince was written in Thai number “๙๐๔.” See “ลงบัตรยืนยันการสมัครเลือกตั้งสมัยที่ 20 ต.ค. 63 ศาลฎีกาสั่งจับกุมสมเด็จพระเจ้าวรวงศ์เธอ พระzagradiha 904 จนท.ปฏิบัติการสุทธิธรรม” (“Moving the 20 July forward, countless Reds are ready to stay at Aksa in the long run. [They] pressured the three courts to reject Suthep’s proposal to appoint a Prime Minister”), Prachatai, May 11, 2014, December 24, 2015, http://www.prachatai.org/journal/2014/05/53154.
The display of affection for the Crown Prince of Thailand by Redshirt participants could be read in three different ways. First, it was one among sarcastic counter discourses against Bhumibol’s cult and the Redshirts’ political foes. Implicitly, “We love the prince” was both Redshirt strategy to provoke their royalist opponents and the safest and most indirect mode to say that one did not love the King. Ruptures occurred when another royal member – one whom Thai were unlikely to love the most – replaced “the King.”

According to interview accounts, Redshirt informants similarly recalled that “We love the prince” initially served as merely an anti-Bhumibol cult strategy. One Redshirt remembered that he first saw people wearing shirts with this slogan on December 5, 2011 – the King’s birthday.\(^{787}\) It was hardly convincing that a person who wore this shirt on this national holiday really wanted to express his love for the prince. Aunt Pinky called it “psychological warfare” to stir up conflicts.

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\(^{787}\) Redshirt sub-leader, interview by author, Bangkok, Thailand, May 9, 2015.
within the palace. That is, it made one “feel neglected” by the people since the latter had shifted their love to another royal figure. “But was it real love?” I asked Aunt Pinky. She replied, “Definitely not. I cannot answer for others. But personally, I am done. I do not accept any single one of them. The entire clan.”

The second interpretation regarding the logic behind the Redshirt “love” for the Prince also appeared. “The son was attacked the least. There was nothing to offend him. He was not subject to verbal assault,” Anon, a lawyer, answered when I asked whom lèse-majesté speeches or actions implicated the most, ranging from “the father, the mother, and the son.” He admitted that there were those who were imprisoned because they insulted “the son” by circulating indecent video footage regarding his personal love life. But, for Anon, this did not concern politics. It was the “Father” who became a main target for political criticisms constituting lèse-majesté crimes.

For many Redshirts, although the Crown Prince was infamous as a playboy, for his scandalous divorces, sexual behavior, and bad temper, he was believed to interfere and act the least against Thailand’s electoral parliamentary politics. Aunt Kai explained, “No matter how licentious he is. Let him be because he does not play any [political] role. He never takes sides, does he?” Likewise, Aunt Sao gave similar comments, “I am only 50 percent certain about the prince. He has not yet directly shown [his position]. That is, he did not order the killing.” The same logic was applied to the oldest princess. For Aunt Sao, Princess Ubonrat (“903”) could dress up,
sing, or dance as she pleased so long as she stayed away from normal politics, let alone showing preferences to one political group over another.\textsuperscript{793}

It can thus be argued that, for several participants, Redshirt struggles primarily aimed at the attainment of minimal democracy in which there would be stability in both election and representative government regardless to the existence of the royal institution as well as to the scandalous private life of the royal family. However, as conflicts unfolded, particular members who belonged to the Thai monarchy showed attempts to obstruct Thailand’s democratization and disappointingly endorsed anti-democratic forces in both subtle and exhibit manners. Popular resentment against the palace thus did not derive from their indecent private behaviors, but precisely from the public political roles they assumed. Although the 2010 eye-opening outbreak enabled several Redshirts to move from individual criticisms to institutional and structural ones, particular members of royal family were exempted from the Redshirts’ anger.

Finally, “We love the prince” could be regarded as Redshirt competition with Yellowshirts who claimed to be “the people of the King.” In an audio clip popular among Redshirt internet users, Banpodj, a DJ, explicitly endorsed the crown prince due to the conspiracy theory that the prince and Sirindhorn were competing for the throne. Moreover, he believed that the Prince had a good relationship with Thaksin. Banpodj even asserted that the prince promised that he would rule under the constitution and not interfere politics when he became Rama X.\textsuperscript{794} This kind of political stances received criticisms from the literati who sympathized Redshirts. Anon opined that “We love the prince” initially carried only sarcastic meanings; however, some Redshirts started to believe that the Prince could be their savior. Their victory would finally be accomplished soon after the reign of King Bhumibol ended. For Anon, this was the movement’s weakness. “In the

\textsuperscript{793} Sao, interview by author, Bangkok, October 29, 2014.
\textsuperscript{794} Thailand, Criminal Court of Bangkok, ค าฟ้อง (Charge sheet), Black Case no. Or. 2788/2557, August 29, 2014.
end, they still were royalists (นิยมเจ้า).” The Redshirt poet and lawyer explained that democratic struggle should never rely on royal elites, whether it be true belief or mere strategy. Somsak Jeamteerasakul, another intellectual, criticized that “the Prince trend” reflected an “unhealthy” element in Redshirt democracy. That is, while rejecting to love particular royal figures, they sought patronage from another.

6.3.3 Academic and Artistic Critiques of the Love Regime

Among intellectuals sympathetic to the Redshirt movements, subjective concepts such as love and hatred were barely touched upon. Attempting to frame “love” in legal or politically proper terms, they rather conceptualized “love” as a freedom of choice. Expression of love and hatred toward political figures, for Somsak, were fundamental rights in modern democratic society. Not limited to the ballot, popular consent and legitimacy of the ruler derived from public criticism, no matter how vulgar. According to several intellectuals, the existence and implementation of lèse-majesté in Thailand contradicted the idea that the Thai monarchy was beloved by the people. Piyabutr asked, in a seminar titled “Politics, Justice, and the Monarchy,” what was the point of having the lèse-majesté law if every Thai, as the court and royalists claimed, loved the monarchy. Linking love to legal prosecution, Piyabutr said that it was ironic for “the country which advertised that its monarchy was beloved and revered (was also) the one which charged the most people for violating Article 112 and imprisoning them as well.” In other words, the relationship between love for the King and number of lèse-majesté cases was a direct correlation. Piyabutr ended his talk with a powerful statement, “Law cannot force people to love.

Love stems from the heart. No matter how well you wrote the law, the law cannot command people to love one another.”

In addition to straightforward academic criticisms, there were many ways to condemn that the love expressed to the monarchy was involuntary. In Faiyen’s popular song “Refuse to love, watch out for jail (ไม่รักระวังติดคุก),” Thailand’s regime of love was humorously mocked. The song begins with a fast and fun rhythm, following Speedy Gonzales’s catchy melody. Then, it was followed by the famous part. It also shares similar melody to another oldies’ hit’s, I will follow him. Faiyen replaced the original part, which repeated “I love him” for three times before the words “And where he goes, I follow, I follow, I follow” with the triple “Refuse to love (Mai rak na – ไม่รักนะ)” followed by “Refuse to love, watch out for jail, jail, jail.”

The song shared similar structures with other eye-opening stories. It stated, “I used to be moved by tears,” “I used to love you so much,” “I used to live sufficiently”; however, “You inconsiderately hurt me” and “It was you who never had enough.” In the end, the song pointed out that when Thais realized that they were “exploited” and “impoverished” and wanted to quit loving, they were at risk of being imprisoned. To put it simply, this was the song about forced love. Without mentioning royal names or political terms besides “jail,” the song indirectly criticized Thailand’s lèse-majesté regime.

Describing how the revolutionary French invented symbols which broke with its monarchical past, Lynn Hunt notes, “Liberty was to look like an ordinary woman, not like a

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797 “เสวนา ม 112 กรณีสมยศ การเมือง ความยุติธรรม สถาบันกษัตริย์” (“Seminar on Article 112, Somyot Case, Politics, and the Monarchy”) (video of public discussion, Bangkok, February 17, 2013) accessed March 5, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oq6j-gQ5bAE.

798 Speedy Gonzales was originally publicized in 1961 but popularized in 1962 when it was sung by Pat Boone. Faiyen, “ไม่รักระวังติดคุก” (“Refuse to love, watch out for jail”) (audio clip), posted October 31, 2014, accessed September 3, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kF7o6GahsEo.

799 “I will follow him” was originally in French before it was translated in English and recorded one year later in 1963. In 1992, the song re-appeared when it was sung by the nuns’ chorus at the end of the film “Sister Act.”
superstitious icon.”

Another tacit way to artistically criticize King Bhumibol’s love regime was to contrast it with various forms of ordinary love in everyday life. In 2012, Read published “Oh Love (Rak Oei -- รักเอย),” written by the wife of “Arkong” or “grandpa,” an old man sentenced to 20 years of imprisonment for four lèse-majesté cell phone messages which he may not have written and who died in jail.

At first glance, Oh Love was not different from other memorial booklets usually distributed at a funeral. Page by page, the readers slowly came to know the life of Arkong, narrated by his wife, Rosamalin Tangnoppakun. Although she quit school in the 4th grade, Rosamalin offered a well-articulated and clear narrative. Readers could picture Arkong’s simple daily life and his personality. Like other lower-middle-class families, Arkong and Rosamalin married at very young ages, had seven children, and had to let their relatives raise some of them. They endured several hard days and nights when they had only a bowl of rice to fill their stomachs. Rosamalin maintained, “Although we were poor, we were happy. Although we did not have enough to eat, we had no distrust. We could laugh out loud.” However, this ordinary love story shifted drastically.

Oh Love’s second half depicts how Rosamalin and her family encountered unbearable hardships after Arkong had been arrested in August 2010. In one day, Rosamalin cooked for her grandchildren, sent them to school, visited her husband once or twice, and did any tedious trivial work in exchange for little money. After several rejections of bail requests and the 20-year imprisonment verdict, Rosamalin remembered how she barely kept her sanity. In Oh Love, Rosamalin wrote about her impossible dream:

Even today, sometimes I think that if he [Arkong] had been released, Redshirt brothers and sisters would have waited [for him] at the gate. I would have felt

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800 Lynn Hunt, Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution, 65.
801 Rosamalin Tangnoppakhun, รักเอย (Oh Love) (Bangkok: Read, 2012).
802 Ibid., 47.
amazed, but what would I have done next? He would probably have run to hug me. In my imagination, “If he runs and gives me a hug, I will swear at him for embarrassing me.”

No doubt, Rosamalin’s dream was crushed since it was only Arkong’s lifeless body that was unchained. Despite her anger, Rosamalin knew her place and did not make revolutionary statements in this memorial book. As she confessed that she wrote a lot of things:

Sometimes, after having written it, I wonder why I wrote it and I wrote for what. Then, I squashed it and threw it away. Sometime, I wrote “Here, Jack does not slay the giant if only the giant does not slay Jack.”

Chusak Patarakulwanich, a literature scholar, interprets this remark as, “The world where Jack slays the giant is in a fairy tale. In the real world, no Jack successfully slays the giant.” In Oh Love, a life of the ordinary couple who had been married for 44 years had turned upside down due to Thailand’s love regime which neither condone nor tolerate few words of insult. Moreover, this “great love” “is ready to kill ordinary men and ordinary love in cold blood.” Oh Love was extraordinary thanks to its ordinary and simplicity. One poet captured its beauty as well as its political impact with poignancy:

Oh love uttered from the people’s heart.
This love is neither dim, dark, nor notorious
But reveals longstanding injustice,
Cowardice, and stupidity behind the throne.
Ordinary love tells the truth, not falseness
The sacred love that demands worship everyday
is indeed the fake love forcing endless adoration.
How can it be greater than the love of commoners like Oh love?

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803 Rosamalin Tangnoppakhun, รักเอย (Oh Love), 47.
804 Ibid., 65.
806 Ibid, 28.
Last but not least, the refusal to love and critique of the love regime inevitably engaged paternal and maternal issues. In Thailand, Thai not only had to worship the King and Queen, but love them as if children loved their father and mother (see chapter two). Their birthdays are Thailand’s national father’s and mother’s days. As society has become more polarized, the royalist camps often appropriated “Father” and “Mother” to mobilize the crowd’s mood of love as well as hatred against the Redshirts. Found in anti-Yingluck demonstrations in 2013-2014, protest shirts and banners read “What is your dad’s name? I don’t give a damn. My dad’s name is Bhumibol” (Figure 6.9).

Figure 6.9: “My dad’s name is ‘Bhumibol’.” Protest slogans declaring that Bhumibol is protesters’ dad.

I have only one dad. Others aren’t my dad. My dad can be criticized unlike somebody’s Dad who is similar to the impeccable prophet. But you cannot think, ask, and criticize [him]. I thus wonder how you can prove that [he] is really great.
Above is an excerpt from the song, “Father/Dad (Pho – พ่อ)’” by Faiyen.807 The song rejected the regime’s command of love and the imposition of Bhumibol’s paternality over its subjects. As with Oh Love, it compared and contrasted the great Dad with an ordinary dad. The latter did not have to be a morally good person; however, his children could challenge and question him. Anti-royalism, in this sense, was against unchecked perfection. It longed for society of normal human beings who were capable of making mistakes and wrongdoings.

Moreover, the idea of Father and Mother of the Kingdom was contested when the respect and admiration was paid to other paternal and maternal figures. On the cover of its August issue of 2012, Red Power did not spare any space for the traditional poetic praise of the Queen on the occasion of her birthday.808 On the contrary, the cover image was of a woman named Payao Akkahad in a red shirt (Figure 6.10). The title said, “The day for mothers who lost [their children]: Payao Akkahad.”809 Payao’s daughter was a volunteer nurse. She was shot dead while rescuing Redshirt protesters on May 19, 2010. Since then, Payao has transformed herself from a street vendor who sold malai, a floral decoration, into a political activist demanding justice for the 2010 victims.810 Prior to the 2010 crackdown, Payao was neither interested in nor followed politics. Her daughter’s death politicized her. As a consequence, Payao, an ordinary woman from a lower class, became a symbolic representation of “mother” for the Redshirts.

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808 The Queen’s birthday and Thailand’s mother day dated on August 12 every year. Like the King’s case on December, it became a tradition that every printing product published on these two months had to put royal images on their covers and blessed them. This collective act of royalism was only part of other rituals and spectaculars initiated and participated by both state officials and ordinary mass.
809 Red Power 1, no. 28 (August, 2012).
810 Ibid, 55.
Four months later, in its December Issue, *Red Power* also celebrated Thailand’s Father’s day by devoting several pages to the stories of children whose fathers were jailed or killed as Redshirts. The title was “Fight for my dad (*su phuea pho ku* - ผู้เพื่อพ่อคุก).” Notably, as Figure 6.11 illustrates, this column was juxtaposed with a grotesque glorification of the King on the occasion of his birthday on its left hand. Whether or not it was an intention of the magazine editor, the stark difference between god-like patriarch and fathers suffered from injustice invoked questions and subversive interpretations.
“Mother” was sometimes symbolized as an abstract entity. In a poem titled “Mother – of Democracy (Mae -- khong prachathippatai - แม่ -- ของประชาธิปไตย),” Anon Nampa poetically described the life and fate of a woman whom he called “mother.” In an introduction, Anon admired her courage to stand firmly on the ground of truth although she had to sleep in the street and withstand contempt. This mother was tough and strong:

Her hands were far from softly smooth due to hard work.
Her cheeks were full of wrinkles caused by lack of rest.
Her shoulders were solid and rough as a result of heavy loads.
Her skin was red hot since it had been exposed to the sun for years.

Wearing her old red shirt and holding foot clappers, the mother left home to fight a battle at Ratchaprasong, only to end up fleeing the “yellow rain” of bullets. Anon then offered a graphic account of the “death” of the mother.
Mother ran. They chased and hunted after (her). Mother fell. They kicked her face with combat boots. They then crushed her face against the ground, making a sacrifice to the command of the deva.

Made ragged by countless bullet holes, (her) red shirt “could no longer soak up the blood.” “The mother of democracy” died for “freedom,” for “ideology,” and for the “new old world that we longed for.” Anon executed the last four verses impressively:

With labor and sweat, mother is thus beautiful
Although she has gunshot wounds all over her body.
The one that looks gorgeous with shiny dress and jewelry...
is merely an old woman, not our mother!811

From claiming that one has only one biological father and mother, to paying respect to ordinary parents who fell prey to the regime’s injustice, to personifying the “mother of democracy” as a lower-class “Redshirt,” the idea of the magnificent, splendid, and extraordinary Father and Mother was rejected. Fathers and mothers in worldly and everyday senses are cherished in Redshirt subversive texts.

6.4 Codification and Politicization of Particular Sets of Numbers

Sometimes numeric codification constitutes convenient and safe ways to criticize the Thai monarchy. Symbolizing injustice, violation of basic rights, and state-imposed indoctrination, 112 and 8 (p.m.) were appropriated by Redshirt activists, artists, and internet users in their political activism. These numeric forms helped tone down the aggressiveness of dissenting voices, but at the same time, these fugitive forms of resistance subversively undermined the royal power through indirectness as well as sense of humor.

811 แม่จึงสวยด้วยงานและหยาดเหงื่อ แม้ร่างเถือปืนดาบอาบบาดแผล
ที่สวยๆด้วยเสื้อเรื่อเพชรแพร
เขาเป็นเพียงหญิงแก่ใช่แม่เรา!

Anon Nampa, เหมือนบอดใบ้ไพร่ฟ้ามาสุดทา (Blinded and muted, the serfs have reached their dead-end) (Bangkok: Read, 2011), 19-21. In an interview, Anon recalled that he wrote this poem right after the 2010 crackdown. He read this piece in front of his “mothers” sitting on a pedestrian path on December, 2011. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPXif1Z6PCk#t=20
6.4.1 The Politics of “112”

“112 does not serve the people. 112 violates people’s rights. The country has gone chaotic [since] 112 is injustice,” depicted Faiyen’s song titled “112 [is] injustice (112 ไม่เป็นธรรม).” The song further elaborated, “People get bail for a murder charge. But they are jailed excessively for only criticizing.” The song calls for the abolition of the lèse-majesté law.

Never before had Article 112 of the criminal code, commonly dubbed lèse-majesté law, been widely known let alone been heavily criticized. Its notorious reputation was no doubt the by-product of the color-coded political conflicts of Thailand. As mentioned in chapter two, prior to 2007, the lèse-majesté law had been a political tool which politicians employed to discredit and undermine each other. Some cases revealed the problematic nature of this defamatory law; however, they were rarely associated with mass resentments nor with political opposition to Thai royalty. For example, a local politician in Chonburi pressed lèse-majesté charges against another candidate for insulting the ancient king, Rama IV, on a radio program. The court sentenced the accused to four years’ imprisonment.

Nowadays, Article 112 has become a powerful weapon used by the royalist camps against the so-called “anti-monarchist Reds (daeng lom chao - แดงล้มเจ้า).” Instead of a handful of political public figures, its impact has expanded to the lives of ordinary Thais. Redshirt awareness of Article 112 stemmed from their everyday experiences. The risks and destructive effects of this law were real. Lèse-majesté prisoners were those whom the Redshirt participants could easily identify with: careless internet users who expressed political opinions via Facebook and amateur pamphleteers.

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814 Thailand, Criminal Court, Court decision, Red Case No. 6374/2556, May 8, 2013.
On January 15, 2012, The Campaign Committee for the Amendment of Article 112 (CCAA 112) announced its list of political demands and sought supporters. Initiated by various groups of intellectuals, activists, and artists including Nitirat, the Student Federation of Thailand, and Midnight University, the campaign aimed to collect 10,000 signatures within 112 days to propose the Nitirat bill to Parliament to amend the lèse-majesté law. The reform included:

1. A withdrawal of Article 112 from legal sections regarding state security
2. Adding a section which clarified offensive acts against the reputation of the King, the Queen, the heir apparent, and the regent
3. Separating a provision which aimed to protect the King from those applied to others
4. Reducing Article 112’s penalty from a maximum 15-year imprisonment to three years for defaming the King and two years for others
5. Exempting criticisms with good intention from an Article 112 offence
6. Exemption of penalty if the criticisms were proved factual and contributed to public goods
7. Only His Majesty Principle Private Secretary had authority to file lèse-majesté charges.

With academics and members of the literary class at the forefront, CCAA 112 had, from its inception, signatures of renowned Thai intellectuals such as Thongchai Winichakul and Thak Chaloemtiarana, young writers such as Prabda Yoon, and the film director who received the Cannes Film Festival’s Palme d’Or, Apichatpong Weerasethakul. Moreover, CCAA 112 managed to successfully seek endorsement from international scholars such as Noam Chomsky, Michael Burawoy, Cornel West, and Nancy Fraser.

Finally, CCAA 112 gathered more than 27,000 signatures and presented the petition to parliament. However, the House speaker rejected the draft amendment, explaining that “the issue was tied to the monarchy, and the current charter forbids any changes of law related to the

816 Ibid.
Again, as mentioned in the introduction, formal political institutions and organizations supported by the Redshirts refused to transform any demand regarding the monarchy into legal nor policy reform.

Although the campaign failed to achieve its goal, it was able to put Article 112 on the public agenda, resulting in fierce open debates regarding its benefits and setbacks. Over the course of 112 days, activist campaigners organized seminars, distributed pamphlets around the country, and, above all, were able to provoke various reactions from royalist camps. Nitirat leader, Worajet Pakirat, was punched in the face at his workplace, Thammasat University. Right-wing movements mobilized to oppose the campaign. Authorities announced that they would pay close attention to what was said. Many royalists made contemptuous remarks that campaign participants were only a few marginal parts of the Thai population. In short, the campaign successfully revealed how much antagonistic Thai society had become in association with attitude toward the monarchy. Conflict no longer was latent. It disrupted the royalist projection of Thailand as a harmonious society.

