

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Political Demonology, Dehumanization, and Contemporary Thai Politics

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Abstract: The employment of acts of political demonology has become common among power holders in Thai society. Demonization campaigns trace back to the early 1970s when Thai nationalists deemed Communists to be “beasts in human clothing.” This paper reviews demonization strategies employed by power holders (countersubversives) to undermine, marginalize, and repress anti-government protesters (subversives), beginning with the formative 1970s student movements, and continuing through the 2014 military coup d’état. We argue through a series of vignettes that the Thai elites have conveniently labeled anti-government protesters and their mobilization networks as demons, trolls, or animals due to their supposed threats to the Thai state, its monarchy, or national religion.

Keywords: political demonology, Thailand, dehumanization, state violence, repression

Demonology, or regarding others as non-human or as being unwelcome, is a phenomenon that has been around as long as political society itself. The political variety is primarily derived from Michael Rogin’s (1987) book, *Ronald Reagan, The Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology*, which called to the attention the creation of monsters as a feature of politics, by the “inflation, stigmatization, and dehumanization of political foes” (p. xiii). In the book, Rogin described the demonologist splitting the globe in two, “attributing magical, pervasive power to a conspiratorial center of evil” (p. xiii). Fearing the destruction and chaos, the countersubversive (*good*) interprets local initiatives as signs of alien power, and individuals and groups become members of a single political body directed by its head.

Although demonology has been accredited with origins in the United States because of Rogin’s work, there are oft-cited examples elsewhere, such as the Nazi dissemination of a massive ideological dehumanization of a host of other groups of people, devaluing these groups as lower forms of life, commonly associated with animals (Steizinger, 2018). Using animal similarities, they redefined humanity and reclassified Jewish people as inferior animals. Terms like the “Jewish parasite” were an essential part of Nazi propaganda, which flowed from racist anthropology.

In that same century, the labeling of opponents as disgusting things or inhuman to accommodate the use of violence against them has become widespread, often with an end result that the perpetrator of violence bears no remorse for their crimes or displays no feelings

of guilt. This process has been applied in several countries amid extreme violence. Demonization and dehumanization played an essential role in facilitating violence during the Rwandan Genocide, which saw more than 850,000 Tutsis slaughtered by the majority Hutus. Dehumanizing rhetoric and language were used by the local radio stations and by the Hutu government to convince the population to rise against the Tutsis (Higiro, 2007). One of the first actions taken by antagonists was to place the Tutsis into an undesirable outgroup, labeling them as traitors and cockroaches, or *inyenzi* in Kinyarwanda.

There are a number of instances where aggressors were involved with killing things that they did not regard as human. The Japanese “elevated the self,” producing war films that focused on the admirable qualities of the protagonists, but the dehumanization of non-Japanese “outsiders” led to a war record of brutal behavior (Dower, 2012, p. 49). During World War II, Japanese artists and propagandists routinely rendered their Anglo-American counterparts as demons, such as a 1944 popular magazine that urged all Japanese to “Beat and kill these animals that have lost their human nature! That is the great mission that Heaven has given to the Yamato race, for the eternal peace of the world!” (Dower, 2012, p.56).

In the era of international terrorism and intrastate conflicts after the September 11, 2001 attacks, U.S. President George W. Bush declared the conflict between radical groups and the United States as a spiritual battle between good and evil. In his third television address after September 11, Bush declared that “thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror” (Gunn, 2004, p. 12). As Gunn (2004) described, these speeches cast the President as a “healing exorcist” and the radical groups as a kind of “negative force” that divided the American body as “evil or a “faceless coward” (p.12). This dichotomy of good versus evil in America’s war on terrorism was seen in several other campaigns, notably Iraq. In the Western view, there have been several attempts to portray Muslims as aggressive, half-demonic people. In the words of Daniel Nalliah, the leader of the Rise Up movement in Australia, “Tony Abbott, our prime minister called the ISIS [Islamic State] group in Iraq and Syria a death cult. I go one step further. I call Islam the death cult” (Cook, 2014, par.12).

The making of monsters or demons is not unique to any culture. The monsters of state creation help justify

repression or unspeakable forms of violence perpetrated in the name of self-preservation. Characterizing something or a subgroup of people as demonic or evil helps establish or solidify certain beliefs, values, or attitudes in relation to prevailing social, religious, or political norms. In the Thai context, the preservation of the state ideology is a common theme. Modern Thai history is replete with stories of subversive elements of Thai society, whether communist insurgents, pro-democracy students, supporters of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, or the now-iconic band of Red Shirts who have claimed to support the preservation of liberal democracy in the country. The discourse of the “other” in Thai politics, as Pavin Chachavalpongpun (2011) suggested, is a powerful narrative where propaganda “is frequently employed to attack opponents and at the same time strengthen the legitimacy of power holders” (p.1022). The selection of enemies and the “evil” otherness or people who are perceived to be criminal or extremely damaging to society (p.1023). This has been made clear as a theme of the monarchy’s attacks on Thaksin and his supporters, with the late monarch aiming at Thaksin back in 2006, questioning his mental competence.