Apart from appearing in academic discussions, campaign’s banners, and slogans, “112” turned into a symbolic signifier that became appropriated by various forms of political activism. A group of artists organized a “112 Hunger Strike” declaring that they would fast for 112 hours to call for the amendment of Article 112. Likewise, a son of Somyot Prueksakasemsuk fasted for 112 hours in front of Bangkok Criminal Court. Somyot had been an editor of Voice of Taksin, which contained articles deemed insulting to the monarchy. Although Somyot did not write the articles himself, he faced a prison term of 11 years and was denied bail.

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Without providing systematic criticisms or thorough explanations, the number 112 itself constituted political symbols standing for the underlying problem of Thailand’s politics, injustice, and lack of freedom of expression. Strategically, it was safer and “less provocative” for one to say that he wanted to amend or abolish Article 112 than to propose a reformation of the Thai royal institution and to explicate that criticisms or mockery of the monarchy should not be unlawful.

Although 112 became more than just a criminal code and turned into a symbol carrying deeper political meanings, it was further codified in a humorous way. In Thailand, one could dial 1112 and order a pizza delivery from The Pizza Company. Due to a coincidental resemblance, pizza and the logo of the 1112 pizza delivery service were politically employed to allude to Article 112. As the comparison in Figure 6.12 shows, a logo on the left is the original pizza delivery logo whereas the one on the left is the politicized one. Using the same fonts, “The Pizza Company” was changed into “The Royal lèse-majesté” whereas “call 1112” turned into “Article 112” and “Fast Delivery” turned into “Fast Imprisonment.” In the cyber world, when one wanted to warn that a statement or image could be deemed lèse-majesté, he could say, “Would you like to order pizza?” or “Wanna eat pizza?” While the lèse-majesté regime created fear, this symbolic displacement enabled people to talk about Article 112 in a rather non-serious and sarcastic fashion.
To conclude, Scott writes that lèse-majesté law’s main function is not only to coercively suppress the voices of dissent, but also to restore the “symbolic status-quo of the dominant.” That is, after punishment, it requires “a public reply.” Indeed, “remorse, apologies, asking forgiveness, and generally making symbolic amends are a more vital element in almost any process of domination than the punishment itself.” During 2011 – 2013, the Thai lèse-majesté law failed to fulfill the latter. The law was condemned as a symbol of “injustice.” The number 112 became part of political campaigns aiming to reform the royal institution.

6.4.2 8 p.m.: The Drama Time

In addition to 112, 8 (p.m.) was another specific number carrying subversive signification. When people wished to exhibit their anti-royalist position, instead of saying it directly, they might

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explain that they turned off the television at 8 p.m.\footnote{Fieldnote, Bangkok, Thailand, October 21, 2014.} As mentioned in chapter two, 8 p.m. is when every public channel broadcasts reports on the royal family and the Privy Council for 30 minutes. It usually portrays figures of the benevolent Father of the nation and the royal family who tirelessly meet their people, listen to their problems, and help them with mercy. If 112 was a perfect representation of how the law is abused to suppress freedom of expression, 8 p.m. illustrates how the Thai state’s propaganda idealizes images of the monarchy. 8 p.m. captures the routinization of royal power in every household. Refusing to watch television at 8 p.m. thus meant political opposition against a one-dimensional public portrayal of the Thai monarchy.

Faiyen band produced another composition which talks about a “TV drama” broadcast everyday at “8 p.m.” The vocalist sings with a satirical tone, “The drama is coming. Save electricity, turn off the TV.”\footnote{Faiyen, “ยาสีฟันตรานกแสกคู่” “(The double barn owl toothpaste)” (video clip of Faiyen’s lived performance, May 19, 2013), accessed December 13, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVtq5afzaHk.} The song compares the royal news not only to a fictional drama but also to a boring and ridiculous drama which no one can watch.

Furthermore, 8 p.m. could constitute creative artwork required no explanation. As one instance (Figure 6.13) in Read journal illustrated, under the heading “Thai Style,” a man stands when it is 8:00 and 18:00 but kowtows at 20:00. Decoding the message, one commonly knows that Thais have to stand when the national anthem is played twice everyday at 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. But at 8 p.m. there was no common rule requiring anyone to prostrate on the ground.\footnote{Read, vol. 4 no. 3 (January – March 2013): 224.} However, we all know that this was the time when every channel broadcast the royal report news. These three moments, as this black and white art implied, symbolized Thailand’s way of life embedded in docility and conformity. Having say that, the last gesture, prostration on the ground, seemed to be most undignified of all.
In short, numeric representation of political regime became common language for anti-royalist politics. Its simplicity and non-serious tonality made anti-royalism not only accessible to a larger group of people but widespread horizontally without being at risk of the lèse-majesté prosecution.

6.5 The Temporal Critique of the Monarchy

Through various creative metaphorical expressions, the Thai monarchy has become linked with backwardness, anachronism, and the embodiment of an entity which is supposed to be extinct. This criticism is shared with those critiques made by anti-absolutist urban literati during 1920s-1930s and Thai Marxists, and leftists. As Matthew Copeland writes about criticisms in newspapers in the 1920s, while calling for the “establishment of parliamentary rule,” “absolute monarchies were frequently characterized as the ‘earliest’ and, hence, ‘the least developed’ of political systems – ‘the form most likely to disappear.’” From Thai Marxist/leftist perspectives,

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the monarchy was the remnant of feudalism, with the privileges of old modes of production based on land, which would be eventually undermined and replaced with the capitalist system. As this section will show, during 2011-2014, the Thai monarchy was presented as outdated not because of its feudalist economic status, but rather its representation of belief and culture which are incompatible with principles of modernity and equality among people.

6.5.1 Opposing the Hierarchical Culture

Thailand’s royalist regime has been relied on the hierarchical notion that men were not born equal. Therefore, the royal elites must be treated with respect from the commoners. The latter must always stay physically in a lower position than the former. The practices of kneeling and prostration on the floor are excellent representations of royalist culture embedded in everyday life. Therefore, the recent forms of anti-royalism opposed these cultures of servitude.

Back in the 1920s, this outdated practice of prostration was heavily criticized and satirized. Political journalists and cartoonists similarly picked this theme to oppose absolute monarchy. Publicized in Sayam riwiw (Figure 6.14), a caricature entitled “Our Custom of Crawling” portrayed Thailand as hierarchical and economically divided society where the poor crawls on the floor with dogs and the rich noble sits on a chair. A foreigner asks, “Aren’t they your compatriots?” The noble replies, “Yes, but they are poorer than me.”

See Jit Phumisak, โฉมหน้าศักดินาไทย (The Real Face of Thai Feudalism) (1957; repr., Nonthaburi: Sripanya, 2007).

Almost one hundred year later, the same custom still existed and symbolized Thailand’s inequality. Figure 6.15 offered a summary of this critique through an online visual graphic. This graphic does not target any royal figure. Royal beliefs and practices are condemned as “counter-evolutionary” to human nature. As it depicts, humans in general gradually evolved to stand upright, with two feet on the ground. This visual art did not assert that Siamese people never evolved and hence were simply “primitive.” It is ironic that they learned to stand up vertically; however, they later learned to bend their back and finally crouched servilely. The sad undertone is that the Siamese had already encountered modernity and found a proper position as a human being. Still, they were willing to abandon the dignity and freedom which they had obtained and preferred servitude. This point distinguished the current anti-royalism from the one in the 1920s. As for the latter, the nature of absolutist regime coercively prevented the poor from standing up. On the contrary, frozen in an ice cube, a prostrating Siamese man does not have to be poor but he voluntarily refuses to further “evolve” nor “change.” Time has stopped. But “can the Siamese
man stay on the ground forever?” Highlighting an act of standing up as a powerful challenge against the royalist regime, one Redshirt poet insisted vehemently:

Our spine is vertical not horizontal. Whoever want to bow or prostrate, let them be. But when the Sky fell, the dust thus floated in the air and replaced stars. In this land of Thai, phrai and royals must be equal.827

Figure 6.15: Human Evolution, Siamese Evolution. A cyber visual graphic comparing a universal with a Siamese pattern of human evolution. The latter’s last stage is a prostrating man frozen in an ice cube. (Source: Voices of Siam Facebook account, 4 November 2012)

827 Jom Faiyen, “เมื่อดินเสียดเบียดดวงดาวบนราวฟ้า” “(When the dust floated in the air and replaced stars in the sky),” in 40ปี 14 ตุลา จงพิทักษ์เจตนารมย์ประชาธิปไตยสมบูรณ์ชองวีรชน 14 ตุลาคม (40th anniversary of Oct. 14: Protecting the democratic will of the 14 Oct. martyrs) (Bangkok: The Free Write Award, 2013), 122.
6.5.2 The “Lost World” and the Monarchies

According to anti-royalist texts, traditional conservative institutions including the monarchy are compared to dinosaurs. Both represent things which not only used to exist in the past, but died out because of an inability to adapt and survive in changing environments.

In its January – June 2013 issue, Same Sky picked “monarchy and royalism in the modern world” as the main theme. Benedict Anderson offered comparative explanations regarding the monarchies all over the world and how they became transformed in the past century. Since it was published during the era of “liberalization,” this “Lost World” issue ambitiously attempted to push the academic boundary of debates and studies of the monarchy. While some articles provided global comparative perspectives, others dealt more deeply with the idea of “hyper-royalism,” lèse-majesté, and historical anti-royalist pamphlets. More importantly, as creative as it had been before, the cover of this issue had an image of a shadowy creature resembling a tyrannosaurus (Figure 6.16). Although it reminded readers of the Jurassic Park logo from the Hollywood films, this cover was indeed a map. T-rex’s head was made of maps of countries where monarchies still exist. While the Kingdom of Norway’s fjords perfectly fit its curvy top head, the Kingdom of Thailand is located below, in the upper jaw area of this so-called king of the dinosaurs. Since its “Coke” issue in 2005 (see chapter three), Same Sky’s subversive arts on its cover have changed and evolved as political conflicts have unfolded.

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6.6 Semiotic Ruptures against Royalist Symbolism

Going beyond targeting particular royal individuals, linguistic and symbolic contestations against Thai royalism, especially in the cyber world, often took on forms of rejection and displacement of royalist symbols as well as assertion of new meanings. However, resistance did not have to feature merely negative reactions nor innovative meanings. It could involve expressions which evoked questions, openness, and humor. Through visual graphic design, several eye-opened internet users revealed the absurdity of the existing regime while evading legal prosecution. This section discusses three themes: anti-royalist utilization of the dust discourse, political satire against Thailand’s forced veneration, and overidentification/decontextualization of royal expressions.
6.6.1 The Dust Discourse: The Utilization of “Dust” with both Satirical and Newly Positive Meanings

According to the royalist semiotic order, the analogy between the dust underneath the soles of the royal feet and Thai people subjected to monarchical power captures the underlying cause of Thailand’s problems. Pervasively used in mass media, this expression has become a good example portraying Thailand as a hierarchical society. Similar to worthless dust, those in a lower class have been deprived of their basic rights, voices, and dignity.

Direct refusal to be a worthless being under anyone’s feet was common among Redshirt participants. Prior to the 2014 coup, Redshirt protesters wore T-shirts saying “Proud not to be under any foot (phumchai mai yu tai tin - ภูมิใจไม่อยู่ใต้เท้า)” (Figure 6.17). Mentioning nothing about the monarchy, this political statement was another fugitive form of anti-royalism. Toying with the existing official dust and royal feet discourse, the shirt’s implicit message was the declaration of self-emancipation from royal power. Here, the court language “phrabat” which means “royal feet” was replaced with “tin (ตีน),” the plainest and most vulgar Thai word for foot. Use of the latter is an example of linguistic desacralization. A double refusal has been made. That is, this dissent both refused to use the special language which elevated royal figures and to be under royal subjection. In a society where one could not directly say that he or she neither loved nor worshiped the monarchy, the refusal to be under “tin” would be an indirect way to express these political positions.
On the other hand, instead of rejecting the official discourse, a novel meaning was added to evoke the empowering sense of dust. Like phrai, the Redshirts transformed terms which previously carried negative meanings into positive self-identification. In a famous Redshirt song titled “The warriors of the dust (naksu thuli din - นักสู้ธุลีดิน),” Redshirt protesters were compared to a troop of soldiers of dust. Dust referred to the insubordinate multitude which never succumbed to brutality and injustice. Often played or sung to honor those who were killed at the hands of the ammat, the song boldly declared, “Our pride emerged in the battlefield. Nameless warriors never die. The troop of dust will change destiny.”

Rather than the submissive dust, the composer praised the countless numbers of “democratic” and defiant dust. While individually they were powerless, they became powerful when they united collectively and kept on multiplying. Through poetic and metaphorical language, the political idea that the many had superior power over the few was articulated.

Building on the same logic, the Faiyen song titled “One drop of sweat (nguea yot diao -- เหงื่อหยดเดียว)” also prioritized the collective forces of common men over those of a few elites, especially the King. According to the royalist symbolic order, the iconic portrait of the King with a drop of sweat falling from the tip of his nose represents the King as a selfless, hardworking ruler (see chapter two). Challenging this notion, Faiyen’s song contends, “One drop of sweat” can neither “build” nor “develop” the nation. Rather, the nation is made of the sweat of countless peasants which “has been pouring over this land as much as (the water in the) Chaophraya River” for hundreds of years. The song concludes that precisely because of this “drop of sweat,” the country suffers from confusion and political deadlock. Whether it is a troop of warriors of the dust or the accumulation of peasants’ sweat which formed a river, these metaphors reverse the royalist logic and adhere to the collectiveness, wholeness, and superiority of people power.

Instead of the power of the monarch or a few elites, Thailand, these artists maintain, has been built upon the blood and sweat of poor commoners. Without the latter, the former were disempowered and worthless similar to “the sky without stars,” “the ocean without currents,” or “the mountain without woods.”

6.6.2 Criticisms through Satirical Graphic Symbols

Political dissent through mockery, relying on visual graphics with minimal descriptions, can be a potent force. This section explores several artworks publicized in the cyber world which satirizes Thailand as a society of irrational forced adoration.

831 Stephanus Junius Brutus, the Celt, Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos: or, concerning the legitimate power of a prince over the people, and of the people over a prince, ed. George Garnett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 74.
832 Jom Faiyen, “เมื่อดินเสียดเบียดดวงดาวบนราวฟ้า” “(When the dust floated in the air and replaced stars in the sky),” 121-122.
Royalist submission and respect were not voluntary cultural practices. Those who refuse to conform to these unwritten rules would be subject to shunning and ostracism. Chotisak Ornsoong refused to stand to pay homage to the King’s anthem in a movie theater. He was injured by other moviegoers and was forced to leave immediately. Afterward, his friend was fired from work because she wore a shirt on which was written, “Not standing is not a crime,” to show support for him.

Figure 6.18 visualizes Thailand’s forced veneration through a simple drawing. Without providing written explanation, the work reveals that, in “other countries,” people can either stand or sit at will whereas in “our country” a man who chooses to sit loses his head. Viewers are left to interpret by themselves whether or not this cartoon is associated with the King’s anthem in a movie theater and is thus making a political statement. As an example, this drawing indicates that anonymous cyber satirists have problematized daily codes of conduct which were taken for granted and are barely related to formal politics. They assert that these social norms are indeed underlying causes of current conflicts perpetuating the state of inequality and coercive conformity.

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833 For case details, see http://freedom.ilaw.or.th/en/case/331.
Figure 6.18: Other Countries, Our Country. A simple drawing of a man “in our country” losing his head while sitting in a chair. (Source: Anonymous Facebook account, 2012)

Figures 6.19 shows how Thai internet users understand and aspire to democracy. In Figure 6.19, masks of the British royal family available for purchase can only exist under “democratic” condition. Here, following the British model, democracy is defined as freedom to imitate, make fun of, and commercialize the monarchy, as with other public figures and celebrities. Again, implicitly, this visual graphic portrayed an indirect way to condemn Thailand’s political regime as undemocratic.
To conclude, although these cyber works could be read as challenging Thai royal power and thus anti-royalist, their underlying political causes did not necessarily involve the abolition of the royal institution. Rather, these authors desired that the monarchy be treated equal to ordinary Thai and that an end be put to irrational and coercive worship.

### 6.6.3 Misuse and Over-exaggeration of Royal Expressions

Reaching its mature stage, anti-royalism in Thailand shares characteristics of what Alexei Yurchak called “stiob” or “absurdist forms of irony” prevailing in the late-socialist Soviet Union. According to Yurchak, stiob discursive practice entails two crucial elements – “a grotesque overidentification” and “decontextualization.”

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degree of overidentification with the object, person, or idea at which this 
stoib was directed that
it was impossible to tell whether it was a form of sincere support, subtle ridicule, or a peculiar mixture of two.\textsuperscript{836}

Second, “decontextualization is the act of placing this form in a context that is unintended and unexpected.”\textsuperscript{837} As a result, stoib seemingly reproduces official symbols; however, it brings about absurdity and opens up political ruptures for novel meanings. Boyer and Yurchak argue that stoib discourses achieve something which “politics of opposition” is incapable of. Instead of directly attacking or ridiculing symbols and rhetoric of power, they unfolded semiotic mechanisms which support the powers-that-be. In other words, “they all expose authoritative discourse’s reliance on form.”\textsuperscript{838} This section examines various anti-royalist arts and illustrations, mostly in the cyber world, which involved the identification and displacement of royal expressions and symbols. It starts with one which clearly signifies discontent to those which feature the absurd mimicry of hyper-royalism.

“Long live the king (song phra charoen - ทรงพระเจริญ)" was superfluously used by official media and royalists in Thailand, from billboards, to magazine displays, to small comment sections in social networks. Due to its terse and simple statement, “Long live the king” seemed to be the most popular royal expression uttered by Thai royalists. People chanted it during the royal procession. When royal news was published in social networks, the comment section contained a long list of “Long live the king” repetitively written by Thai internet users. However, it was impossible to monopolize the usage and meaning of this phrase. Several cases below show that

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[\textsuperscript{836}] Alexei Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation, 250.
\item[\textsuperscript{837}] Ibid., 252.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
“Long live the king” occasionally appeared in the cyber world with unlikely royalist motifs and in an exaggerated fashion.

After “Arkong” was sentenced to 20 years of imprisonment, one Facebook user posted this sign on his Facebook wall (Figure 6.20).

Figure 6.20: “Long Live the King” in chains. Symbolic expression of forced reverence (Source: Anonymous Facebook account, November 2011)

The sign says, “Long live the king,” but was written using chains and handcuffs. Describing his art, the internet user vented his frustration, “Is this what you want from ‘ordinary people?’ Today is such a shitty day. First, Arkong was sentenced for 20 years. And second, my boss assigned me to design ‘long live the king.’” 839 For this Thai graphic designer, “Long live the king” signified forced glorification. While at his workplace, he unwillingly participated in reproducing royalist symbols; he turned his semi-private cyberspace into a political site where he could design his own version of “Long live the king.”

Figure 6.21 captures this essential aspect of the power regime. This internet artwork is an image of a computer keyboard with most of the alphabet buttons disappeared. The remaining eight buttons compose the phrase “Long live the king” in Thai. In other words, the absurd nature of existing order and power is made apparent through overidentification of “Long live the king.”

839This Facebook account is no longer available.
Figure 6.21: The keyboard on which one can only type “Long Live the King”

Symbolic expression of forced reverence (Source: Anonymous Facebook account, 2012)

Figure 6.22 is another example in which the decontextualization of “Long live the king” is fairly salient. Imitating typical royalist expressions on the King’s birthday, the so-called “Ruthless (hot sat - โหดสัส)” Facebook page owners, recited “Long live the king,” using a compilation of the King’s images in the background. The format was correct. The makers of this imagery did not break the pattern in which hegemonic discourses operate. Nevertheless, they selected only images of the King holding guns and rifles. These photos were not counterfeited. Taken and circulated by the palace during Marshal Sarit Tharat’s premiership (1958 - 1963), they portrayed the King as a young masculine militant. This resulted from Sarit’s revival of the monarchical power and the newly forged alliances between the monarchy and military (see chapter two). 840 Decades later, the

840 Maurizio Peleggi, “Semiotics of Rama IX” (working paper series no. 114 presented at the Roundtable on Thailand in Crisis: The Twilight of a Reign or the Birth of a New Order held at the Asia Research Institute on February 24, 2009), 13. See also Thak Chaloemtianrana, Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism (Ithaca: SEAP, 2007), 207.
throne gradually thrived independently without counting on military patronage and King Bhumibol became fully elevated as the democratic and developmental savior of nation. Accordingly, these photographs ceased to be popularized. So did the aggressive image of the King as a fighter. The cult of King Bhumibol relied heavily on the King’s benevolent paternal power. The wise old King was praised as a songwriter, development forerunner, novelist, and philosopher, not as a crude combatant firing a rifle.

The “Ruthless” Facebook crew humbly blessed the King, but their selective royal images strangely did not fit contemporary royalist contexts. The images were decontextually juxtaposed with “Long live the king.” Thus, political ruptures were made using royal symbols themselves, those which were sunk into oblivion. Eliciting confusion from both sides, Figure 6.22 received positive feedbacks from both royalists and anti-royalists.

![Figure 6.22: “Long Live the King” with compilation of images of the King holding rifles and pistols. Cyber art of hyper-politeness and decontextualization (Source: Ruthless V2 Facebook account, 4 December 2012)](image)

Using the same technique but pushing the limits of overidentification further, another internet user wrote “His Majesty is a genius at gun firing. He is truly the father of the bullet
“spree” underneath an image of a young militant King Bhumibol at a shooting range (Figure 6.23). Again, the royalist grammatical structure was unbroken; however, the King’s exceptional talents became overly identified with firing skills. Under the twenty-first-century hyper-royalist regime, it was nearly blasphemous to put a gun in the Buddha-like King’s hand, let alone call him a great marksman. Furthermore, these historical images appeared to evoke the Redshirt slogan, “The monitor lizard/ motherfucker orders the killing.”

Figure 6.23: The King and a rifle. Decontextualization of royal image (Source: Ultra-royalism Facebook account, August 16, 2010)

Overidentification aside, particular forms of symbolic contestation were articulated by referring to something completely unrelated to Thailand’s politics. Therefore, their decontextualized effects should be highlighted. Similar to images of Steve Jobs holding an “iboard,” several cyber artworks relied heavily on prior collective understandings of anti-royalist narrative structure in order to successfully send seditious messages. Precisely because of their complete irrelevance to the context, they urged viewers or listeners to seek deeper meanings underneath de-contextualized surfaces.

In the royalist semiotic system, King Bhumibol has been matched with many objects, resulting in reproducing official royalist ideology. For instance, a photo of the King holding a
camera and a map supports the idea that he was insightfully omnipotent and had already visited and had knowledge of every inch of Thailand’s kingdom.\textsuperscript{842}

In contrast with these royalist symbolic signifiers, a wheelchair signified the King’s inactivity, physical and mental weaknesses, and the terminal stage of life. It was not uncommon to see images of King Bhumibol on the wheelchair visiting a shop at the hospital or appreciating the Chao Phraya River; however, to specifically associate him with this sickness-related object gravely undermined his divinity and magnificent power.

In the cyber world, there were many images of the “wheelchair” which were so de-contextualized that they had nothing to do with Thai politics. Figure 6.24 – 6.26 are intriguing instances. While the former offered no hint at all of its meaning,\textsuperscript{843} the latter two had short captions. “Today is Father’s Day, a squirrel at my house took his daddy squirrel outside ^^”\textsuperscript{844} is written below Figure 6.25. “On Father’s Day this year, I will take my dad to the beach^^”\textsuperscript{845} explains Figure 6.26. Smiley eyes at the end of each sentence hinted at the lack of seriousness of the messages. Publishing them on Father’s day, this internet user appropriated humor, pretentious naivety, and decontextualization to constitute subversive texts which could be decoded into a simple message to royalists, “your Father is an ordinary being on a wheelchair.”

\textsuperscript{842} Irene Stengs, Worshipping the Great Moderniser: King Chulalongkorn, Patron Saint of the Thai Middle Class (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), 224 – 225.

\textsuperscript{843} The person who posted this image online did not indicate where it came from. It is actually a snapshot from one screen of the film “Red Dragon” (2002) when reporter Freddy Lounds, played by Philip Seymour Hoffman, was glued to a wheelchair and set on fire. There was no indication that this internet user was a movie lover or a fan of the Hannibal Lecter film franchise.

\textsuperscript{844}วันนี้วันพ่อ กระรอกบ้านผมพาพ่อกระรอกไปเที่ยวนอกบ้านครับ ^^

\textsuperscript{845}วันพ่อปีนี้ ผมจะพาพ่อไปทะเลครับ ^^
Figure 6.24: A *wheelchair on fire*. Political symbolization of “wheelchair” (Source: Anonymous Facebook account, 2012)

Figure 6.25: *The squirrels, Father’s day, and a wheelchair*. Political symbolization of wheelchair on the Father’s day (Source: Ruthless Facebook account, December 2012)
The beach, Father’s day, and a wheelchair. Political symbolization of wheelchair on the Father’s day (Source: Ruthless Facebook account, December 2012)

A T-shirt worn by a Redshirt protester saying “THE KING IS DEAD” with Elvis Presley’s face would not have made political sense nor created subversive implications unless it appeared in political gatherings and there had been widespread rumors about the King’s vulnerable health (Figure 6.27). When being attacked by the royalists, a person who wore this Elvis shirt immediately gave a naïve response. He said that he admired Elvis, this sentence was globally known, and Elvis was not “divine.” Likewise, thanks to the awareness of the existence of “The King Never Smiles” and its demystification of the monarchy, “smile” became a popular theme for anti-royalist parody. Instead of the King, either Queen Elizabeth or a grumpy cat refusing to smile, served as signifiers of prohibited subjects (Figures 6.28 – 6.29).

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Figure 6.27: “The King of rock is dead” shirt. Protest shirt featuring decontextualization

Figure 6.28: The Queen never smiles. Cyber visual graphic featuring decontextualization
(Source: Anonymous Facebook account, 2012)
These decontextualized instances prove that complex webs of anti-royalist meanings and ideas had been sufficiently well-established so that extraneous images juxtaposed with particular short phrases could open up new implications deviating from formal semiotic order. In a regime where direct criticism against the monarchy is impossible, people seek to find ways to express their anti-royalist thoughts, communicate to each other by using symbols and codenames, and, above all, add humor to everything. Unlike vulgar codenames such as “the blind bastard,” the authority and decoding specialists had difficult times detecting these forms of irony and exaggeration, penetrating into the makers’ intentions, and legally prosecuting them. This was because while vulgar codenames could easily be seen as oppositional discourse, instances offered in this section either shared “formal resemblance” or engaged with something completely irrelevant to authoritative discourse.\footnote{Dominic Boyer and Alexei Yurchak, “American Stiob: Or, What Late-Socialist Aesthetics of Parody Reveal about Contemporary Political Culture in the West,” 182.}
6.7 Conclusion

Year 2011 – 2014 was significant for Thailand’s history of anti-royalism not in terms of the drastic shift in political consciousness. Nor was it the period when Redshirt participants remain uncertain regarding their political foes. Rather, members of the movement to some extent shared collective perception and attitude toward the Thai monarchy. The main agenda was to seek various modalities of resistance, taking in forms of rhetoric and symbolic contestation, in avoidance of being convicted of lèse-majesté.

On the one hand, as the Pheu Thai party’s slogan stated, “Solving the problem instead of [exacting] revenge” the Thaksin camp, including the UDD, implicitly followed the strategy of “eyes opening but lips whispering.” This strategy was commonly known as “Fighting while prostrating,” according to their fellow Redshirt critics. That is, Yingluck’s administration and UDD leaders failed to transform their supporters’ political awakening into a concrete reform policy nor legal change. Their most concrete accomplishment beneficial to the Redshirts was the compensation fund given to families of the deceased and those who were injured as a result of political turmoil.

On the other, it is arguable that the Yingluck government, to some extent, allowed certain kinds of “whisper” which were louder than others. Independent and radical fractions of the so-called eye-opened Redshirts were able to express and spread out their political thoughts. Despite legal constraints, Faiyen, Nitirat, Somsak, and other activists were free enough to speak their minds while testing the limits of possibility. For instance, while the UDD chairwoman, Thida Thawornseth, insisted on repeating that Redshirts aimed to attain true democracy “with the king as head of state,” Piyabutr, a member of Nitirat, boldly replaced it with “democracy which allows

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848 แก้ไขไม่แก้แค้น (kaekhai mai kaekhaen)  
849 สู้ไปกราบไป (su pai krap pai)
the king to be head of state.” The latter was Thailand’s political regime which had not yet been accomplished. As opposed to the former, the latter posited the people and democratic values above the monarchy.

Moreover, several media personnel overcame self-censorship. For the first time, a television program called “Answering Thailand’s Questions (ตอบโจทย์ประเทศไทย),” aired by The Thai Public Broadcasting Service (ThaiPBS), invited a former politician and public scholars to openly discuss about the role of the Thai monarchy under constitution. Somsak was one of the guest and his critical thoughts were eventually delivered to the public. At the participant level, fear was replaced with laughter, love was politicized, official names, ideas, and laws were codified, attached with new meanings, or subversively misused. As Aunt Wan, a Redshirt protestor, recalled in 2015, “At that time, we feared nothing. We had no limit.”

In the end, the government was again overthrown. In the wake of the 2014 military coup, most acts previously understood as either whispering or shouting could be prosecuted under the sweeping lèse-majesté law. Acts of whispering could no longer guarantee both the effectiveness and persistence of the Redshirt struggle after 2014. What remained was merely the sense of “eye-opening” with extremely limited means of outward expression. Nonetheless, the post-May-2014 charges and prosecutions could be seen as the Thai elites’ stubborn desperation to control and monopolize political expression and meaning making. Arguably, the elites’ harsh and coercive reactions were caused by their fear of Redshirt contagious “whispers” during 2011 –
2014. These whispers were often “louder” and more blasphemous than those uttered by the party and movement leaders. As Faiyen said in their song:

Only soft whispers can shake their hearts, move the mountain, contaminate the society as if they were under attacked. The whisper of truth is more serious than firing an RPG. It aims to exorcise evil spirits. This is Redshirt strategies... To whisper is an execution sword, conquering Satan and giving it a restless death.¹⁸⁵⁴

CHAPTER 7

REDSHIRT ANTI-ROYALIST INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY OF THAILAND

To serve their charismatic power, the feudalist class has monopolized rights to write and interpret history. The feudalist intellectual self-claimed to be the father of history and the supreme judge of national history. Instead of the progressive history of the people, national history thus concerned about royal successions and kings’ achievements... They are not history but fairy tales.855

Jit Phumisak

7.1 Introduction

As this dissertation has shown so far, the Redshirts’ self-perception and their stories of struggles became incompatible with the dominant royalist narratives. Up to now (2016), the Redshirts, regardless to the specificity of groups and factions, are remembered as the villains in Thailand’s official history. They are slandered as tools of the politicians, buffalo Red (stupid), non-Thai, rebellious anti-monarchist, and terrorist. As current conflicts have gradually unfolded, the Redshirts, as a mass movement, have found themselves with no proper place in Thailand’s typical royalist history. Redshirt authors thus began to write contested stories in which they perceived themselves as “warriors of dust” or commoners who fought against social hierarchy and inequality. As I have argued, the ongoing conflict can be read as a war over meaning-making.

There is also another type of war which the Reds have embarked on; a war over memory. It is necessary to explore how members of Redshirt movement have looked back into the past and subversively interpreted history to make sense of as well as to legitimize their struggles. According to their alternative interpretations of the past, Redshirt struggles were not completely unprecedented, but can be fittingly located in historical narratives. In both the formal and informal sectors, attempts were made to invent a novel version of Thai history in which

855 Jit Phumisak, โฉมหน้าศักดินาไทย (The Real Face of Thai Feudalism) (1957; repr., Nonthaburi: Sripanya, 2007), 63.
particular events and figures could be turned into symbolic forces with which the Redshirts could identify. As Thanavi Chotpradit puts it succinctly, Redshirt struggles involve “the resurrection of the past and historicisation of self.” The point of these re-tellings, whether on the side of the royalists or on the Redshirt side, is less about historical accuracy than about politicization of history to serve current political causes.

According to a typical royalist history of Thailand, this Land of Smiles has been portrayed as a relatively peaceful country with continuity rather than development driven by disruptive antagonistic politics. In comparison to its neighbor countries, Craig J. Reynolds notes, “[In Thailand] no social revolution swept the land, no independence movement was called up to liberate it from colonial oppression, no Chairman ever moved millions with anti-feudal exhortations.” Above all, the official narrative depicts Chakri kings as “national savior” and “national maker.” For instance, Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1853-1910) is known as the great modernizer who abolished slavery and prevented Siam from being colonized. Prajadhipok (Rama VII, 1893-1941) is a democratic king who granted Thailand’s first constitution to his people. As shown in chapter two, Bhumibol (Rama IX, 1927-2016) represents the zenith of the royalist ideology. As a demi-god, righteous ruler, developer, genius philosopher, and hard-working Father, Bhumibol was both an ideal ruler and a flawless example for all Thais.

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859 See Irene Stengs, Worshipping the Great Moderniser: King Chulalongkorn, Patron Saint of the Thai Middle Class (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009).
860 See Prajak Kongkirati, “40 ปีราชอาณาจักรนิติราษฎร์” (40 Years of Royal Nationalist Democracy),” in เฉลิมฉลองสิบสี่ตุลา (Repeating Era, Progressing Time: Celebrating 40th anniversary of October 14) (Bangkok: Fong Tong Enterprise, 2013).
However, as Reynolds and Patrick Jory have maintained, Thailand also has a long history of radical politics and “republican” thoughts that subvert the official narrative.\textsuperscript{861} Due to their absence in mass media and educational system, these “seditious” histories were forgotten and ceased to exist as public memories of national past. Sometimes, they were distorted and dissident figures were criminalized and stigmatized. In a sense, domination has expanded to the realm of memory. As Michael Levine maintains, memorial politics does not only feature remembrance but also forgetting. Undesired past is erased or twisted in order to serve the power-that-be.\textsuperscript{862}

Although in Thailand anti-royalist histories have often been suppressed, they are not completely sinking into social oblivion. From time to time, they have been recollected, reinterpreted, and inspired those in later generations. Historical figures who were supposed to be national traitors or mentally insane in one period have been perceived as heroes or role models in another. Moreover, as “invented traditions,” they served as symbolic forces of political change.\textsuperscript{863} For instance, the so-called Kabot ror. Sor. 130, the military officers who plotted a failed anti-monarchical coup in 1912, was put behind bars during Vajiravudh (Rama VI) reign. Twenty years later, they were praised by Pridi Banomyong, a member of the People’s Party which overthrew Thailand’s absolutist regime in 1932, as forerunners of the revolution.\textsuperscript{864}

Likewise, in the wake of the rise to power of a military dictator, Sarit Thanarat, in 1958, progressive and leftist writings were banned and removed. Intellectuals, journalists, and activists were deprived of their public political life. As Prajak Kongkirati argues, Field Marshal Sarit


\textsuperscript{864} Patrick Jory, “Republicanism in Thai History,” 107.
attempted to eradicate “[the] public intellectual” from Thai society. Shot dead in 1966, Jit Phumisak, a prominent Marxist fighter, and his works were erased from public memories. However, these figures and their writings were dug out and revitalized by student activists in the 1970s. In a more open political context, student activists were introduced to these figures and their writings. From 1973 to 1976, leftist works, including Jit’s *The Real Face of Thai Feudalism Today*, were republished and popularized. Jit, a young student who not only wrote academic works and songs but also fearlessly took arms, fought the oppressive regime, and died for a political cause, turned into a role model for university students a decade later. These instances illustrate that contested stories in the past have never been entirely forgotten; on the contrary, under specific conditions, they can be resurrected and become powerful forces for future social movements and political struggles.

In a similar fashion, the chapter aims to show how and what kinds of historical events and figures were recollected, re-signified, and admired by Redshirt participants. In other words, using Eric Hobsbawm’s terminology, what are the “invented traditions” of the Redshirts? As Hobsbawm defines, invented traditions are “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.” In terms of political purpose, invented traditions serve to “use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion.” Although invented traditions are often imposed from above to instigate nationalism or esprit de corps, they can also be products from below aiming to break with the present by establishing continuity with the neglected past. For instance, James C. Scott views folktales or

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868 Ibid., 12.
spiritual cults as parts of cultural practices of disprivileged groups. As he maintains, the subordinate class “adopt them for their own use, and they of course create a new cultural practices and artifacts to meet their felt needs.”

Redshirt invented traditions or new cultural practices based on the past do not serve the continuation of status-quo but act to de-legitimize it. What has been dug up and resignified includes democratic past or anti-royalist traditions of Thailand. The historical selections are made horizontally and democratically. This chapter will examine the Redshirts’ appropriation of three such historical events: the death of King Taksin of the Thonburi Kingdom; the People’s Party’s 1932 revolution; and the death of King Ananda (Rama VIII). It shows how Redshirt war over memory is expressed in various forms of cultural practices including ritual worship, poetry, written and unwritten storytelling, puzzling music, and online illustrations.

7.2 King Taksin and the Illegitimate Founding of the Chakri Dynasty

“History is written by the victors,” wrote “Major General of Thonburi” (sic), a columnist of Voice of Taksin. This pseudonymous author pointed out that the death of King Taksin of Thonburi, despite its occurrence 200 years ago, remained a riddle and inconclusive. As this section notes, according to a Redshirt interpretation of history, King Taksin, the ancient king of Siam, turned into not only a Redshirt folk hero but also a subversive historical symbol against the present royal power. To elaborate, Taksin’s personal background, his death, and historical events leading up his final moments unveiled the illegitimate root of Thailand’s current monarchical dynasty. This ancient king’s success and tragic end was believed to share similarity with the Redshirts’ history of struggles.

The moment of founding, the birth of new form of government, is crucial to the legitimacy of the ruler. As mentioned in the Introduction, several political theorists indicate that tyranny, as a political regime originating from conquest and usurpation, has no legitimate grounds for ruling.\textsuperscript{871} According to theories regarding covenant and resistance, a tyrant is not only a despotic ruler who betrays people’s will and governs arbitrarily, but also originally gains power by force. As John Locke argues, “he that conquers in an unjust war can thereby have no title to the subjection and obedience of the conquered.”\textsuperscript{872}

As is commonly known, the date which marked the great beginning of Chakri dynasty, of which Thai monarchs have reigned until today, is April 6, 1782. According to official and public memory, the demise of Taksin and Thonburi kingdom was caused by Taksin’s own disability instead of internal fractions among the elite and the attempt to seize power in a coup. Out of necessity, General Chao Phraya Chakri became the first monarch of the House of Chakri and the founder of Rattanakosin (Bangkok). This story downplays another narrative that not only Taksin but also Taksin’s family members and satellites were brutally killed and purged. Moreover, general Chakri was indeed supported by the old power, the nobility during Ayutthaya’s era, which desired a resurrection of Ayuttahaya’s godly king tradition. Justifying the new Chakri monarch’s accession to the throne, the narrative does not emphasize rebellious and conflictual aspects of the story.

Rather than celebrating the founding of Chakri dynasty on April 6, Thailand’s national holiday, several Redshirt participants choose to mourn for lives which were lost at the expense of the great beginning of Chakri’s power. “Others celebrate the Chakri’s day but we do not,”


\textsuperscript{872} John Locke, \textit{Second Treatise of Government}, 92.
commented Aunt Chan at the _____________. On April 6, 2015, Aunt Nuad and her Redshirt friends instead went to Taksin’s Monument and worshiped the ancient king, offering flowers. “It was the day when King Taksin was beheaded,” she explained fluently. This Redshirt woman, who came from the northern region and earned money from massage, might offer inaccurate historical facts. King Taksin was indeed executed on April 10, not 6, four days after General Chao Phraya Chakri staged the coup. Nonetheless, this kind of subversive thought becomes politically powerful not because of its historical precision but because of its underlying intention to sabotage typical glorifications of the Chakri founding monarch, the ancestor of the current Thai monarchy.

The moment of establishment of Thailand’s new capital was remembered as the moment of decapitation of one great leader as well as the eradication of political foes. On the same day, a cyber satirist took an opportunity to publish a visual graphic depicting contested historical narratives. As Figure 7.1 shows, Manee, a girl in redshirt, is looking at a Thai mural painting. The painting visualizes an execution held at a palace. It is the moment when a criminal, wearing a monk’s robe, is decapitated by the executioner, who appears beautifully angelic and flying in the air. The execution takes place in front of a god-like king, wearing a traditional crown and sitting on a throne. Nearby, two boats are capsized and two children are drowning. In the painting, violence, killing, and death co-exist with glamorous figures and court tradition. Manee, a redshirt viewer, scratches her head with confusion. The caption reads, “Chapter 111, The Cruel Friendship Betrayal (phuean rak hak liam hot - เพื่อนรักหักเหลี่ยมโหด).” The beheaded monk is likely to be understood as King Taksin since he was in monkhood as his subordinates, who later elevated himself to be a divine monarch, staged the coup against him. Those in the water are Taksin’s

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874 Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, April 7, 2015.
children. Arthit Jeamratthatanyu poignantly summarized the Redshirt narrative regarding King Taksin’s death. While the official narrative attempts to highlight historical continuity and harmony, the Redshirt story emphasizes the antagonistic aspects of the event. What was dominantly perceived as the moment of founding turns, in reverse, into moments of treason, chaos, and ruthless massacre.

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875 Arthit Jeamratthatanyu, "คิดถึงพ่อ พ่อถึงคุณ คุณถึงพี่: สมเด็จพระเจ้าตากสินมหาราชกับวัฒนธรรมการเมืองของขบวนการเสื้อแดง" "(Missing Dad, Dad used to serve the royals: King Taksin and Redshirt Movement’s Political Culture)" (working paper presented at Chulalongkorn University, Humanities Conference, March 10, 2012).
Betrayed by someone whom he trusted and unjustly overthrown, King Taksin gained the sympathy of the Redshirt participants. Many Redshirts could not help but associate King Taksin’s tragedy with deposed Prime Ministers Thaksin Shinawatra’s fate. The two stories were

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told as if they were in parallel. Therefore, one could not be certain whether the following sentence talks about the past or the present. “He was deposed in a coup” because “he had no royal blood. He thus did not have a solid support base nor connections with the old nobility.” Moreover, the name resemblance between Taksin and Thaksin makes their transcendent relationship more convincing.