Chachavalpongpun (2011) documented the role that enemies play in Thailand rather well, noting that “otherness,” whereas “dark and satanic,” is an essential part of the social controls placed on rivals from within (p.1024). Authors such as Chachavalpongpun have also used the term “Thainess” (*khwan pen thai*) as a subtheme to describe otherness, but it has always been a difficult term to define. When centered outside the political arena, it can encompass geographical boundaries, represent a people, cultural relations, and give meaning to a national identity. It also has evolved under rulers who have taught generations of subjects and their children a message of harmony, unity, and discipline. Thainess is the process of assigning order. For the demonologist, that order is defined as good and evil, Thai and very un-Thai. Thainess has been used by military strongmen and King Bhumibol to reinforce the national ideology of nation, monarchy, and religion. Former premier Abhisit also defined it as a convenient tool to define who is a unifying figure and who is not. It is the process of identifying what is and what is not Thai that is essential in the social construction of the “other.” A fortunate in-group cannot have their full purpose without defining the marginalized out-group.

Thai historian Thongchai Winichakul (2004) identified this process as “negative identification” (pp.5-6).

This paper reviews various demonization strategies employed by power holders (countersubversives) to undermine, marginalize, and repress anti-government protesters (subversives), beginning with the formative 1970s student movements, and continuing through the 2014 military coup d'état. Our paper seeks to study the history of demonology in Thailand, particularly through the cloudy lens of democratization. We examine political demonology, tracing its historical usage through multiple case studies or vignettes. We argue that the countersubversives have conveniently labeled anti-government protesters and their mobilization mechanisms or organizations as enemies, as demons, trolls, or animals due to their supposed threats to the Thai state, its monarchy, or national religion. In what can only be described as a common reoccurrence, democratic movements are surveilled then repressed, while simultaneously framing them as dangerous out-groups to a fragile Thai body politic.

The 1970s Student Movements

The dehumanization and demonization of the political other in Thailand does not begin in the modern era, but in the context of democratization and the modern Thai state, it is difficult not to begin with the student movements of the early and mid-1970s. More than 40 years ago, students dared to face down a trio of dictators (*sam thorarat*)—Prime Minister Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, Deputy Prime Minister Field Marshal Prapas Charusathira, and Colonel Narong Kittikachorn. Three significant narratives are surrounding the student movement that are relevant in the context of political demonology. The first narrative is a popular progressive student movement waged by the National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT). NSCT was formed in 1969 and who organized events about the perception of corruption on university campuses and the higher education administrators. As their confidence grew, they mobilized a national campaign against perceived Japanese influence on Thai labor and for better employment conditions, partly due to swings in the health of the Thai economy during the early 1970s (Darling, 1974). Initially, the activities of the NSCT were well received by the government and by Bhumibol Adulyadej, who called the student movement against the Japanese “excellent.”

Empowered by the influence they had acquired during the Japanese labor protests, they expanded to rail against Thanom, who staged a bloodless coup d'état against his own government. The NSCT later defended a student political organization after students at Ramkhamhaeng published a magazine, *A University Which Still has No Name*, which was critical of Thanom, citing his connection to individuals connected to a wildlife refuge hunting scandal. (Rajaretnam, 1974, p.309) The ire of the students put the government in a corner. Riding a wave of public anger, the students forced the government to investigate, which revealed the status of a “secret mission” to the Thung Yai nature preserve (Darling, 1974, p.13). Around the same time, the government was placing pressure on Ramkhamhaeng to close the critical student magazine and expel nine students connected to it. The quick mobilization of students by the NSCT led to the resignation of the university rector. While continuing to mobilize against the Thanom regime, students and some Thai professors petitioned the government to accelerate the creation of a democratic constitution. When some were arrested for violating draconian public assembly laws, students rallied in the streets of Bangkok, with the demonstration reaching as many as 500,000 people. While the government made some concessions, like the release of all prisoners, students persisted and marched to Chitralada Palace. The violence began after students broke through police barricades, and the aftermath saw hundreds of students dead or wounded. The political fallout from a government crackdown saw Rama IX endorsing the removal of the Thanom regime, which went into exile in the United States. This narrative survives intact because of the benevolence of the King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit, who achieved significant legitimacy by opening the gates to the Palace to those fleeing the violence.