Accordingly, the Redshirts re-constructed a history of King Taksin in the way which resonated with their perceptions of current political conflicts. First, King Taksin symbolized a great leader who used to be a commoner and ascended to power because of his own abilities instead of hereditary ties. Second, he was believed to be toppled by the old establishment, those who wished to restore the idea of divine monarchy. Third, after his execution, King Taksin’s story was distorted and remembered falsely as the king who turned crazy. These three dimensions constituted Redshirt memorial politics regarding King Taksin.

In a poem titled, “The Unfortunate Great King, King Taksin,” Mai nueng, a Redshirt poet, emphasized the ancient king’s Chinese heritage and non-royal blood by repetitively calling him “Mr. Sin from the Tae clan” who mobilized ordinary men and led the people’s army to fight external threats while the king of Ayutthaya was weak. In the end, his power was robbed by the “ammat (aristocrat or noble).” Here, in the poet’s view, King Taksin’s and the Redshirts’ enemy appeared to be the same group of people. In other words, King Taksin represented the first victim of the tyrant regime which lasted until today and now oppressed the Redshirts. As the poem finally concludes, the vicious circle of Thailand’s politics was never broken. “There is no place for good men in this history.”

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877 The author was talking about King Taksin. Major General of Thonburi, “กงกรรมประวัติศาสตร์ Taksin Return!” “(Historical Wheel of Karma? Taksin Return!),” 6.
879 Arthit Jeamratthatanyu, “คิดถึงพ่อ ผู้เก็บเนื้อหาจากข่าวสารทางวัฒนธรรมการเมืองของชนเผ่าแดง” “(Missing Dad, Dad used to serve the royals: King Taksin and Redshirt Movement’s Political Culture)” (working paper presented at Chulalongkorn University, Humanities Conference, March 10, 2012).
As a result, King Taksin has become a political icon acclaimed among Redshirt participants. So far, no one has ever been charged with lèse-majesté law for either admiring King Taksin or casting doubt toward his death and the Chakri’s controversial founding. The former indeed often takes in an explicit fashion. For spiritual protection, Taksin’s images and statues are usually visible during Redshirt gatherings as well as within indoor places such as Redshirt offices or shops. As figure 7.2 illustrates, at the Redshirt a 10-centimeter black statue of King Taksin was placed on the top of the bookshelves.

Figure 7.2: A small statue of King Taksin (Sources: A photo was taken by the shop owner on June 8, 2016)

It is interesting to link the increasing popularity of King Taksin’s portrait with the removal of the current monarch’s portraits. During my fieldwork, I visited several places where Redshirt participants usually met and socialized, for instance, the office of one Redshirt television channel, Redshirt local headquarters in Bangkok, and the . They all shared similarity in terms of
objects for spiritual worship. That is, several portraits were present and decorated, including those of King Taksin, recently deceased Buddhist monks, and Chinese gods. Not a single image of anyone in association with the current Thai royal family was visible.\textsuperscript{880}

Moreover, the King Taksin monument in Thonburi district, directly across the Chao Phraya River from Bangkok and the King’s Palace, was turned into one Redshirt rally site. Lastly, due to his military charisma, King Taksin became an auspicious symbol in battle. In 2008, the head of the Redshirt militant faction, Major General Kattiya Sawadipol, alias Seh Deang, started training ordinary protesters and formed an autonomous troop called “King Taksin’s Warriors.”\textsuperscript{881}

In short, on the one hand, the Redshirts, ranging from the formal United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) organization, artists, internet users, ordinary participants, to militant groups, attempted to re-write Thailand’s contested history by portraying King Taksin as the forgotten heroic commoner and the victim of the Chakri monarch’s and the ammat’s thirst for power. For Redshirt participants, King Taksin thus deserved more respect from Thai people whereas the first king of the Chakri dynasty did not obtain legitimate authority to form and rule the kingdom. Implicitly, this illegitimate rule lasts until today. On the other hand, the Redshirt admiration of King Taksin and their subversive interpretations of history can be seen as advocating elitism. That is, despite the attempt to undermine the authority of leadership, the movement needed someone such as King Taksin or Thaksin Shinawatra, ordinary men who turned extraordinary and charismatic, to be the inspiration for, if not leaders of, current struggles against the royalist establishment.

\textsuperscript{880} Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, April 17, 2015.

\textsuperscript{881} “‘นักรบพระเจ้าตาก’ VS ‘นักรบศรีวิชัย’” “(‘King Taksin’s Warriors’ VS ‘Sriwichai Warriors’),” \textit{Bangkok Today}, October 2, 2008.
7.3 The People’s Party, the 1932 Revolution, and Anti-Monarchism

On June 24, 1932, a group of military and civilian officers under the name of the People’s Party (Khana Ratsadon) overthrew Thailand’s absolutist regime. The head of the People’s Party, Phraya Phahon Phonphayuhasena (Phahon), read the Announcement of the People’s Party No. 1 at the Royal Plaza located on Ratchadamnoen Avenue, Bangkok. Written by Pridi Banomyong, the head of the civilian faction of the People’s Party, the Announcement attacks Thailand’s absolutism for its arbitrary ruling power, favoritism, plundering public spending, and exploitative and oppressive nature. King Prajadhipok, Rama VII, was criticized that “he rules without any guiding principle.” The royalty and the king’s government, as the Announcement condemns, “rules dishonestly with deception.” Phahon finally proclaimed that, “[T]he time has ended when those of royal blood farm on the backs of the people. Things which everyone desires, the greatest happiness and progress which can be called si ariya, will arise for everyone.”

As mentioned in the previous section, Redshirt alternate interpretations of King Taksin do not emphasize his political ideologies or the principles of this ancient ruler, but rather focus on his root as a commoner and misfortunes at the hands of Chakri monarch. Moreover, the narratives usually rely on folklore and oral histories rather than well-recorded, well-written sources. Moving forward to contemporary historical cases, the Redshirts selectively remember and celebrate the People’s Party not because of the personal story of each member, but their

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882 Benjamin Batson, Siam’s Political Future: Documents from the End of the Absolute Monarchy (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, 1974), 97.
success in the overthrow of absolute monarchy on June 24, 1932 and their attempt to establish popular sovereignty and constitutionalism.\textsuperscript{884}

This narrative is deviant from the royalist one. According to the latter, the People’s Party was usually portrayed as a group of officers who ungratefully robbed power from the king to serve their interests instead of the people’s. The 1932 revolution was often depicted as a premature coup establishing a political regime to which Thai people had not yet been accustom. As royalist historians often condemn it as “early ripe, early rotten.”\textsuperscript{885} Moreover, for these royalist narrators, Thailand should have been slowly democratized by the monarch who well-intentionally prepared to grant the first constitution to Thai people. Above all, the People’s Party were blamed for Thailand’s political underdevelopment until nowadays. To put it simply, according to the royalist interpretation of the 1932 revolution, Prajadhipok is understood as the democratic king whereas the People’s Party as an impulsive, hypocrite, and self-serving group of bureaucrats. However, since the 2006 coup, there has been an emergence of counter-discourse which turns the comparison above upside down.

On June 24, 2012, the official Redshirt UDD organized a large gathering to celebrate the 80\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the 1932 Siamese Revolution, which marked the end of Thailand’s absolute

\textsuperscript{884} There are three prominent works examining various interpretations of the People’s Party and its legacy. First, focusing on the early 1970s, Prajak Kongkirati argues that this was the period when the idea of democratically royalist nationalism began to form among Thai intellectuals. That is, Thai monarchs were depicted as democratic endorsement whereas the People’s Party was portrayed as the predecessor of military dictatorship. Second, Somsak Jeamteerasakul noted that from 1981 onwards, there was another emerging trend of narrative which reconciled between the People’s Party and the monarchy. According to this paradigm, both the People’s Party and the monarchy were praised as democratic supporters. The two ideas of pro-People’s Party and pro-monarchy accommodated each other. Finally, Chatri Prakitnonthakan explored how the Redshirts, from 2008 onwards, formulated a counter-narrative which posed the People’s Party as democratic forerunners against the royalist elite. See Somsak Jeamteerasakul, “24 มิถุนา การตีความ 4 แบบ” “(June 24: Four Interpretations),” Somsak’s work Blogspot, June 17, 2006, accessed August 22, 2016, http://somsakworkblogspot.com/2006/06/causes-mutation-in-existing-structural.html; Chatri Prakitnonthakan, “คณะราษฎรหลังรัฐประหาร 19 กันยา” “(The People’s Party after the September 19 Coup),” \textit{Read 4}, 4 (April-June 2013): 19-39; Prajak Kongkirati, การเมืองวัฒนธรรมไทยว่าด้วยความทรงจักรและนารา (Thai Cultural Politics: On Memory/Discourse/Power), 3-56.

monarchy. Under the theme “80 years, there is still no democracy.” Nattawut Saikua, a UDD leader, declared on stage, “The main political structure has not changed.” In other words, since 1932, what was embarked on by the People’s Party remained an “unfinished struggle for full and equal citizenship.” Nattawut then informed 35,000 Redshirts at the Democracy Monument that the People’s Party was not the first group which desired “political changes” and constitutionalism. He went back to 1885 when Prince Prisdang, together with other royal officials, submitted a petition to Chulalongkorn (Rama V) calling for political reform. As the 1885 memorials emphasized, in order to protect the country’s independence from the West, Siam must transform itself into a constitutional monarchy in which there is a cabinet government, the rule of law, and freedom of speech and thought.

Nattawut then moved forward to the 1912 plan for an uprising, a plan which turned abortive. He talked about “Mo Leng,” or Captain Khun Thuayhanphitak, who had been inspired by the 1911 Chinese Revolution and plotted to overthrow the absolute monarchy and establish constitutional monarchy, but failed. Eventually, Nattawut’s historical narrative reached its climax. On June 24, 1932, the People’s Party carried out their forerunners’ democratic missions. Pridi Banomyong, a French-educated law-school student who was one among the key revolutionary leaders, was admired onstage. What was interesting was that Nattawut then provided an extremely concise summary of Thai politics after the 1932 revolution. Neither individual nor incident was praised and discussed in detail including the events of October 14, 1973 or October

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6, 1976. In other words, this Redshirt leader seemed to prioritize political struggles before the 1932 revolutions and the revolution itself to those occurring after 1932.

Patrick Jory differentiates two types of republicanism in Thai history. First, “liberal republicanism” includes those criticisms and struggles against absolute monarchy to which constitutionalism, rule of law, equality among men, freedom of expression were central. The second type of republicanism, “communist republicanism” led by the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) and leftist students, aimed to conquer capitalist imperialism and “the remnants of feudalism,” a leftist trope standing for the monarchy. Nattawut’s speech appeared to highlight and convey admiration toward the former instead of the latter. In this sense, it can be argued that the Redshirt movement’s ideological lines were close to those of the anti-absolutists rather than of the Marxists or leftists.

From their beginning, Redshirt participants, at all levels, did not pay attention to the political legacy of the People’s Party. The resurrection and resignification of the People’s Party by Redshirts was a gradual process. Before 2006, Chatri Prakitnonthakan notes that neither group nor organization explicitly identified themselves with politics or principles of the People’s Party. Every year on June 24, only family members of the People’s Party partook in almsgiving to monks at Buddhist temples. A group of people gathered at the People’s Party commemorative plaque. However, the number of participants was very small and the point of gathering was to merely evoke nostalgia for the past. In other words, the event was merely a depoliticized recollection of the People’s Party.

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889 Defining republicanism in a broader sense, Jory includes political thoughts which accept the existence of the monarchy but strive to limit the royal power.
At the participant level, several Redshirt informants recalled that they were recently exposed to the People’s Party and these forgotten histories. During an interview in 2015, Pae Bangsanan, a Redshirt singer, admitted that he started studying a biography of Pridi after the 2006 coup and gradually realized why “Pridi could never return to Thailand.” Again, the past and present seemed to overlap in Pae’s narrative. Thaksin, Pae’s favorite prime minister, was similarly ousted and lived in exile as was Pridi. Aunt Pinky, another active Redshirt protester, said that she used to dislike political changes or movements. “I did not care. They seemed chaotic. Now I reversely admire them.” She even claimed that if only she had been born in Pridi’s and Field Marshal Pleak’s era, she would definitely have “joined their struggles.” “I would have been one of them.” For both Pae and Aunt Pinky, political foes of the People’s Party and the Redshirts were the same group of people.

In 2007, an anti-coup group called “June 24 for Democracy” was founded and later became a Redshirt autonomous group allied with the UDD. The date which marked the beginning of Thailand’s regime change became the vital component of a group name. Somyot Prueksakasemsuk, the group’s leader who was convicted of lèse-majesté writings in 2011, explained that on June 24, 1932, the People’s Party aimed to transfer sovereign power to the Thai people but did not succeed. He said that, after the regime change, the People’s Party were condemned and labeled as villains in Thailand’s official history. Their stories of struggle were distorted and de-valued. The June 24 group thus aimed to bring the People’s Party back to public memory and achieve their unfinished goal.

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892 Pae Bangsanan, interview by author, Bangkok, May 7, 2015. After the death of King Ananda, Rama VIII, 1946, Pridi was accused of being involved in the regicide. He left Thailand and lived in exile for the rest of his life.
894 Chatri Prakitnonthakan, “คณะราษฎรษ์หลังรัฐประหาร 19 กันยา” ”The People’s Party after the September 19 Coup),” 21.
program. In an interview, Chai, another group’s leader and a DJ, demonstrated how the program began:

Hello, the next program is hosted by the “June 24 for Democracy” group. Our country changed her political regime on June 24, 1932. As the first article [of the Temporary Charter for the Administration of Siam Act 1932] read, the sovereign power belongs to all the people. The People’s Party changed the form of government from absolute monarchy to democracy.896

Here, what was selectively emphasized in this recollection of the People’s Party was the popular sovereignty as opposed to the absolute power of the king. As color-coded conflicts escalated, June 24 became a politically significant day for Redshirt participants, particularly since 2009 onward. Chatri holds that Redshirts’ growing attention to June 24 in 2009 might be associated with their “National Eye-opening Day” in 2008.897

“Today is Thailand’s real national day,” declared one speaker on June 24, 2009 in front of a Redshirt crowd at the memorial plaque of the People’s Party. This was the first commemoration of the People’s Party officially organized by the UDD in alliance with other splinter Redshirt groups including the June 24 group. The event’s title in 2009 was “Reclaiming Democracy, Searching for Thailand’s National Day.”898 Organizers and participants announced that June 24 used to be Thailand’s national day until Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat erased the People’s Party from public memory by changing the national day to December 5, King Bhumibol’s birthday in 1960.899 This change symbolized the downfall of the People’s Party and the rise to power of the monarchy. The

896 Chai, interview by author, Bangkok, Thailand, April 3, 2015.
897 As mentioned in chapter three, October 13, 2008 was locally known as “National Eye-opening Day” when the Thai Queen presided over the funeral of one Yellowshirt participant. This incident caused a drastic shift in attitude toward the monarchy, at least the Thai Queen. See Chatri Prakitnonthakan, “คณะราษฎรหลังรัฐประหาร 19 กันยา” “The People’s Party after the September 19 Coup),” 32.
899 June 24 was officially declared to be Thailand’s national day on July 18, 1938. On May 21, 1960, after seizing power in coup, Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat changed national day to December 5, the King’s birthday. See Somsak Jeamteerasakul, “ประวัติศาสตร์วันชาติไทย จาก 24 มิถุนายน ถึง 5 ธันวา” (“The History of Thailand’s National Day: From June 24 to December 5”), Same Sky 2, no. 2 (April – June 2004): 70 -121.
reclamation of Thailand’s national day on June 24, 2009 thus implied Redshirt intention to remove
the monarchy from its central role in Thai nationalism. Mai nueng, a Redshirt poet, urged people
to “put a stake in the ground (ปักหมุดใหม่อีกครั้งให้ถาวร)” again more firmly than the People’s Party
did.900

Since 2009, recollection of the People’s Party has taken many forms. First, as noted above,
the 1932 revolutionary leaders and their accomplishments were brought into the spotlight. The
Redshirt newspaper, Mahaprachachon, honored the People’s Party on its cover with large photos
of Phahon and Pridi, the two leaders of the revolutionary group (See Figure 7.3 and 7.4).
The headline of the 24 June issue (Figure 7.4) clearly states that the People’s Party’s mission
needs to be carried on. The Redshirt movement adopted the principles of these
revolutionaries and intended to realize them. In other words, the Redshirts historicized
themselves as the People’s Party’s political heir.

Figure 7.3: “Commemoration of the People’s Party. The Revolutionary leader: Phraya
Phahonphonphayuhasena” (Source: Truth Today Mahaprachachon, July 29 – July 1, 2009)

900 Mai nueng, “ไม้หนึ่ง กุณที 24 06 2009” “(Mai nueng kor khun tii 24 06 2009)” (video of Redshirt gathering
at the People’s Party’s memorial plaque, Bangkok, June 24, 2009), accessed May 10, 2016,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D96hQYovL74.
Second, arts and symbols produced during the People’s Party’s era were resurrected and re-appreciated. Chai remembered that during the community radio program hosted by the June 24 group, the “June 24” song composed in 1940, was routinely played as a prelude. Barely well-known to the public nowadays, the song celebrated Thailand’s first constitution, the beginning of civilization and democracy, people’s rights, and liberty. Next, a Redshirt entrepreneur designed wall clocks replicating the memorial plaque of the People’s Party and sold them. This memorial plaque was a round brass plate fixed on the ground at the Royal Plaza where Phahon read the revolutionary Announcement. Made in 1936 to salute the People’s Party, the plaque was engraved the following sentence, “In the dawn of June 24, 1932 at this place, the People’s Party bore the constitution for the sake of national prosperity.” Seventy years later, this plaque turned into a political symbol and was circulated in the form of commodity. Similar to King Taksin’s iconography, as Redshirts removed and threw away royal home decorations, they were replaced with new ones including this People’s Party wall clock. At the , the clock was put on the wall above other
decorations, reminding every visitor of the contribution of the People’s Party and their unfinished political mission (Figure 7.5).

Figure 7.5: A wall clock taking after the People’s Party plaque (Source: The photo was taken by a shop owner on June 8., 2016.)

Third, among symbolic legacies of the People’s Party, the most powerful, to which Redshirts constantly referred, was the Announcement of the People’s Party written by Pridi and read in public by Phahon on the revolution day. For instance, Redshirt community radio programs spent almost ten minutes playing an audio record of this Announcement during interludes. Many excerpts, particularly the one starting with “You the People should know that this country belongs to you, not to the king as you have been deceived into thinking”\textsuperscript{901} was reproduced in printing

\textsuperscript{901} Translation is made by Patrick Jory. Patrick Jory, “Republicanism in Thai History,” 109.
materials, on Nitirat’s website, and even in a punk rock song called “the People’s Party,” sung by a political band – “The Punch (kampan – กำปั้น).” In addition to the reference to popular sovereignty, this statement from the Announcement become popular possibly because it stresses the elements of deception and disillusion which are essential to Redshirt eye-opening experience.

During one Redshirt outdoor gathering at the People’s Party plaque on June 24, 2013, a group of young activists called Prakaifai (a spark) performed a political play depicting Siamese society starting from the pre-1932-revolution era to the present. The audience cheered loudly when a mother who worshiped the absolute king had a quarrel with her son – a state official – who heavily criticized the absolutist regime and preferred constitutionalism. “Today, I don’t see the king doing anything. He spends money on birthday parties and funeral ceremony,” complained an actor onstage as the audience screamed with pleasure. He was talking about Prajadhipok – the last absolutist monarch of Thailand. Nonetheless, the play evoked implications that extended beyond the merely historical dimensions.

There was no scene portraying how the People’s Party seized power. Instead, every performer left the stage. An audio record started playing on a loudspeaker. It recited every word from the Announcement. Although this took ten minutes and the stage was empty, the audience

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902 For example, “ถวัติฤทธิเดช ฟ้องรัชกาลที่ 7 ข้อหาห่มิ่นประมาทอาชญา” (“Tawat Rithidech prosecuted Rama VII for defaming the people”) Redpower 1, no. 9 (February 2011) and Mookhom Wongtet, “ถอดเทพ” (De-deva), Read 3, 3 (April – September 2011): 19 -20.
903 This webpage was later banned by the ICT. “งงกันถ้วนหน้า! ประกาศคณะราษฎร ถูกระงับการเผยแพร่ในเว็บไซต์ นิติราษฎร์” (Total shock!! Declaration of the People Party was banned for publication in Nitirat website), Matichon online, December 14, 2012, accessed March 20, 2016, http://www.matichon.co.th/news_detail.php?newsid=1355421082.
905 In 2014, one of the performer was charged for involving in another play “The Wolf Bride” of which contents deemed lese majeste.
did not lose its concentration. They carefully listened and responded passionately to Pridi’s words. The audience collectively clapped and cheered after the following statements were uttered:907

The King was above the law even as his predecessors had been […] Royalty sleeps, eats, and is happy. No other country gives its royal class so much […]908

If the people are stupid, then royalty is stupid too, because both are of the same race […]909

The reason why the people are outwitted by the lords is that the latter excluded the former from accessing full education. The latter are afraid that when the former become educated, the people will know about evil things the lords have done. And the people will no longer let the lords farm on their backs […] You the People should know that this country belongs to you, not to the king as you have been deceived into thinking.910 The people’s ancestors rescued and freed our nation from the enemies’ hands. The lords reaped what others have sown and robbed properties worth billions.

Despite its 81 years of age, Pridi’s writing has remained powerful, meaningful, and “truthful” for a number of Thai people nowadays. Similar to the situation in 1932, anti-royalism in the 2010s problematized the monarchy’s extra-constitutional power, monopolization of wealth, exploitative nature, false divinity, and attempts to deceive, exploit, and exclude its subject. All of sudden, historical events and debates strangely were replicated in the present.

Fourth, the convergence between histories of the People’s Party and contemporary struggles also took explicit theatrical forms and featured novel dimensions. On June 24, 2012, seven Thammasat and Chulalongkorn university students -- six dressed up in military uniforms and one in a suit -- gathered at the People’s Party plaque and claimed to be “The Second People’s Party.” They read a new version of the Announcement.911 Responding contemporary and

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909 Benjamin Batson, Siam’s Political Future: Documents from the End of the Absolute Monarchy, 97.
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immediate problems of the country, demanded the end of the military’s role in politics and the abuse of lèse-majesté law. Moreover, those who were responsible for the crackdown of the Redshirts in 2010 must be put on trial.\footnote{Thanavi Chotpradit, “Revolution versus Counter-Revolution: The People’s Party and the Royalist (s) in Visual Dialogue,” 167.} In a sense, political goals now expanded beyond the People’s Party’s original one. While revitalizing the People’s Party, the Second People’s Party added more up-to-date political missions.

As Chatri observes, in 2012 – 80 years after the 1932 revolution – the People’s Party reached the pinnacle of its reconstruction and reinterpretation. Besides this “Second People’s Party,” more than 10 articles, academic and non-academic, regarding the People’s Party were published. Many organized activities took place at People’s Party-related locations such as the Democracy Monument, the memorial of the People’s Party, and Phra Sri Mahathat Temple.\footnote{Chatri Prakitnonthakan, “คณะราษฎร์หลังรัฐประหาร 19 กันยายน” (“The People’s Party after the September 19 Coup”), 33.}

The renewal of the mission of the People’s Party occurred along with the celebration of the downfall of its royalist opponents. The latter was also expressed in the October 14 commemoration of the defeat of a group of royalist rebels, known as the Boworadet Rebellion. These royal officers attempted to stage a counter-revolt against the People’s Party on October 11, 1933 and were completely suppressed on October 15, 1933. Left forgotten for decades, the “Safeguarding the Constitution Monument” or “the Monument for the Suppression of the Boworadet Rebellion,” built to celebrate the People’s Party’s victory at Lak Si circle in Bangkok turned into Redshirt political symbol.\footnote{Thanavi Chotpradit, “Revolution versus Counter-Revolution: The People’s Party and the Royalist (s) in Visual Dialogue,” 85-86.} On March 12, 2010, it became an important Redshirt meeting spot.\footnote{Pirasak Chaiyatham, “ชัยชนะคนเสื้อแดง จากยุทธการเลือดสู่สมรภูมิปลดแอกรัฐทหาร” (“Victory of the Redshirts: From Blood Tactic to the Battle of Liberation against the junta’s state”), \textit{Voice of Taksin }1, no. 18 (April 2010): 38.} UDD leaders used this forgotten historic site to officially inaugurate the big 2010
Redshirt demonstration. On this date, floral decorations were placed in front of the statues of a peasant family – the kingdom’s first public statue of commoners.¹⁰¹⁶

During 2011-2013, the June 24 group remembered October 14 as the “Rebel Suppression” day and organized a gathering at this monument. Chai, an organizer, recalled that initially few participants attended the event. However, from year to year, the number of participants grew and they managed to invite members of parliament. On October 14, 2012, Phuttinat Phaholpholphayuhasena – son of Phahon – was the guest of honor.¹⁰¹⁷ In terms of historical significance, Chai argued that October 14 should be remembered as the day when the rebels were defeated by the People’s Party in 1933 instead of the day when the students protested against the military government in 1973. The former, in Chai’s view, directly reflected the Redshirt struggle. Despite opposing the military junta, the latter, on the other hand, featured “mixed” ideologies.¹⁰¹⁸ Implicitly, the enemy of the people in the present was not merely military dictatorship, but rather the “royalist rebels” who attempted to turn back the wheel of history and bring down what the People’s Party had established. As discussed in one seminar, there were similarities between “the Boworadet Rebellion” in the past and “the Ammat rebellion” in the present.¹⁰¹⁹ Here, the term rebel obtained new meanings. In contrast to the royalist definition of “rebel” as anti-monarchical, “rebel” now came to mean those who tried to restore royal power and acted hostilely against Thailand’s “democracy” and constitution.

To conclude, the politicization and revitalization of the People’s Party and 1932 revolution among the Redshirts led to the emergence of contested narratives regarding nationalism and

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¹⁰¹⁶ Chatri Prakitnonthakan, “คณะราษฎรหลังรัฐประหาร 19 กันยา” “The People’s Party after the September 19 Coup),” 34.
¹⁰¹⁸ Chai, interview by author, Bangkok, Thailand, April 3, 2015.
¹⁰¹⁹ Chatri Prakitnonthakan, “คณะราษฎรหลังรัฐประหาร 19 กันยา” “The People’s Party after the September 19 Coup),” 34.
sovereignty. This primarily occurred through the appropriation and reinvention of People’s Party rhetoric and symbols. The Redshirt version of nationalism and sovereignty marginalized monarchical power and placed the power of the people at the top of the political process.

In the wake of the 2014 coup the war over memory regarding the People’s Party become increasingly salient. Political-ideological division was manifested in the two polarized interpretations of the People’s Party. As this section has shown, seeing the People’s Party as their democratic predecessors, the Redshirts found a proper place in this alternative version of the history of which the most important political foe was the royalist elite and political objective was to establish truly democratic and constitutional regime. On the contrary, the People’s Party was derogatively remembered as the “ungrateful,” “evil, stupid, and hypocrite” movement. On June 24, 2016, a right-wing “Homeland Trash Collection Organization” declared that June 24 was the “Day of the Land’s Trash.” Forefathers for one, trash for another, reinvented meanings of the People’s Party will remain unsettled as Thai society was polarized by two incompatible ideologies.

### 7.4 The Mysterious Death of Rama VIII and the Illegitimate Root of Bhumibol’s Reign

In Thailand, June 9 is officially known as Rama VIII Day. On June 9, 1946, the young king, Ananda, Rama VIII, was shot dead in his bedroom and his younger brother, Bhumibol, ascended the throne. Soon thereafter, the regicide case was politicized by the conservative opposition who accused Pridi, the Prime Minister, of responsibility for the king’s death. This progressive leader of the People’s Party was forced to live in exile for the rest of his life. The court ruled that this was a case of murder and executed three men, Chit, But, and Chaliao. The former two were on-duty royal guards while the latter was a former royal principal private secretary and Pridi supporter.

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Despite Rama VIII’s tragic mysterious death, the date is annually celebrated as the beginning of Bhumibol’s reign. On June 9, 2006, having reigned for 60 years, the King was greeted and saluted spectacularly by his Thai subjects and royal families around the world. However, in the wake of the “eye-opening outbreak” during 2010 - 2014, alternate narratives regarding June 9 and the death of Rama VIII began to surface.

“Oh yes, [yesterday was] the anniversary of when the bastard killed his brother,” Aunt Sao commented after she saw the King’s image on a newspaper dated June 10, 2014. This was her understanding of June 9. This conversation took place at the , while two Redshirt friends sat nearby. Aunt Sao shared this blasphemous statement in such a casual and normal manner. No listener gave a reaction; it was as if they had already heard this story many times.

Aunt Sao was certainly not the first person who came up with the seditious idea that the current King was a regicide. This counter-narrative has long existed in Thai society and usually appeared as rumor and gossip circulated through oral means and in underground pamphlets. Occasionally, the rumor would transgress into public spheres, when Thai politics underwent turmoil and the legitimacy of the monarchy was contested. In 1957, two men were charged for delivering lèse-majesté speeches regarding the King’s involvement in Rama VIII’s death during gatherings at Sanam Luang. After the October 6 1976 massacre, underground leftist booklets and magazines straightforwardly accused the King of murdering his brother as they attacked Thai feudalism. These alternate narratives pointed out that Rama VIII was influenced by “Western”

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922 For example, Thammasat University Archives, A.1.6.2/1, กษัตริย์ไทยในปัจจุบันกับการรัฐประหาร (The Current Thai King and Coups); A. 1.6.2/4, ความขัดแย้งในกลุ่มศักดินา (Conflicts within the Feudalist groups); A.1.6.2/11, พระเจ้ากรุงสยาม (The Siamese Lords); A.1./8, โองการแช่งฟ้า (The Commandment of Curse against the Sky), December 1977, 4.
progressive values, endorsed Pridi, and even planned to abolish the royal institution. Rama VIII’s political reform, as these underground writings claimed, upset his mother and the royalist camp. This eventually led to the regicide committed by his brother. In 1982, a booklet titled “Nine Reigns of the Chakri Dynasty” was distributed. As Reynolds has well summarized, the book offered a counter-history against the dominant one which celebrated the Thai monarchies’ “accomplishments.” 923 Starting with Rama I, the founder of Chakri dynasty, “Nine Reigns of the Chakri Dynasty” reveals dark sides for each king. When it was Rama VIII’s turn, the book named the king “the young king who was a victim of ambition.” Replicating accounts from previous underground texts, it disclosed details regarding chronological events and investigation processes regarding the death of Rama VIII. The section concluded that the murderer was no one but the current King whom they termed, “a sinner in the guise of a saint.” 924

In the academic realm, Somsak Jeamteerasakul, a historian, has been providing archival facts regarding the death of Rama VIII. He uncovers testimonies, a crime scene diagram, and correspondence between Thai and foreign officials. 925 According to Somsak, Rama VIII’s death was not so mysterious and complicated that we cannot logically comprehend it. Similar to a plot from an Agatha Christie novel, the murder took place within a closed environment where all individuals at the crime scene can be identified. 926 Careful study and comparison of testimony of each person, medical reports, and opinions, enable us, in Somsak’s view, to piece together the events leading up to the crime and to distinguish sensible testimonies from false ones. To elaborate, all evidence

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926 Somsak Jeamteerasakul, “ปริศนากรณีสวรรคต” “(The Mystery of the King’s Death),” 119.
pointed out that the three royal officers who were executed were innocent. More importantly, they were made scapegoats in order to cover up a crime committed by someone else, someone essential to the existence of the Thai royalist establishment. Somsak believes that this case of regicide reveals the underlying problem of Thai politics: the royalist ideology that dominates the Thai judicial process and the unaccountable power and status of the monarchy. As with contemporary lèse-majesté cases, those in power were willing to abandon plain rationality and morality to serve royal interests.927

The newly revealed history of Rama VIII’s death became politically powerful for eye-opened Redshirts since it inferred that Bhumibol’s reign had been illegitimate from the outset. Again, as mentioned in section 7.2, Redshirt anti-royalism featured the nullification of the moment of the founding of both the Chakri dynasty and the current King. Moreover, this new history fitted the anti-royalist perception of the King as the one behind the killing and violence of the past years, with a long history of impunity.

While Aunt Sao could explicitly make subversive statements during a daily private conversation, several eye-opened Redshirts were convicted of lèse-majesté when they expressed their doubts in public. From 2013 to 2015, at least five individuals were arrested for making remarks or online visual graphic regarding the King’s complicity in the regicide.928 One of them was sentenced to 60 years of imprisonment due to his lèse-majesté Facebook posts which partly concerned the controversial regicide. The prison sentence was cut half when he pleaded guilty.929

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929 Thailand, Military Court of Bangkok, Military Court Decision, Black Case no. 99 kor. /2558, August 7, 2015.
Rather than underground pamphlets or Somsak’s academic approach, many ways appeared to both convey thoughts regarding this controversial regicide and avoid legal prosecution. Codification and decontextualization of rhetoric and symbols, as mentioned earlier, can be of vital importance. When anti-royalist narratives are adequately popularized, a simple visual graphic of a mysterious hand holding a pistol can carry double meanings (Figure 7.6). The Ruthless V2 Facebook account appropriated this technique similarly applied to images of wheelchair. Decontextualized selective images solicit questions regarding the hidden meanings contained in them. As one internet user asked the Ruthless V2 Facebook crew, “I wonder if you really love the King. Why do you always post something sneaky like wheelchair, gun, ‘we do not forget,’ and blue diamond almonds?” The latter’s naïve reply was:

I deeply love the King. What you wrote were your own arbitrary interpretations. Here is my explanation which might enlighten you. 1. Wheelchair: I support Paralympic games 2. Gun: I want to raise an awareness of its danger in this society 3. “We do not forget”: I love Thailand’s history and am fond of historical study 4. Blue diamond almonds: best snacks I have with beer.

Figure 7.6: A pistol in a mysterious hand. (Source: Ruthless V2 Facebook account accessed on August 30, 2012)

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According to anti-royalist narratives, “blue diamond” related to the mysterious case of the stolen Saudi blue diamond in 1989. It was believed that the reason why Thai authorities failed to return the stolen diamond to Saudi Arabia and why there were many murder cases involved was that the Queen had the diamond. See chapter 6, section 6.2.3.
The regicide was also referred to in songs played either online or on protest stages. Depicting the rise and fall of the so-called “invisible hand (mue thi mong mai hen - มือที่มองไม่เห็น),” a “Lannanian” artist started his song with the following verse: “After the mysterious gunshot was silent, [you] woke up and were surrounded by treasure. But why were [you] so blue? Why didn’t [you] give neither glance nor smile?” The “invisible hand” was left unnamable throughout the whole song.

Faiyen band played a song called “Who Killed Rama VIII?”, dealing with the regicide case in humorous and indirect ways. The song simply documents the various answers to this question which the singer obtained after asking different groups of individuals. As the song narrates, the conservative Democrat Party blames Pridi, while Somsak Jeamteerasakul says that the lèse-majesté law silences the truth. The non-serious tone of the piece increases as the vocalist keeps on listing who he asked: his teacher, grandparents, mother, father, and older brother. Some refuse to say anything since they fear “losing their heads,” some get mad. Finally, he turns to the “younger brother.” The song ends, “After asking the younger brother, an answer was spilled out: the killers’ names are ‘Baa, baa, baa.’” Echoing its satirist and parodist narrative, this Faiyen song starts with a serious political statement about the king’s death; however, its final line is three goat’s bleaks. Although the song does not tell us directly “who killed Rama VIII,” it provokes us to re-think about the role of “the younger brother” who appears to be the only person capable of the answer and about the “three goats” as alleged culprits.

Based on complex anti-royalist webs of meaning, February 17 was known as “The National Scapegoat’s Day.” This commemoration highlighted another “forgotten” historical event. On February 17, 1955, Chit, But, and Chaliao were executed as the Thai court ruled that they were

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931 This sentence is possibly referred to Paul Hadley’s *The King Never Smiles.*
932 Faiyen band, “ใครฆ่าอ.บ. วงไฟเย็น” “[Who killed Rama VIII/ Faiyen band]” (audio clip), posted June 9, 2013 (King Ananda’s day), accessed November 11, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-eENbYGxZQ.
complicit in the regicide. Rather than the day when justice prevailed, Redshirts, in particular urbanite literati groups, contentiously remembered February 17 as the day of scapegoats. On this day in 2013, a group of scholars held a seminar discussing justice and the monarchy.933 In a cyber world, the *Ruthless* Facebook crew posted the cover of a children’s book titled “The Three Goats” (Figure 7.7).

Semantic dynamism surrounding these three historical figures – the purported regicides -- was set in motion. On the one hand, as scapegoats, they symbolized the victims of Thailand’s long history of injustice. On the other hand, some internet users empowered them in a sarcastic fashion by calling them “the king slayers.” One Facebook account even made and sold shirts with this slogan and images of Chit, But, Chaliao online (Figure 7.8). In holding this commemoration, anti-royalist texts did not deny that these three individuals were accused of a crime they did not commit. Instead, they “over-identified” with the dominant narrative. They did not attempt to re-investigate history and exonerate the “three scapegoats.” The term “king slayer” evoked the sense of a hero vanquishing evils similar to “the vampire slayer.” And the meaning of “king” here went beyond merely Rama VIII.

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7.5 Conclusion

Thailand’s on-going conflicts were not only deepened by the different sets of political beliefs in circulation, but also about how people chose to remember, retell, celebrate, and mourn particular past events. Different sets of understanding about the past were formulated and
shared. Chakri day on April 6 became known as “the day when Taksin was beheaded,” June 24 became the “real” national day of Thailand; June 9 the day when Bhumibol ascended to the throne became “the day when the bastard killed his brother;” and execution day on February 17 became “Thailand’s national scapegoat day.” The battlefield took place in the realm of memory. These recollections did not merely occur as forms of speech but also occurred in creative fashions such as rituals, theatrical plays, iconographic and symbolic decorations, music, and humorous satirist visual graphics. All of these interpretations of history emphasized the illegitimate roots and characters of the monarchy.

Concomitantly, attempts to rewrite more immediate histories by focusing on ordinary people were undertaken. The 2006 coup and the 2010 crackdown were not remembered as the days when Thaksin’s corrupt regime was toppled and peace and unity were restored. In contrast, they came to represent the royalist regime’s brutality and arbitrary power at the expense of many martyred Thai commoners. Every year even under the junta ruling, people gathered where Redshirt protesters had been slaughtered on April 10 and May 19, 2010 and sang “Warriors of the Dust.” At the Redshirt television office, two big studios were named after the two foreign reporters killed in the 2010 crackdown, Hiroyuki Muramoto and Fabio Polenghi. Last but not least, if any “father figure” remained in the Redshirt version of history, it was Uncle Nuamthong Phraiwan, the taxi-driver who committed suicide as an act of resistance against the 2006 coup (see chapter three). Nuamthong was praised as a “father of the anti-coup d’état.”934 Symbolically, he represented the countless faces of ordinary men and women who fearlessly challenged the power of the Thai establishment. Honoring him, Nuamthong’s statue was made of cement mixed

with Redshirt blood. One columnist wrote, “His [Nuamthong’s] death was not in vain since he had embarked on challenges and the search for the true mastermind.”

Nowadays, official royalist histories appear as old drama scripts losing their magical spells and credibility. At the same times, contested narratives are still forming and are occasionally violently suppressed. Below are verses from one of the award-winning poems for the Free Write event held in October 2013. It reflects the demise of the old narrative and hopes for a future new Thailand as a result of the massive eye-opening experience:

One day serfs and slaves declared out loud,
They shouted that their eyes shone so bright,
That they no longer believed in the old [drama] script. (Cheers)
Replacing it, we must write a new and more equal one.

A hero transformed and, in reverse, turned evil.
He cruelly and angrily cleansed, killed,
And scorched body after body.
What a great accomplishment across the entire land.

Today, the fake drama show still exists.
But deep down, I know it will end in the future, (Yes!)
Just as the sun at dusk descending to the earth.
All that is left is the final writhing before its real death. (Hoo! Applause)

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936 Pirasak Chaiyatham, “การจากไปของแม่กอง ไพรัชัย กับการกลับมาของ สนธิ บุญรัตกลิน” “(The Departure of Nuamthong Phraiwan and the Return of Sondhi Boonyaratglin),” Voice of Taksin 1, no. 6 (October 2009): 15.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

“Black (repeat 5 times). We prepare to wear black all over the country. Feudalists (Sakdina) are shedding tears (repeat twice). People in this land are ready to wear black.”

(Faiyen’s song “A Black Shirt Man.”)

In early November 2016, two weeks after Thailand lost its king, Bhumibol Adulyadej, I returned to Thailand. While walking the streets, I could not help but think of Faiyen’s song “A Black Shirt Man (khon suea dam - คนเสื้อดำ).” Wherever I went in Bangkok, from the Skytrain BTS, to the hospital, to a 7-Eleven, colorful signs and advertisements had been removed and now displayed in black and white. People, whether they were white-collar workers or homeless men, all wore black and white cloth. For those who could not afford to wear black everyday, they had a choice to put a black ribbon on their non-black/white shirts. Even Thai sex workers, at Bangkok’s red light district, wore black mini-skirts to convey their grief for the revered King while earning their living. Among black shirt merchandise, the most popular phrases were “I was born in the reign of Rama IX (chan koet nai ratchakan thi kao - ฉันเกิดในรัชกาลที่เก้า)” and “I wish to be a servant under the royal feet in all my next lives (kho pen kha rong phrabat thuk chat pai - ขอเป็นข้ารองพระบาททุกชาติไป).” The whole town was painted in black. As a Thai cartoonist depicted in it (Figure 8.1), no matter which color, red, yellow, or blue, the portrait’s frame was, the images inside now turned black. Together, these black portraits constituted an image of King Bhumibol. Preparing for my trip back from New York to Thailand, I also put every black cloth I had in my bag. All my red shirts and political shirts were left in a wardrobe in Queens. I anticipated not wearing these colorful shirts in Thailand anytime soon.
Sanam Luang, the gathering site where Redshirts embarked on their political activism, was now overcrowded with public celebrities and Thai commoners lining up to pay respects to Bhumibol’s body at the Grand Palace. Free meals and free rides were provided all day long. Public figures often showed up and generously distributed food to the mourning visitors. Thida Thawornseth, the UDD leader, set up a booth giving away food.938

I did not expect Redshirt aunties and uncles at the to bravely celebrate the end of ninth reign or refuse to wear black. The political environment was too risky for these kinds of defiant actions. Anyone who did not shed enough tears or glorify the late King was not only

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subject to legal prosecution but also violence by “micro-fascist mobs.”