The above narrative is important because it contradicts revisionist history which recalls a left-wing student movement that would be later linked to socialism and the insurgent Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). It also recalls the senseless slaughter of students by right-wing groups after an alleged effigy of the Crown Prince is burned at Thammasat University in early October, 1976. All of these narratives are incomplete and are worth revisiting in the context of political demonology. There are several assumptions made by the countersubversive (the state and the monarchy) that make these narratives incomplete

or factually inaccurate, particularly regarding the communist origins of the student movement. As detailed above, the student movement was not borne of communism but out of economic and social concerns. These myths were born out of two evolving situations—the deepening social and political divisions between the students after the 1973 uprising and the spread of hateful rhetoric and propaganda by rising right-wing anti-communist groups.

Thanom was replaced by Sanya Thammasak, the Thammasat university president who, in the aftermath of the uprising, promised free elections and more importantly here, a lift on political censorship (Mallet, 1978). One resulting development was the influence of Marxism on the ideology of the political left in Thailand where translations of Chairman Mao and Che Guevara could now be purchased at campus bookstores and stalls across the country. However, this does not translate into the open communist revolution that would later be described by rightist groups, and it does not give credence to the idea that students were a unified group, directed by a single political head, as Rogin (1987) described. After 1973, students could not agree on the direction of their newfound influence in the Thai Cabinet. Some bickered about becoming too radical (Heinze, 1974), whereas others thought the NSCT was not as radical as it could be. Some followed the leadership of Seksan Prasertkul, who formed the Federation of Independent Students Thailand (FIST), and still advocated the “preservation of democracy, the country’s religion, and the King” (Heinze, 1974, p. 505). In fact, communist insurgents had a difficult time recruiting students following the removal of Thanom due to political divisions between them.

By the mid-1970s, two right-wing paramilitary groups—both of which garnered the support of the military and the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC)—began to see memberships in the tens of thousands as anti-communist fervor took hold of Thailand. Nawaphon (or the ninth force) pledged their loyalty to Rama IX, who in turn backed both groups. The Red Gaur (*krathing daeng*) was largely a group of unemployed youth, vocational students, and ex-mercenaries. Their demonization and dehumanization campaigns were critical components of catalysts to the October 1976 Thammasat University massacre. Nawaphon represented a variety of Thai nationalism that Kittiwuthō found necessary to “solve all problems of government, economics, and society,” and that

anyone opposed to this philosophy or opposed to the Thai ideology should be destroyed (Keyes, 1978, p.153). He warned that it was the communists who are “beasts in human clothing,” and it is they who order people to kill one another (Keyes, 1978, p. 155). If Thailand is to protect its own ideology of religion, nation, and monarchy, Kittiwuthō argued that it is necessary to kill the communists. He continued,

Communists are not people; they are Māra, the Buddhist devil; they are an ideology, an abstraction. It is all right to kill an ideology; the Buddha taught us to do so, and he gave us the Dhamma with which to do it. If defenders of the nation, religion, and monarchy use the methods of the world to kill communists, that is all right because their intention was morally correct. (Keyes, 1978, p.155).

Kittiwuthō directed his ire at the students who were associated with the NSCT. He believed the awkward period of democratization that had occurred had propelled general unrest was a communist conspiracy and that students who had been involved in trying to reorganize Thai society into something other than a regime-directed or led by the monarchy should fervently be opposed. They were more evil than communists. The Sanya government, whose liberalization policies had uncensored socialist ideologies, should also in this line of reasoning, be opposed.

Right-wing groups demonized the student movement as evil, worms, traitors, and un-Thai (Kongkirati, 2008), the latter of which has been used in different contexts to discredit and marginalize alleged subversives. Through 1976, right-wing radio stations, mostly owned by the military, played hateful propaganda songs such *nak phaendin* (heavy on the earth) and *rok phaendin* (scum of the earth), both of which eventually were sung by school children.

After being asked if killing leftists or communists resulted in demerits, Kittiwuthō responded:

It is my view that we ought to do it. Thai, even though we are Buddhist, should do it, but it should not be regarded as killing person, because whoever harms the nation, religion and monarchy is not a whole person. That means we do not intend to kill persons but rather Mara. That is the duty of all Thai. Killing people for

the sake of the nation, religion, and monarchy is meritorious, like killing fish to make curry to put in a monk's bowl. (Selby, 2018, p.26).