Using Scott’s language, this period of Thai collective mourning featured the moment when the difference between public and hidden transcripts became ever greater. “The more menacing the power, the thicker the mask.” Nonetheless, I remained uncertain about how the Redshirts I knew would react to Bhumibol’s death. Would they join Thida, their movement leader, at Sanam Luang to mourn the King? Would they now wear the shirt indicating that they wanted to be the King’s servant forever? If they did, how much change and how many more explanations would I have to make in my dissertation?

“I forgive him [the King],” Aunt Sao, the most outspoken Redshirt woman regarding the monarchy, told me on the phone. She used the Thai word “ahosikam (อโหสิกรรม)” which literally means that karma no longer has any effect. Based on a Buddhist belief, an individual suffers from karma as a consequence of his or her previous actions. When a speaker says “ahosikam” to someone, it usually means that all bad deeds made by the latter are forgiven. The latter no longer owes anything to the former, either in this life and the next lives. On the one hand, Aunt Sao, now ceasing political activities on streets for two years, toned down her critique on the monarchy, particularly Bhumibol. There was no rage or anger left in her voice when compared to her fierce statements two years ago. On the other hand, in this Redshirt woman’s memory, the King’s “bad deeds” did not vaporize. Despite the absence of a desire for revenge, Aunt Sao’s remarks blasphemously challenged the dominant idea that Thai people were deeply indebted to King Bhumibol. Therefore, they proclaimed that they wished to be his servants in their next


941 Conversation with Aunt Sao on the phone, November 3, 2016.
reincarnation. For Aunt Sao, it was vice versa. Yet she generously “ahosikam” the King so that he did not have to repay her anything in his next lives.

Life at the didn’t change much. Bai, a deaf-mute man, still sat at the same spot watching PeaceTV, a Redshirt channel. Substituting for Aunt Sao, Aunt Chan, a Redshirt pensioner, now Aunt Lek, the Since the junta prohibited any entertainment event, this Redshirt community could not hold any kind of mini-concert or party. As a result, the number of visitors dropped and only routine ones remained. Business thus did not run well. Aunt Chan and Aunt Lek were upset when hearing that their movement leaders showed up at Sanam Luang. “Why don’t they distribute food here?” complained Aunt Chan. Aunt Lek added, “At least, they did not go there on the behalf of Redshirts, but themselves.” For these Redshirt women, people at Sanam Luang already received too much attention and care whereas Redshirts at the rarely gained any support, materially or mentally. At least for this Redshirt community, “Redshirts,” as a political organization, did not belong to public spectacles at Sanam Luang.

I was somehow relieved that Redshirts at the didn’t express loyalty and hysterical sadness upon the King’s death. I could only feel an atmosphere of anxiety. “Why do you come back?” “You should stay outside.” I received these comments from two or three Redshirts. For them, Thailand was not a pleasant place to live in.

Aunt Chan and Aunt Lek worried about Thailand’s future. Although Bhumibol’s reign was over, both seemed uncertain about what would happen. In fact, they were inclined towards rumors and conspiracy theories regarding conflicts over the throne. According to them as well as several Redshirts, the Crown Prince, was obstructed from immediately taking the throne by the old elite, Princess Sirindhorn and Prem, and might fail to enthrone. As mentioned in chapter six, the Crown Prince was the least hated royal figure among the Redshirts. Eventually, on December 1, 2016, Thailand officially had its new king, Rama X. Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn became
King Maha Vajiralongkorn Bodindradebayavarangkun. This appeared to alleviate several Redshirts' anxiety temporarily.

While many royalists and pro-junta middle-class members still nostalgically mourned the Father King Bhumibol and recited the King’s dedication to the country, Aunt Lek, Aunt Chan, San, and several other Redshirts welcomed the new monarch and chanted “Long live the king.” Full of hope, Redshirts looked forward to Thailand's future, albeit with uncertainty. After several repetitive disappointments, disillusionments, and political defeats, they expressed high expectation towards the new era. Perhaps, “the Sky” in the future Thailand, as several Redshirts dreamt of it, would restrict their political roles to the air and refrain from lowering themselves to become entangled in electoral politics on earth, order killings, and hypocritically claim to be the most morally superior figure above all others. However, the Redshirt light of hope got dimmer quite quickly. A few days after accepting the throne, Rama X appointed the 96-year-old Prem

Figure 8.2: Portraits of the old and new Thai monarchs in front of a building. A giant black and white Bhumibol image on the left and a relatively small colorful King Maha Vajiralongkorn’s image with a caption, “Long Live the King,” underneath on the right. (Source: Author, December 8, 2016)
Tinsulanond, the primary Redshirt nemesis, to remain the head of the Privy Council. Afterwards, new members of the Privy Council were appointed. Three of them were generals closely linked to the ruling junta. None of them seemed to signal any positive change in the royalist power structure.

In this study, I developed and expanded the notion of resistance against a monarchy using Thailand during political transition as a case study. The primary aim was to engage with classical theories of sovereignty and resistance by showing the contestation between constituent popular sovereignty and the sovereignty of the Thai King taking place nowadays. In other words, Thailand at the watershed is an excellent case to portray how the divinity, perceptuality, and inviolability of royal authority became gradually undermined and challenged. Concomitantly, the dissertation depicts how the new ideology of constituent popular sovereignty slowly emerged and how commoners asserted this sovereignty.

This dissertation’s point of departure was James C. Scott’s thesis that “every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a ‘hidden transcript’ that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant.” However, the study not only demonstrates the development of various modalities of hidden transcripts under stark inequality, but also reveals these transcripts’ fluid transformative features, especially in terms of semantic shifts. Scott’s works tend to take for granted the existence of hidden transcripts among subordinate groups in every society. However, he does not pay sufficient attention to ideological shifts leading to the transformation of resistance. The idea that resistance always exists everywhere might fail to make sense of the origins, dynamic developments, and complexities of resistance.


943 Frederic Schaffer, in reading this study has suggested that, “(a)nother possible interpretation is that Scott (at least in Domination and the Arts of Resistance) is looking at instances of extreme personal exploitation (slavery, serfdom, caste domination) and (I) am not. In other words, (my) case might fall outside the scope conditions of (Scott’s) own analysis. Is (Scott) inattentive to fluidity or is there just more fluidity when the exploitation is less severe or when the nature or severity of the exploitation itself is more fluid(?)” Responding to Schaffer, I agree that Scott’s analysis
In this thesis, most accounts of Redshirt anti-royalism were explained by the proposition that their political imaginary was hemmed in by the dominant royalist ideology. Defiant thoughts did not derive from foreign doctrines exogenous from everyday experiences. Nonetheless, the thesis’s main goal is to show how resistant actors and discourses, embedded in royalist ideology, became gradually transformed into potential forces undermining the monarchy. Indeed, these emotionally-laden breaks, I argue, were powerful and opened up new possibilities (more powerful than those that Thai intellectuals had attempted to accomplish previously). As a result, the royalist order was disrupted so gravely that these elites had to utilize legal suppression and brute force. The system had cracked from within, caused by those who used to be the system’s truest believers.

As table 8.1 shows, during 2006 – 2016, discontent towards the Thai monarchy emerged under specific contentious contexts and took on diverse forms in accordance with the backgrounds of specific political actors. The interrelationships between resistant actors, modes of resistance, and political contexts better our understanding of these political struggles. Here, anti-

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certainly focus on places where the exploitation and hierarchy were severe. However, his study does not rule out other cases with less suppressive degree. Scott’s main argument was that the gap between public and hidden transcripts is determined by the degree of exploitative conditions. The more severe the situation (for instance, the case of concentration camp), the wider the gap between language of the oppressor and of the oppressed. Accordingly, Scott mentions about power relations between employers and workers in which the former use euphemisms to conceal violent nature of the economic system whereas the latter have to a wear mask of civility (p. 53 - 54). In a sense, he maintains that public and hidden transcripts exist under this seemingly more open condition; yet the gap of difference between both was narrower comparing to the extreme case of master and slave. Above all the price that the subordinates have to pay when they accidently spill out their inner thoughts is not high and fatal. In terms of fluidity, Scott’s works mainly concern the fluidity of discourse in relations to different social sites and audiences (as his table on page 26 shows). In this dissertation, I show several instances demonstrating the fluidity of anti-royalist discourse in this sense. For example, among trusted Redshirt friends, a Redshirt might say that he or she hated the monarchy. Yet, in a protest song played in public, this emotion might be indirectly conveyed by the phrase “Refuse to love, watch out for jail.” Finally, a Redshirt taxi driver toyed with this royalist love by simply posting a sticker read “a person who used to love” inside his cab. However, there is also another kind of fluidity which I claim that Scott’s works neglect. This is fluidity of discourse through time. Redshirt anti-royalist discourses transformed through the process of first-hand experience of injustice and violence. As shown in chapter two to chapter six, the term “Sky” and “Deva” appeared from time to time as elusive references to the monarchy. Initially, they served to euphemized the sacredness and superiority of the monarchy. However, the more repetitively the Redshirts felt out of grace and forced to endure struggles alone, the more the two terms serve merely to criticize the unnamable. In short, discursive fluidity in this dissertation has not only spatial and personal elements but also the temporal one.

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royalist voices were neither static nor homogeneous. I argue that this approach is crucial, politically and analytically, to explain Thailand’s anti-royalism during 2006 – 2016.

In the early period, political frustration and resistance was directed against visible and identifiable political enemies, namely, Yellowshirts, the junta, and, most importantly, the King’s advisor, Prem Tinsulanond. In other words, resistance discourse turned only against particular individuals or certain “functionaries” of the dominant network monarchy. According to public rally speeches, most movement leaders vowed allegiance to the throne. On the streets, several individuals had started attacking the monarchy; however, they were marginalized and excluded from the movement. So were progressive intellectuals. Ordinary Redshirts did not see “royalist democracy” or “humanized monarchy” as problems. Rather, they were full of hope that they would benefit from the existing order. Put theoretically, Michael Walzer frames this kind of critique as a “monarchic theodicy.” The king can take bad advice; however, subjects still believe in “his good intentions and his ultimate power to do the right thing.”

In the next period, the first hint of ideological rupture occurred when the Thai Queen presided over the Yellowshirt funeral on October 13, 2008. Shock and confusion prevailed among Redshirt members. Nonetheless, political resentment was articulated in form of an obstinate attachment to the omnipotent Father monarch as the Redshirts’ sole savior. Tensions began to form between those who suggested Redshirts quit begging the King and those who resorted to royalist repertoires. Finally, the 2010 massacre led to another round of “eye-opening” -- the Redshirt break with the royalist idea that Bhumibol was the wise benevolent national savior. The King, they now perceived, was indeed the enemy of the people. In a sense, this anti-royalism

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developed because the King’s subjects took the dominant ideology to heart. They accepted its implicit promise and thus became disillusioned after being betrayed.945

Equally important was that this period led to the reformulation of relationships between the formal leaders, progressive literati, and ordinary Redshirts. Since Redshirt leaders were imprisoned and ceased their political activism, ordinary Redshirts found their own ways to articulate their anger against the monarchy, including anonymous curses, graffiti, and removal of royal symbols from their households. These acts of uprooting oneself from the monarchical power were laden with tense anger. In regards with a theory of sovereignty and resistance, these acts could be seen as a withdrawal of consent and the collapse of the king’s divine omnipotent power, as expressed in mundane and unsophisticated fashion. King Bhumibol was derogatively called many names in either public, semi-public, or private sites – a monitor lizard/mother fucker who ordered the killing, the sick man, and the blind man, among others.

Above all, Redshirt participants forged a new alliance with intellectuals, exchanging radical ideas and arming themselves with more academic critique of power. By the time movement leaders were released, they had no choice but to accept the existence of eye-opening ideas and discourses within the movement. However, their main resistant strategy became “eyes opening but lips whispering.”

The political environment under Yingluck Shinawatra’s premiership was relatively open. Although movement leaders toned down their critique of the royalist elite, including Prem, autonomous groups, intellectuals, and ordinary participants gained space to express and diffuse eye-opening discourses. Anti-royalist desacralization evolved into codified forms with satirical comic tonality. Meanwhile, progressive academics pushed the limits of public debates on the monarchy and called for the amendment of the lèse-majesté law. Alienation and tension between

the formal leaders and intellectuals developed, especially on their positions towards the monarchy. The former, despite gaining both executive and legislative power, refrained from joining the latter’s movements and initiating the reform of the royal institution.

Under the military dictatorship after the 2014 coup, any critique against the ruling power became unlawful. Movement leaders and intellectuals were detained, went through “attitude adjustment programs” at military camps, and had to stay politically inactive. Some decided to flee the country. Ordinary Redshirts were again left leaderless as well as incapable of voicing political dissents. Their modes of resistance became more concealed and autonomous. They turned to rumour and conspiracy theories regarding Bhumibol’s declining health, royal succession, and intra-elite competition over the throne. As a result, ordinary Redshirts became estranged not only from their own movement leaders but also the academic camps.

While living in Thailand under restrictive and authoritarian contexts, ordinary Redshirts chose to express hope for a new reign after Bhumibol’s death. Contrarily, progressive intellectuals found this hope naïve, groundless, and above all contradictory to democratic principles. Several literati questioned the Redshirt understanding of democracy. For them, Redshirt love and trust for Rama X was incompatible with democracy.
Table 8.1: Conclusion Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Time Periods / Modes of Resistance and Discourses in relation to the Monarchy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>The beginning of political conflicts and the emergence of street protests (2005 – 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>The intensification of conflicts (2008 - 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>Post-2010 violent crackdown on the Redshirts (May 2010 – July 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>The Yingluck administration (July 2011 – May 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>Military dictatorship (May 2014 – 2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>Against those “moral” unelected elites who overthrew Thaksin’s government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>Attack the King’s adviser, Prem, as the great mastermind behind the coup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>Mobilize mass rallies in front of Prem’s residence and demand Prem’s resignation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>The ammat, the people’s nemesis, included, Yellowshirts, the judiciary, the army, the Democrat Party, and the Privy Council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>Red becomes the movement’s official color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>Continuation of attack against Prem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>The “Sky” distanced and neglected the worthless dirt-like Redshirt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>“Don’t hit the sky” as a cautious movement slogan given to Redshirt protesters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>2009 royal petition begging King Bhumibol to exercise his paternal exceptional political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>Official leaders imprisoned and became inactive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>Leaders from radical factions help diffuse “eye-opening” discourses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>“Eye-opening means we feed the deva.” The deva’s life depends on us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>(Surachai)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>“Eye-opening” and “Monitor lizard/mother fucker ordered the killing” appear on Redshirt print media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>New UDD chairwoman attempts to circumscribe critique of the monarchy within the movement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>Downplay “anti-royalist” elements in Redshirt public discourse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>Some leaders avoid mentioning Prem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>Stress that Redshirt’s political cause was to attain “democracy with the monarchy as head of the state”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>Refuse or hesitate to criticize the lèse-majesté law, not to mention proposing an amendment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>Radical leaders and activists flee the country, some die, some make video clips online directly criticizing the monarchy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement leaders/ Media</td>
<td>Remaining leaders are under strict surveillance and limit their critique of the junta.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artists: Poetry/Play/Music</td>
<td>Clear identification of political enemies: the coup makers, the</td>
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<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repetitively stress that the protesters loved and worshiped the monarchy Prem did not belong to the monarchy Assert that the monarchy and the protesters both endorsed Thaksin and democracy. role to rescue Redshirts. More local/autonomous leaders express resentment against the Queen as well as the royal institution. For instance, “blue” (Queen’s personal color) was condemned as “evil, doomed, and damned.” Talk about the removal of royal portraits. Disagreement with the petition campaign because it was too “submissive.” Resort to the Thai folktale Ramakien: The deva had deceived and cheated on Ravana; therefore, the latter was destined to be defeated as were the Redshirts. Some formal leaders still push limits of criticisms. “Love made us blind but death has opened our eyes.” (Nattawut) After June 2011, all attention shifted to electoral campaigns. “Eyes opening but lips whispering” strategy Attacks against Prem made in non-serious fashion, as if he could be blamed publicly on everything since he was not immune to lèse-majesté law.</td>
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</table>
unelected Prime Minister, and Prem, the King’s adviser.

Recitation of leftist poems and songs from the past, for example, Naowarat Pongpaibul’s *Finally the Movement has Unfolded*

Play the King’s anthem to mark the end of the rally

At this early stage, the movement had not yet produced their own arts to define their political positions.

“The Sky at dusk, have you forgotten a clod of dirt?” (*Free Red, Nattawut Saikua*)

“Worship the ‘eye-opened’ people who have no infatuation left, are firmly aware of men’s rights, and refuse to be the dust under the soles of feet” (*Constituting the institution of the people, Mai nueng kor kun ti*)

At the same time, other artists produced arts glorifying the King.

“There is no more deva in the sky... I followed the wind of deception wherever I went. But now Thai have their eyes open, capable of seeing the righteous path.” (*Samak’s Poem*)

“I am sick of donations. Let me exercise the rights of human beings.” (Red foot poet)

cursing madly. Rather than the noise of anarchy, this is the roar of revolution.” (*Look Down, Anon*)

Faiyen’s comical satirical anti-royalist songs: “Refuse to love, watch out for jail”, “112 is unjust”, “Uncle Somchai and Aunt Somjit”, “Who killed Rama VIII?”

Political plays about the 1932 revolutions and the “Wolf’s bride”, depicting the story of a beggar, a fictional protagonist, who became a monarch, married his wolf bride, and was poisoned by his Brahmin advisor.

“Blackshirt” man/ Dad songs

Most poems and music focus on anti-coup/dictator/military themes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ordinary Protesters</th>
<th>The beginning of street protest to show supports for ousted Thaksin and opposition to the coup</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prem as the coup mastermind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prem was not the “Sky;” he was just a man. Prem ambitiously made himself equal to the royals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mock Prem’s sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Love the Father King but reject Prem</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wear yellow shirts to express love and loyalty to the monarchy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The monarchy was in danger because of bad ambitious advisers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shocked, confused, and</td>
<td>King transformed from national savior to mass murderer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heartbroken after the</td>
<td>Realization of the non-existence of the benevolent Father King.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen presides over Yellowshirt funeral.</td>
<td>Slogans and graffiti: “Dad, where are you?” “I don't know, I am sick.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Doubt turned into certainty”</td>
<td>“Monitor lizard ordered the killing,” “You are not the sky but a pathetic dog.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Eye-opening” in the sense of disappointment towards monarchical role.</td>
<td>Removal of royal symbols from everyday life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For some, resentment expands from Prem to Queen but not King.</td>
<td>Join the royal petition campaign either because they truly thought King was the sole savior, or to test how the palace would react and show how much Redshirts could be mobilized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Join the royal petition campaign either because they truly thought King was the sole savior, or to test how the palace would react and show how much Redshirts could be mobilized.</td>
<td>Join academic seminars as a part of their “eye-opening” process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“After years and years, we no longer attacked</td>
<td>Anonymous laughter and hiss of the crowd in response to royalist expressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King supports this latest coup.</td>
<td>Diffusion of indirect references to the monarchy such as “the blind bastard”, “the whale”, and “the red lip”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Games of throne” between the Prince and Princess conspiracy theory: Redshirts support the former, believing latter was endorsed by Prem and the old elite.</td>
<td>“A person who used to love” and “We love the Crown Prince” discourses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumors regarding the King’s and Queen’s fragile health; “dreams” for the end of the ninth reign</td>
<td>“Proud not to be under any foot” protest shirts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go through a period of self-questioning. Some lost faith in their leaders due to their concessionary positions.</td>
<td>King supports this latest coup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope that the Crown Prince would better the situation</td>
<td>Exchanging/sharing clips or documents with contents deemed lèse-majesté.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

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Resentment directed against the monarchy remained marginalized.

Inexperienced public speakers were charged with lèse-majesté and jailed for implying that the monarchy endorsed the coup.

Prem. We attacked ... (pause and laughter without naming) instead. The target had changed.”
<p>| Internet Users | Early wave of the “eye-opening” trend occurring in online discussions. “Eye-opening” understood in a sense of drastic shift of attitude toward the monarchy through reading, attending classes, finding new information on the internet | More members joined the cyber-world as an alternative channel where ones could find the “truth”. The Queen was called “Blue Mama Sister.” Funeral day of October 13, 2008 was called “The National Eye-opening Day.” | During 2010 crackdown, several internet users made comments online such as “If Redshirt people die, the King must take responsibility...Children are fighting with each other. The Father must stop it. No father lets his children kill each other.” Same Sky web board (now changed its name into We are all human web board) full of rumors, comments, academic discussions critical of the monarchy. On this web board, anonymous writer by name “Hi S” talked about the worsening health conditions of the so-called “xxx” who slept on the hospital’s 16th floor. “Xxx” or “Somchai” is an owner of a “canned fish factory” whose wife was called “aunt” or “Red lip aunt.” Toy with objects seemingly relevant to the monarchy, such as a wheelchair, pistols, “the cat never smiles,” 1112 pizza delivery Over-exaggeration and misuse of royal expressions, for example, five-hour “Long live the king” audio clip in Youtube or “Long live the king” written in chains. As mocking the King’s dog online became illegal, internet users honed their arts of resistance. Imitate royal expressions and anti-Redshirt discourses in more absurdist fashion |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Progressive Intellectuals</strong></th>
<th>See the monarchy as political players and the on-going conflict as the elite’s attempt to undermine Thailand’s democratization for the sake of “royalist democracy,” “oligarchical rule,” and “humanized monarchy”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical of both Thaksin and the coup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prem was part of the monarchy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The <em>ammat</em> must include the royal institution. And <em>ammatayaphippatai</em> (rule of the <em>ammat</em>) entailed royalism as a way of thinking. However, because these intellectuals were well aware of royal power and the lèse-majesté law, they knew the limits of their criticisms and refrained from</td>
</tr>
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</table>

|                             | While most intellectuals remained hesitant to show support to the Redshirt movement, Somsak for example, closely observed and engaged with Redshirt discourses. |
|                             | Somsak criticized the official movement leaders and urged them to stop “treating their followers as an idiot” as well as limiting their critique to Prem. He pressured the leaders to publicly discuss the royal power. |

|                             | Show a clear position in favor of the Redshirts |
|                             | Demand justice for the Redshirts who were injured and killed in the 2010 crackdown |
|                             | Organize public seminars and concerts in university areas with Redshirts as main audiences |

|                             | The birth of “Nitirat” as academic celebrities of the Redshirts |
|                             | Legal critique of the army, the coup, the monarchy, and lèse-majesté law |
|                             | Somsak’s historical and political analysis of the monarchy |

|                             | Somsak rejected “Eyes-opening but lips whispering” strategy and demanded public intellectuals and movement leaders start proper criticisms of the monarchy. |

|                             | Organize campaign for the amendment of the lèse-majesté law (CCAA 112) |
|                             | Bold political art designs in *Same Sky* and *Read*, for example, a comparison between the monarchy and dinosaur, mockery of hyper royalist cultural practices such as prostration. |
|                             | Make a statement that Thailand’s political regime must become “democracy which allows the king to be head of state.” |
|                             | Push limits of public discussion regarding the monarchy. Somsak was eventually invited to talk on one television program |

|                             | Celebrate “ordinary” love of commoners as opposed to forced love imposed from above |

|                             | Anti-coup/anti-junta academic talks |
|                             | Attempt to overcome “color-coded” conflict and to build a “new” bloc of resistance |
|                             | Wider gap between intellectuals and Redshirts |
|                             | Some intellectuals criticize Redshirt movement for its hierarchical organizational structure and elitist value. Somsak begins to question Redshirt democracy due to its attachment to charismatic leaders. |
|                             | Others see Redshirt rumors and groundless conspiracy theory regarding royal succession as “loser’s mentality” and pure fantasy. |
| publicly criticizing the monarchy explicitly. | Same Sky and Read journals sold at Redshirt gathering sites. |  |  |
Because of lèse-majesté law, criticisms or references to the monarchy could not be expressed directly. Notably, Redshirt “hidden transcripts” in linguistic and symbolic forms featured dynamic transformations in terms of the political meanings attached to them. For example, “Sky,” initially meant the sacred realm where Prem, an evil King’s servant, did not belong. Then the Queen was also excluded from this realm. Before the eye-opening outbreak of 2010, “Sky,” for most ordinary Redshirts, was specifically limited to King Bhumibol who the Redshirts looked up to and hoped that their worthless distant voices of suffering would finally be heard. Nonetheless, after being slaughtered without divine intervention, the Redshirts realized that there was no “Sky.” As one graffiti condemned, “You are not the Sky, but a pathetic dog.”

This dissertation digs deeply into historical accounts of recent forms of anti-royalism in Thailand. It pays attentions to particular sets of languages and symbols which entail complex layers of meanings. The main sources include personal narratives of ordinary Redshirts, public speeches of movement leaders, and political arts expressed through graphics, poetry, songs, and plays. These various arts of anti-royalism were not all well-written, recorded, and “legible” by members of the Thai state. While some have become subject to legal prosecution, others continue to take place even under military dictatorship.

Chart figures 8.3 and 8.4 demonstrate characteristics of lèse-majesté offenses in Thailand from 2006 – 2016. Figure 8.3 focuses on means of communication while figure 8.4 shows who or what has been defamed or insulted. Offering a holistic picture of Thailand’s lèse-majesté situation, these charts reveal the relationship between anti-royalism and legality. Among 89 cases, specific means of communications or contents were more likely to be legally prosecuted than others. Similarly, a degree of legal sensibility towards discursive crimes against particular royal figures was higher than others.
Figure 8.3: Lèse-majesté cases and means of communication from 2006 - 2016 chart
Figure 8.4: Lèse-majesté cases and defamed subjects from 2006 - 2016 chart
Since the aim is to show the crisis of royal legitimacy in relation to on-going conflicts, I have excluded politically irrelevant lèse-majesté cases, for instance, making false claims about the monarchy for personal gain and offenses made by lèse-majesté defendants which were not politically motivated. “Ibrahim,” a Saudi stock trader living in Thailand, was an example of the latter. He was arrested and jailed for sharing news regarding Bhumibol’s death to his fellow traders online in 2010.946

Although the actual numbers of lèse-majesté cases occurring during 2006 – 2016 were much higher than 89, the sensitivity of the issue involved and public censorship caused difficulty for the researcher to collect data for all cases. The courts often ordered closed trials for lèse-majesté cases. Verdicts were publicly inaccessible. More importantly, no one was allowed to reproduce the alleged lèse-majesté speech-acts, for that would also have been lèse-majesté. Most of the data for these charts derives from The Freedom of Expression Documentation Center’s website, charge sheets, and court verdicts which I received from lawyers and human rights activists through personal contacts. Some cases exist of which only the means of communication is known, but not details regarding defamed subjects.

As figure 8.3 shows, cyberspace was the site where lèse-majesté offenses were found most often (40 of 89 cases: 45%). Although cyberspace has become more politically important as a main site of resistance in Thailand, it is no longer a safe haven where any type of anti-royalist expression can thrive. Indeed, 70 % of lèse-majesté cases after the 2014 coup involved activities taking place in the cyberworld. Online lèse-majesté offenses cover a wide range of actions: comments, visual graphics, audio, video clips, and files publicized online through web boards, websites, or social networks. This type of offense includes acts of sharing items with allegedly lèse-majesté content. For instance, “Joe” was accused of violating Article 112 for owning a blog

946 Thailand, Criminal Court of Bangkok, Court Decision, Black Case no. 1572/2555, May 22, 2013.
which offered a link to download Paul Handley’s "The King Never Smiles" and for being involved in the online publication of a Thai-language version of the book. Incidentally, this type of lèse-majesté offense must be publicly accessible. If lèse-majesté remarks are found in a personal e-mail or message/chat box, they would be categorized as private conservations.

Since cyberspace is no longer a sequestered social site accessible exclusively by defiant members, more circumspect language and symbols were appropriated to make anti-royalism became illegible or incomprehensible for online thought police. As mentioned in chapters one and six, several internet users honed up on satirical skills to make anti-royalist arts and comments. Anti-royalism in absurdist and vaguely comical forms remained exempt from legal prosecution. For example, the Facebook account “The People’s Army Overthrowing Thaksin’s Regime” (see chapter one, section 1.5.4) still continues making anti-royalist visual graphics without being charged, even during the sensitive time of Bhumibol’s passing. Mocking the state-imposed mourning spectacles and the ubiquitous black and white trend, the page owners posted a photo of a mass gathering at Mecca with a caption which read, “Reverberant roar at Mecca. Wherever we are, Thai love the King” (Figure 8.5). Here, the graphic toyed with the royalist idea that people around the world mourned for King Bhumibol. It also implied the similarity between Bhumibol’s regime and religious rituals. In a sense, it can be argued that there remained particular kinds of online humor which could not be detected and criminalized by the Thai state. In this case, anti-royalism took in forms of over-identification and decontextualization. As explained in chapter six, this form of resistance tends to evade detection since it bears some resemblance to the structure of formal royalist discourse.

947 For case’s details, see https://freedom.ilaw.or.th/en/case/65.
The second most frequent type of communication subject to lèse-majesté prosecution was in the form of public speeches (23 of 89: 26%). Most of these were delivered in political rallies by public speakers onstage who did not to conceal their identity. Talks in a radio program or interviews were also counted in this category. The majority of defendants were well-known figures, at least within their political community. Their discursive crimes often occurred when they carelessly spilled out their inner thoughts or shouted out loud the “whispers.” Although they received cheers and laughter from the Redshirt crowd, they put themselves in the spotlight and in vulnerable positions. In other words, the anonymity of the crowd, as depicted in chapters five and six, shielded ordinary participants from lèse-majesté regime but not the speakers onstage.

On the other hand, private conversations, ranked in third place (9 cases: 10 %), had much lower number compared to the first two categories. They included expressions made in private
sites such as talks between a taxi driver and his passenger,\textsuperscript{948} short text messages sent to another phone or through social networks,\textsuperscript{949} a threatening phone call,\textsuperscript{950} or even a diary.\textsuperscript{951} As for the circulation of media (8 cases: 9\%), circulated items could be leaflets, booklets, or VCDs. In these cases, lèse-majesté defendants were accused of possessing, reproducing, or being complicit in producing media with content deemed lèse-majesté. Indeed, these two types of resistance were prevalent among ordinary Redshirts at the \underline{[...]} where I researched. As shown in chapter one, informal political chats and exchanges of media were the Aunties’ daily practices.

Five bodily expressions (6\%) consisted of two assaults on royal portraits,\textsuperscript{952} throwing the King’s flag into the river,\textsuperscript{953} acting disrespectfully to the King’s anthem,\textsuperscript{954} and covering one’s mouth.\textsuperscript{955} The first four cases involved physical interaction with royal symbols whereas, in the fifth case, the court interpreted that the speaker covered his mouth to hint that he was talking about the King.

Last, I define graffiti as writing or drawing on a wall or other surface in a public place. The important point is that graffiti are made by anonymous individuals, since the moment of production was not seen by anyone. Three lèse-majesté graffiti (4\%) were political writings on a mall’s restroom walls,\textsuperscript{956} signs hung on overpasses,\textsuperscript{957} and texts on foam boards tied to a cart.\textsuperscript{958}

\textsuperscript{948} Yutthasak’s case. See Thailand, Criminal Court of Bangkok, \textit{Court Decision}, Black Case no. Or .2529/2557, August 8, 2014.
\textsuperscript{949} For example, Arkong SMS’s and Thanet’s cases. See https://freedom.ilaw.or.th/en/case/21 and Thailand, Criminal Court of Bangkok, \textit{Court Decision}, Black Case no. Or. 3190/2557, June 25, 2015.
\textsuperscript{950} Suriyan’s case. See https://freedom.ilaw.or.th/en/case/22.
\textsuperscript{951} Pratin’s case. See https://freedom.ilaw.or.th/en/case/747.
\textsuperscript{952} Samak’s and Thitinan’s case. See https://freedom.ilaw.or.th/en/case/584and https://freedom.ilaw.or.th/en/case/430.
\textsuperscript{953} Krisada’s case. See https://freedom.ilaw.or.th/en/case/353.
\textsuperscript{954} Rachapin’s case. See https://freedom.ilaw.or.th/en/case/32.
\textsuperscript{955} Jeng’s case. See Thailand, Criminal Court of Bangkok, \textit{Charge Sheet}, Black Case no. Or. 2740/2553, September 1, 2010.
\textsuperscript{956} Opas’s case, see Thailand, Military Court of Bangkok prosecutors, \textit{Charge Sheet}, Black Case No. 197 Kor./2558, July 7, 2015.
\textsuperscript{957} Pattani’s case, see https://freedom.ilaw.or.th/en/case/120.
\textsuperscript{958} Chetsit’s case, see https://freedom.ilaw.or.th/en/case/87.
From this statistic, it is possible that the low number might not reflect the infrequent prevalence of these actions. On the contrary, these means of communication could effectively escape the eyes and ears of power. As shown in chapter five, several Redshirt informants had vivid memories of removing royal portraits, calendars, and other products from their house, throwing them in garbage bags. Since most of these acts were located in private sites, people rarely got caught. Moreover, there were many anonymous signs and writing on the walls and streets deemed offensive to the monarchy after the 2010 crackdown; yet, they were made during chaotic gatherings and in an atmosphere of collective anger. These political artists could thus hide beneath anonymity and leave their subversive political art in public places as the only trace of their existence. In a sense, data from legal cases need to be understood by taking into accounts of unwritten stories from below so that one can fully capture Thailand’s recent forms of resistance against the monarchy. These charts show that the Thai state attempted to penetrate hidden social sites, make “codified local practices” legible, and manipulate them. Nonetheless, the findings presented in this dissertation contend that power from above still encounters several limitations.959

Figure 8.4 shows that among 89 lèse-majesté cases King Bhumibol was referred to the most (56 counts). Defamation against the King covered a wide range of expression. He was labeled a blind man, a sick man whose death was approaching, and above all a mastermind behind Prem and the coups. The Queen (24 counts) was attacked for taking political sides in favor of the Yellowshirts. Many cases showed that she was comically called the “whale.”960 She was also

960 See for example, Thailand, Criminal Court of Bangkok, Court Decision, Black Case no. Or. 2788/2557, September 1, 2014 and Thailand, Military Court of Bangkok, Charge Sheet, Black Case no. 120 kor./2557, April 23, 2015.
accused of involvement in the stolen Saudi blue diamond. These findings illustrate that Thailand’s on-going conflict and the crisis of royal legitimacy were centered around King Bhumibol, his personality cult, and his extraordinary power. As this dissertation has shown, the Redshirt process of eye-opening mainly involved a drastic shift in attitude towards the Father and Mother of the Thai Kingdom -- the King and the Queen.

Although Princesses Sirindhorn and Chulaborn, Bhumibol’s second and third daughters, are not protected by lèse-majesté law, I included them if data indicated that they were also referred to, either singularly or together with other royalty. Twelve counts featured defamation against Sirindhorn and four against Chulaborn. Somsak Jeamteerasakul’s case was the only case in which the alleged offense did not involve other members of royal family, but Princess Chulaborn alone.

Eighteen counts were deemed offensive to the Crown Prince (now King Rama X). Notably, after the 2014 coup, several lèse-majesté cases showed that he was not negatively defamed. Rather he was depicted as fighting for power with his sister, Princess Sirindhorn. Some lèse-majesté defendants even expressed support for the former. Banpodj, a DJ famous for his Youtube audio clips and a lèse-majesté conviction, asserted that Rama X would bring Thaksin back home. This claim was considered damaging to the Crown Prince’s reputation.

Criticizing ancient Siamese kings and a royal pet (Bhumibol’s dog, Khun Tongdaeng or Madame Copper) could constitute lèse-majesté crimes. Similar to Princesses Sirindhorn and Chulaborn, these royally-related humans and non-humans are not protected by law; however, they are sometimes elevated to inviolable status. A Thai intellectual, Sulak Sivaraksa, faced a lèse-

961 For example, Thailand, Criminal Court of Bangkok, Court Decision, Black Case no. Or. 3187/2554, February 28, 2012, 9 and Thailand, Criminal Court of Bangkok, Charge Sheet, Black Case no. Or. 3475/2558, October 19, 2015, 5.
962 See https://freedom.ilaw.or.th/en/case/141.
963 Thailand, Military Court of Bangkok, Charge Sheet, Black Case no. 120 kor./2557, April 23, 2015, 13.
majesté charge for allegedly insulting King Naesuan, who ruled the Ayudhaya Kingdom from 1590 to 1605.⁹⁶⁴ Two ordinary Thais were accused of mocking Madame Tongdaeng, Bhumibol’s favorite dog, online.

Finally, the category of institutional defamation entailed criticisms which went beyond individual royal figures. The writings or speeches often consisted of terms broadly alluding to the royal elite such as the ruling class, feudalist (sakdina), and ammat. They demystified the monarchy as the unaccountable institution manipulating Thai politics. For example, “political parties competed so hard to win an election. Still the dark power...appointed a ‘good person’ to be the Prime Minister.”⁹⁶⁵ Several remarks questioned the moral authority of the royal elite. “A good person does not have to brag aloud how magnificent his projects are,” said one taxi driver.⁹⁶⁶ Some also mocked the Thai culture of servility, such as prostration. Notably, these instances were made by ordinary Thai, not those with academic backgrounds. Combined with other accounts presented in previous chapters, I argue that institutional or structural critique was not exclusively preserved for intellectuals. Similarly, ordinary people were not only capable of individual attacks, particularly in “vulgar unsophisticated” fashions.

Last but not least, this study deals with the question of sustainability, or the endurance of dissent voices in relation to political institutions such as movement organization or party. It shows that ordinary people were indeed the main driving forces of political ruptures or radical breaks with the existing orders and dominant ideology; however, unless movement leaders or the party serve to maintain them, they might be at risk of being vaporized when the powers-that-be tighten their grips. As chapter seven has shown, Thailand’s anti-royalist past, despite being driven

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⁹⁶⁵ Thailand, Military Court of Bangkok, Court Decision, Black Case no. 54 kor./2557, November 18, 2014.

⁹⁶⁶ Thailand, Criminal Court of Bangkok, Court Decision, Black Case no. Or .2529/2557, August 8, 2014, 1.
by political institutions, has been subject to distortion and cleansing from public memories. Today, under an authoritarian regime, Redshirt eye-opening and whispering stories could also possibly sink into oblivion, even among members of the movement themselves. The unwritten, unrecorded anti-royalist voices must not be forgotten. So are faceless commoners who were barely remembered as political agents of change.

One day when Thailand’s democracy has returned and positive political changes becomes the inevitable path, I hope this dissertation will serve to oppose the mystic idea that ordinary Thais in the lower classes were not ready for regime change and had always been acquiescent to power. Michael Walzer writes:

Monarchy was a political structure of large dimension, and men lived within it for a long time... The political history of mankind was the history of its kings: reigns and dynasties marked its periods. The destruction of kingship was a long and a difficult process, and the sense of adventure and of danger that it frequently entailed should never be forgotten. Much of this process remains hidden from view: the erosion of royalist ideology, for example, still awaits its historian.967

This study insists that there was a moment when “epidemics of political courage”968 plagued Thai society, when Thai commoners abandoned their existing beliefs and took leaps of faith, and when the royal elite struck back and crushed them with brute force.

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## APPENDIX 1

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Descriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Movement/Group Leaders</td>
<td>Nattawut Saikua</td>
<td>A politician, Redshirt United Front against Dictatorship (UDD) movement leader, and talented public speaker who can make the audience laugh, cry, get enraged, or feel emboldened with his humor, metaphorical analogy, and undeniable charm. Nattawut writes and sings several Redshirt songs. He is the youngest among the key UDD movement leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jatuporn Phrompan</td>
<td>A politician, UDD formal movement leader, and MP. In May 1992, Jatuporn joined the demonstration against Prime Minister Suchinda Kraprayoon. Together with Nattawut, Jatuporn led anti-coup rallies in early 2007 which later developed into the Redshirt UDD. In 2014, he was named the UDD chairman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jakrapob Penkair</td>
<td>A politician, UDD formal movement leader, and former Minister. Leading the anti-coup rallies since 2007, Jakrapob is famous for his insightful academic speeches onstage as well as his sharp criticisms against the establishment. Jakrapob also has a poetic talent. He left Thailand and lived in exile after he was charged with lèse-majesté law in 2009.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Veera Muksikapong</td>
<td>An experienced politician, MP, and a Redshirt UDD movement leader. He was appointed as the UDD chairman from 2009 to 2010.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weng Tojirakarn</td>
<td>A student activist during 1970s, protest leader in the 1992 Black May, Redshirt UDD leader, and MP. Weng used to join the anti-Thaksin forces, then shifted his stance, and became a key Redshirt UDD leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thida Thawornseth</td>
<td>A student activist during 1970s and Redshirt UDD chairwoman (2010 - 2014). Weng, Thida’s husband, asserted that Thida is the “brain” of the movement. She played a significant role in founding Redshirt schools and distributing Redshirt textbooks throughout Red villages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apiwan Wiriyachai</td>
<td>A soldier-turned-politician, Redshirt UDD movement leader, and MP. After the 2014 coup, a lèse-majesté charge was pressed against him. Apiwan fled to the Philippines, where he passed away on October 6, 2014.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sombat Boon-ngamanong</td>
<td>An NGO activists who protested against the September 19, 2006 coup. Sombat used to join the popular uprising in May 1992. As an independent Redshirt activist, Sombat was well-known for organizing symbolic/performative political events. He was a leader of a Redshirt splinter group called “Red Sunday” playing an active role after the 2010 crackdown.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somyot Puksakasemsuk</td>
<td>An activist fighting for labor’s rights, founder and leader of the Redshirt splinter group called “June 24 for Democracy,” and an editor of <em>Voices of Taksin</em> and <em>Red Power</em> magazine. Somyot was charged with lèse-majesté and sentenced to ten years of imprisonment. He refused to plead guilty and remained in jail since 2011.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Chai”</td>
<td>A member of June 24 for Democracy, DJ of one Redshirt radio program, and public speaker. After Somyot was arrested, Chai was behind several events organized by the June 24 or Democracy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suchart Nakbangsai</td>
<td>The co-founder of The Saturday Voice against the Dictatorship, the anti-2006 coup group at Sanam luang from 2006 – 2007. He was an IT shop owner at Bangkok Pantip Plaza and then turned into protest leader and public speaker. He was accused of insulting the Queen of Thailand in 2008 and was sentenced to three years of imprisonment.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surachai Saedan</td>
<td>Surachai is a former communist fighter. Since 2007, he joined the anti-coup movement and appeared on the formal rally stage. However, due to different strategies and ideologies, Surachai was marginalized by the UDD and decided to establish his own autonomous group called Red Siam. He was charged with lèse-majesté law and put behind bars for two and a half years during 2011-2013. After being released, he was still politically active with the Red Siam group. After the 2014 coup, Surachai refused to report himself to the ruling junta and lived in exile.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seh Daeng (Khattiya Sawasdipol)</td>
<td>A major general in the Royal Thai Army, columnist, and writer. He explicitly showed support for Thaksin and Redshirts. He formed the so-called “King Taksin’s Warrior” troop and was believed to be involved in militant activities during the 2010 violent crash. He was shot dead by a sniper on May 13, 2010.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thaksin Shinawatra</td>
<td>A politician and 23th Prime Minister of Thailand. He won national elections in 2001 and 2005. On September 19, 2006, while attending the UN summit in New York, a military coup seized power and overthrew Thaksin. He reentered Thailand in February</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2008. As political tensions grew, Thaksin left his home country in September 2008 and never returned. He was sentenced to two years in jail for helping his wife buy public land at auction. This has been the only criminal charge made against him so far.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yingluck Shinawatra</td>
<td>The 28th Prime Minister of Thailand and Thaksin’s youngest sister. After winning an election in July 2011, Yingluck was overthrown on May 22, 2014.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samak Sundaravej</td>
<td>Former Bangkok major, the 26th Prime Minister of Thailand, and longstanding politician (on the right wing). He rose to power after Thaksin’s proxy party, the People Power Party, won an election in December 2007. However, Samak was then deposed by a court decision in September 2008. He died of cancer in November 2009.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Artists: Poets, Musicians, Performers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Piangkham Pradapkhwam</td>
<td>A Redshirt poet graduated from Faculty of Arts, Thammasat University. She often reads her works with deep emotion and shaken voices. Her Redshirt arts could be traced back to 2009. Piangkham dedicated her works to ordinary people in the oppressed lower/working class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anon Nampa</td>
<td>A law school student who joined the anti-coup activities in 2006. He often wrote and read poems while participating in political gatherings. Anon turned into a prominent human right lawyer defending ordinary Redshirts who were charged with lèse-majesté. After the 2014 coup, Anon did not cease his political activism and was tried in the military court.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mai nueng kor kun ti</td>
<td>A poet who ran a ducks-over-rice restaurant. After 2006, he devoted his life to the political cause of the Redshirts. His political ideal had the socialist inclination. His famous poem is “Constituting the Institution of the People” (2009). Mai nueng read his poem with passion, repeating parts which he wanted to emphasize. During Yingluck administration, Mai nueng campaigned to release political prisoners. He was shot dead on April 23, 2014.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pae Bangsanan</td>
<td>A former civil servant and a professional singer who joined anti-coup movements in 2006. Pae then used his musical and entertaining skill to serve the Redshirts. He first appeared on Redshirt stage in March 2009. His popularity grew quickly since his “Love the Redshirt People” became one among the movement’s top hits. Pae has polite and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
soft characters. With humbleness, Pae shows admiration toward his Redshirt artists who took more risks than he did.

<p>| <strong>Prakaifai theater group</strong> | Founded in 2010, the group composed of young activists who performed at political protests and in rural villages free of charge. Their plays touched upon Thailand’s political history. On October 6 and 13, 2013, they performed a political play called “the Wolf Bride” at Thammasat University. With an incoherent plot, the play depicted a story of a beggar, a fictional protagonist, who became a monarch, married his wolf bride, and was poisoned by his Brahmin advisor. After the 2014 coup, two young activists were arrested and charged with lèse-majesté for being involved in the production of “the Wolf Bride.” |
| <strong>Faiyen musical band</strong> | Chor (band leader, pedal bass, keyboarder), Jom (vocalist), Ton (percussionist and back-up vocalist), Kluay (drummer), Port (guitarist). After the 2010 crackdown, Chor, a middle-aged man who worked in Thai music industry for decades, wanted to form a band of which music both showed supports to the Redshirts and touched upon the “root” of Thailand’s political problem. Finally, band members were recruited and songs were composed in late 2011. Faiyen played “Uncle Somchai, Aunt Somjit” live for the first time on December 31, 2011. During 2012 – May 2014, they were constantly invited to perform by Redshirt regional or independent groups. However, UDD leaders attempted to marginalize and exclude them. Faiyen only had a chance to play on the UDD stage one time at 4 a.m. with the secret help of mainstream Redshirt artists. Faiyen’s songs are unique for being highly controversial, yet all were articulated in comic, fun, and simplified forms of expression. After the 2014 coup, Faiyen members sought asylum in Laos. |
| <strong>Jin Khammachon</strong> | A former student activist in the 1970s who went to the forest after the massacre on October 6, 1976. He was sent to China to study music with a branch of the Chinese Communist Party. Jin opposed the 2006 coup and produced songs to serve the movement. His most famous one is “Warriors of the Dust” saluting the Redshirts killed in their political struggles, especially during the 2010 crackdown. |
| <strong>Intellectuals/Academic Circle</strong> | A former student activist in the 1970s who went to the forest after the massacre on October 6, 1976. Pichit has taught Economics at Thammasat University and been one among few intellectuals who from the beginning opposed the anti-Thaksin forces and the coup. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sutachai Yimprasert</td>
<td>A former student activist in the 1970s. He spent one year in the jungle after the massacre on October 6, 1976. Sutachai teaches history at Chulalongkorn University. He used to join the anti-Thaksin forces before turned into a Redshirt sympathizer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somsak Jeamteerasakul</td>
<td>A former student activist in the 1970s and was arrested after the massacre on October 6, 1976. Somsak taught history at Thammasat University. Since 2005, Somsak gradually became well-known for his critical views towards the monarchy expressed in the cyber world and later in public seminars. Somsak left Thailand after the 2014 coup and lives in exile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thongchai Winichakul</td>
<td>A former student activist in the 1970s and was arrested after the massacre on October 6, 1976. Thongchai was a Professor of Southeast Asian History at the University of Wisconsin–Madison for two decades. He has written works about royalist nationalism and hyper-royalism which offer critical insights on contemporary politics in Thailand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giles Ungpakorn</td>
<td>A Thai Marxist who used to teach politics at Chulalongkorn University. In 2009, he was charged with lèse-majesté law and left Thailand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ida Arunwong</td>
<td>A writer, poet, and editor of Read journal. Since 2009, she began to engage with Redshirt politics in the street and included their stories and her reflections in Read. After 2010, Ida brought the unheard voices of ordinary Redshirts and lèse-majesté prisoners into the world of literature. Wearing glasses and having long black hair, Ida prefers to write rather than talk in order to express herself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worajet Pakirat</td>
<td>A law professor at Thammasat University and a key member of Nitirat group aiming to provide legal knowledge to serve ordinary Thai people. Worajet is a good charismatic public speaker capable of explaining difficult issues in simple and precise language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piyabutr Saengkanokkul</td>
<td>A law professor at Thammasat University and a key member of Nitirat group. Piyabutr was Worajet’s student. He is also a good public speaker, being able to touch upon controversial issues while keeping his calmness and soft non-aggressive voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai Commoners</td>
<td>Nuamthong Phraiwan A 60-year-old taxi driver who drove his taxi into a tank to oppose the coup. One month later, he hung himself to death from a pedestrian footbridge in response to the contemptuous remark that “no one is willing to sacrifice his or her life for political ideals.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aunt Nuad A massage practitioner, a Redshirt woman, who is a regular visitor at the</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Born in the northern Phrae province, Nuad has a plump figure with short haircut. She</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
moved to Bangkok for decades and studied professional massage at Pho Temple. Nuad works at a massage shop elsewhere but occasionally visited the [redacted]. Although it was uncertain when exactly Nuad joined the Redshirt movement, she was in the March-May 2010 Redshirt demonstration. She is not talkative but always gives clear straightforward comments.

Aunt Wan  
A former teacher who joined Redshirt movement around 2007 – 2008. Wan quitted teaching because she was tired of corruption and patronage system at school. Wearing glass and having short bob hairstyle, Wan, in her fifties, likes learning and teaching new technologies. At the [redacted] Wan often exchanged political views and new information regarding online applications with her Redshirt friends. After the 2014 coup, Wan attends small gatherings and public seminars. She was arrested once together with student activists but was pressed with no charge.

Aunt Lek  
A Redshirt [redacted] at the [redacted] Lek is a short woman with a small voice. Her age is around late 40 to 50. Lek likes [redacted] and wishes to keep on [redacted] despite [redacted] after the 2014 coup. Lek [redacted] opens everyday all year long from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Lek always sat on her working desk, staring at a computer and listening to Redshirt conversations. Although Lek admires movement leaders and personally knows some of them well, she often expresses skepticisms and critical views towards the leaders.

Aunt Sao  
An outspoken Redshirt woman who joined the movement since 2006. Born in Nakhon Ratchasrima but growing up in Bangkok, Sao sold plants at Chattuchak market. After the 2006 coup, Sao actively participated in anti-coup activities and became a passionate Redshirt member. I was close to Sao during the first three months of my fieldwork. We sat together and slept in the same room during our four-day trip to Laos. At the [redacted] Sao [redacted] Aunt Lek [redacted]. Then, Sao had quarrels with Aunt Lek and other visitors. Two main causes of disagreement were that Aunt Lek, as Sao claimed, did not recognize her contribution to the shop and Sao did not like people criticizing the movement leaders.

Aunt Ju  
Ju worked for the government at one educational department. She is a well-to-do and well-educated Redshirt woman wearing heavy makeup and expensive cloth. She supports Thaksin due to his welfare policies. Ju asserted that she successfully
convincing her colleagues to change their political positions in favor of the Redshirts. Ju went to the street and began political activism since 2006. Ju never uses vulgar words when she criticizes the Thai elite, her political opponents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aunt Chan</th>
<th>A timid and calm, Bangkok-born Redshirt woman. She used to work as an accountant for the Thai Royal Navy and is now retired. She first attended a Redshirt rally in 2009. She survived the 2010 crackdown, leaving the World Trade Center few hours before it was burnt down. Chan barely smiles and usually does not speak her mind. Accordingly, people was initially afraid of her. She is indeed a generous person. She enjoys listening to others instead of conveying her own opinions. Substituting Aunt Sao, Chan became Aunt Lek’s [co-worker]. She often arrives at the shop earlier than Aunt Lek and [co-worker]. She also [co-worker] with accounting issues. She never complained about [co-worker] work with me.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aunt Pinky</td>
<td>A Redshirt businesswoman from the northern Nan province. She is well-to-do and always travels abroad. Pinky wears makeup and colorful cloth. Yet, this outspoken woman is always on the front line of the movement. Starting politics on the street from early 2006, Pinky supports the movement both physically and financially. She spent tremendous money on the food supply. With loud firm voice, Pinky often speaks out her political views. She spent one month in jail for defaming the court. She is a self-confident Redshirt with rebellious characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunt Bo</td>
<td>A Vietnamese-descendant Redshirt woman with a talent of needlework. Bo earns living from sewing cloth and making bracelets. Bo has a unique loud raspy voice. Joining the movement since 2006, Bo was kicked by a soldier and got injured during one Redshirt rally in 2007. Since then, her injury never fully heals. She thus always walks with a slight limp. At the shop, Bo sells stony bracelets to her friends. When talking politics, Bo gets passionate and stubbornly defends her stance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunt Kai</td>
<td>Born in Surin and then settling down in Bangkok, Kai became interested in Thai politics and joined political gatherings since early 2006. She has a calm personality and tends to stretch her voice while talking. She is not a routine visitor at [co-worker]. I met her accidentally at one anti-coup event at Thammasat University in March 2015.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nun</td>
<td>A Buddhist nun, wearing the white robe with a shaven head. She is in her mid or late sixties and has small figure. The nun is always in good temper around her Redshirt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
friends at the shop. She never preaches Buddhist teachings to her friends. Nor does she ever talk about religious issues. Only her outward appearance distinguishes her from others. Taking out her touch-screen smartphone, the nun spent time watching video clips made by radical Redshirts living in exile. She survived the 2010 crackdown by taking refuge at the Police Hospital nearby Ratchaprasong intersection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Redshirt prep-school teacher</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Teacher” usually visits shop once a week. She has a long curly hair and soft voice. Teacher is fond of reading, especially books regarding history and Western societies. Teacher also makes several copies of Paul Handley’s The King Never Smiles (in Thai) as well as other anti-royalist writings, carries them around in her bags, and distributes them to others. She joined the movement around 2006 – 2007. She also showed me her official UDD membership card which she always keeps in her wallet.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sister Ma</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A slim Redshirt woman in her forties. Ma seems to have a close relationship with “radical” fractions of the Redshirts. She once declared that she was not simply a UDD Redshirt but “anti-monarchist” Redshirt. After the 2014 coup, her male friends were arrested and jailed for possessing war weapons. Ma visits the shop once a week, helping Aunt Lek out. She works as a waitress at one luxurious hotel.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mon</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Redshirt woman who was arrested and imprisoned for almost a year for possessing war weapons. Mon has a short haircut and wears glasses. Since 2006, Mon decided to join the movement. Having a venturesome character, Mon always takes the front line in battles. She was punched in the face by a soldier and got her nose broken. Mon loves cursing with vulgar words. She is good at cooking and sells Thai sweet at a Bangkok stall.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nong</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Like Ma, Nong has a close relationship with Redshirts from “radical” fractions which show critical positions to the monarchy. Unlike Ma, after the 2014 coup, Nong insisted in expressing anti-royalist comments in her Facebook account. While selling clothes at a Bangkok stall, she loved writing and sharing short political essays and poems online. As a result, she became a target of the right-wing witch hunting group and had to leave Thailand in May 2015. In her forties, Nong became so politicized that she could not stand any sign of royalism surrounding her.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Add</th>
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</table>
| Add was not well-to-do Redshirt. Aged 40-50, this woman, with a very short and curly haircut and a tomboy personality, could not afford a touchscreen cellphone. She usually spent most of the time sitting by herself and watching Redshirt programs in front of the

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Occasionally, Aunt Lek let Add sit inside the cart and offered her a free meal. She was a street vendor. Add loved exchanging political rumors with her friends. Around mid-2015, Add disappeared for a while and showed up again with her unhealthy emaciated body. She told her friends that she would get better soon. Few months later, she quietly passed away.

**Bai**
A deaf-mute Redshirt man at the . He always sat at the same spot, watching Redshirt programs all day and collecting empty bottles. He missed most of his front teeth. According to Redshirt Aunties, Bai participated in most Redshirt activities. Despite being unable to talk, Bai used hand signs, meaningless noise, and texts on a cell phone to communicate with others.

**A “Red couple”**
A local Redshirt leader in one Bangkok’s district. The husband works at the Ministry of Defense and the wife runs a small business. Acting as a branch of the UDD organization, they have a close relationship with the movement leaders as well as Party members. They used to mobilize protesters from their area to join UDD rallies. Sometimes, they organize fundraising events and small gatherings.

**Phupa**
A Redshirt man from Surin. He lives in exile since 2014. He admired Surachai Saedan.

**San**
A Redshirt taxi driver from Khon Kaen, living in Bangkok. He is talkative and likes to share “inside” information with the Redshirts at the . San is in his early forties. He usually says with pride that he finished a bachelor degree in Political Science. San also survived the 2010 crash with a traumatic memory of death and violence. San is an active Redshirt and anti-2014-coup participant. His motto is “Whenever, I fight for democracy (สู้ทุกเมื่อเพื่อประชาธิปไตย).”

**Homo Erectus**
A well-educated Redshirt, a poet, as well as an activist in a cyber world, especially Same Sky and Prachatai web boards. He is now a university lecturer at the department of anthropology.

**Puen Lan Sak Na**
A well-educated Redshirt, a writer, an activist in a cyber world, particularly Same Sky web board. He works at the advertisement company.

**Pruay salty head,**
An internet user, well-known in the Same Sky web board, who was arrested and interrogated after the 2010 crackdown. Afterwards, he left Thailand.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Da Torpedo</td>
<td>A Redshirt woman and a lèse-majesté convicted arrested in 2008. Her speech delivered at Sanam Luang costed her 15 years of imprisonment. She received royal pardon and was released in August 2016.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkong</td>
<td>A poor Chinese-descendant old man who was charged with lèse-majesté law and sentenced to 20 years of imprisonment. He died in jail in 2012.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosamalin Tangnoppakun</td>
<td>Arkong’s wife, a writer, and a poet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncle O</td>
<td>A man, in his sixties, arrested in 2014 for writing lèse-majesté graffiti on walls in a mall’s restroom. He is also a musician and a song writer with free spirit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banpodj</td>
<td>Around late 2011, a man who went under the name Banpodj started making audio clips and publicized via Youtube. Banpodj audio clips were instances of Thai anti-royalism which contained several codenames such as “the blind bastard,” “the whale,” and “the butch bitch.” They provided information from within the palace and analysis regarding the royal family. “Banpodj” was finally arrested in 2014 together with others who involved in reproducing and sharing his clips. He was sentenced to five years of imprisonment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wasan Phuthong</td>
<td>Wasan Phuthong, a Redshirt participant, was shot dead during chaotic clashes on the evening of April 10, 2010. His skull was open and his brain scattered on the ground. According to the image of Wasan’s lifeless body, he wore a red T-shirt which read, “[We] love the King [but] fear moral people (รักในหลวงกลัวคนดี).”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narongsak Korbtaisong</td>
<td>On September 2, 2008, Narongsak Korbtaisong, a Redshirt, was beaten to death in a chaotic confrontation between the Yellowshirts and the Redshirts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 2

THE PURPLE BOOK
456
457
กลุ่มผู้ที่มีการรับผิดชอบ ผ.อ. บุญ หัวใจ สถานที่วิ่ง อยู่ 792.0x612.0

3. กระบวนการรักษาผู้ป่วย ผ.อ. บุญ หัวใจ สถานที่วิ่ง อยู่ 792.0x612.0

4. ประชุมที่มีผู้เข้าร่วม ผ.อ. บุญ หัวใจ สถานที่วิ่ง อยู่ 792.0x612.0
พระบาทสมเด็จพระจุลจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว

๔ พระราชทานพระบรมราชานุญาตให้ที่ทำการสะพานแขวนปลดแอกลงกู้หนี้สิน

แปลพระบรมราชานุญาตให้ที่ทำการสะพานแขวนปลดแอกลงกู้หนี้สิน

พระบาทสมเด็จพระจุลจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว

วันเสาร์ที่ ๒๐ มกราคม พ.ศ. ๒๔๔๗

"...

ที่ทำการสะพานแขวนปลดแอกลงกู้หนี้สินได้พระราชทานพระบรมราชานุญาตให้ที่ทำการสะพานแขวนปลดแอกลงกู้หนี้สิน จึงได้ทำการพิจารณาให้สั่งการต่อไปตามที่ได้รับการอนุญาต

ทำให้การพิจารณาให้สั่งการต่อไปตามที่ได้รับการอนุญาต

..."
ผลกระทบโดยมีความสอดคล้องในทาง เลือกใช้เครื่องมือที่เหมาะสม เพื่อให้ได้ผลลัพธ์ที่ดีที่สุด

ผลจากปัจจัยต่างๆ ที่ทำให้ท่านได้นำไปใช้ประโยชน์

ผลจากปัจจัยต่างๆ ที่ทำให้ท่านได้นำไปใช้ประโยชน์
APPENDIX 3

REDSHIRT PETITION FORM SUBMITTED TO KING BHUMIBOL

กราบเรียน พ.ศ. 2552

ขอเวลาให้ทางรัฐบาลและประชาชนได้แสดงความคิดเห็นที่ถูกต้องกับเรื่องนี้ ขออย่าถูกบังคับโดยที่ไม่มีการฟ้องร้องในศาล

1. ข้าพระพุทธเจ้ามีความเห็นว่าผลการฟ้องร้องในศาลควรได้รับการอนุญาต

2. นอกจากนี้ข้าพระพุทธเจ้ามีความเห็นว่า

3. การอธิบายถึงการบริหารอย่างสมเหตุสมผล ที่มีการจัดการในเรื่องนี้ ขอให้ยุติการฟ้องร้องในศาล
ข้าพระพุทธเจ้าและชาวบ้านทั่วไปทรงรับรู้ข้อความดังกล่าว ตามปรากฏการณ์ต่างๆ ที่ปรากฏในเผชิญหน้าในช่วงหลังจากที่เกิดเหตุ
การที่เกิดขึ้น เพราะถ้าการดำเนินการใด ๆ ที่เกิดขึ้น มีผลที่จะกระทบต่อการจัดการภัยพิบัติ ซึ่งเป็นสิ่งที่สำคัญ
สำหรับการป้องกันและบรรเทาผลกระทบที่เกิดขึ้น

ข้าพระพุทธเจ้าจึงขอร้องให้ทุกคนให้ความสนใจในการจัดการภัยพิบัติ โดยการพัฒนาความรู้ ทักษะ ทั้งในด้านการรักษาชีวิตของตัวเองและ
การช่วยเหลือผู้อื่น ซึ่งเป็นสิ่งที่มีความจำเป็นในช่วงเวลาที่เกิดเหตุการณ์อันตราย

ข้าพระพุทธเจ้าขอให้ทุกคนให้ความสนใจในการจัดการภัยพิบัติ ซึ่งเป็นสิ่งที่มีความจำเป็นในช่วงเวลาที่เกิดเหตุการณ์อันตราย

แก้ไขปัญหาสู่สุขภาพวิทยาศาสตร์
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