The result of this demonization campaign was profound. In late September 1976, two activists distributing anti-Thanom materials were beaten and hung on a wall. Students at Thammasat University created a dramatization of the hanging in early October. However, in the heat of anti-communist, pro-monarchy fever, *Dao Siam*, a right-wing newspaper, published a photo of the hanging and identified as that of Prince Vajiralongkorn, the crown prince. With the King's approval, Army radio stations accused the student protesters of lèse-majesté and ordered the Red Gaur, Nawaphon, and the Village Scouts to "kill the communists" (Handley, 2006, p. 235). Beginning in the evening of October 5, right-wing mobs sustained brutal attacks on student protestors leaving hundreds of students killed and mutilated and thousands injured.

Thaksin as the Evil Demon

Thaksin Shinawatra rose to power in 2001, elected as part of the political party he created in 1999, the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party. TRT had benefited in large part because of Thaksin's populist response to the 1997 Asian financial crisis, which devastated local support for the ruling Democrat Party at the time. Thaksinomics, as it would soon be called, rejected the demands of the international community who had been slow to help Thailand, and pursued a course of fiscal stimulus to prop up the Thai economy until exports could recover. Thaksin, premier from 2001 to 2006, was elected on the promise of larger returns and fiscal independence from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). His TRT party won the parliamentary elections in February 2005 outright, jettisoning its former coalition partner. However, Thaksin's popularity soon began to fade amidst a weak economy, persistent corruption scandals, and a perceived failure to ease tensions in Thailand's restive southern provinces.

A political rift opened between the poor rural voters who had swept Thaksin into power and the urban middle class that got increasingly upset with his personal business dealings, namely the US\$1.9 billion sale of his telecommunications firm to a Singaporean company. One year after his reelection, an opposition

movement, the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), began a series of street demonstrations that later led to a bloodless military coup, timed while Thaksin was away at the United Nations in New York in September 2006. Royal Thai Army Commander-in-Chief Sonthi Boonyaratglin soon declared martial law and formed the Council for Democratic Reform (CDR), which later became the Council for National Security (CNS). Surayud Chulanont, a former Army commander, was named Prime Minister. By May 2007, a constitutional tribunal ruled that the TRT would be disbanded because it had allegedly violated election laws. Thaksin and 110 TRT party executives were banned from Thai politics for the next five years. Since the ban, Thailand's politics have been consumed by populist rural villagers and a mix of urban royalists, military figures, and ruling elites.

The anti-Thaksin movement defied most explanations. Some scholars, for example, Pye & Schaffar (2008) have suggested that the anti-Thaksin movement goes beyond the simple contrast between a "pro-poor, populist premier supported by the mass of the rural poor (a kind of Asian Hugo Chavez) against an urban, royalist elite" (p. 39). However, it is difficult to overlook the glaring dichotomies that have been put forward by both sides of Thailand's political conflict. The coup itself has been characterized into good and bad or good versus evil terms (Laothamatas, 1996). Among Thaksin's first critics was Sondhi Limthongkul, a disgruntled former Thaksin supporter who owned the Manager Group, a publishing company with ventures in real estate, hotels, and telecommunications. Why Sondhi turned on Thaksin is not entirely well known, but the 1997 Asian economic crisis created a situation where his finances were completely illiquid, and the state of his media empire was tenuous. Thaksin's rule was generous to Sondhi, as he was able to revive his flagging businesses with fresh injections of capital from state-owned Krung Thai Bank (Pongsudhirak, 2006; McCargo, 2009). Some political tensions erupted when Thaksin denied Sondhi the control over a television station and when Thaksin's government removed Sondhi from a popular political talk show, Thailand Weekly (*Muang Thai Rai Sapda*), which had been going out live since 2003. Critics charged that this was the government's attempt to silence Sondhi, who quickly moved to host a "mobile" talk show at Thammasat University and Lumpini Park (Nelson, 2005). Sondhi's attacks on Thaksin were later echoed

by some members of Thai civil society, Yellow elites, and some members of the Royal Thai Army, enlisting rhetoric that signaled to supporters that Thaksin aimed to topple the monarchy. The claim was that Thaksin was disrespecting Thailand's national ideology, a kind of "holy trinity" with the monarchy at its center (Pathmanand, 2008).

Among Sondhi's first attacks on Thaksin was the publication in the *Manager Daily* of a controversial sermon by Luang Ta Maha Bua, another former Thaksin loyalist, who portrayed him as a savage "clearly aiming for the presidency." He continued, "the monarch trampled, the religion trampled, the country trampled, by this savage and atrocious power in a few people in the government circle. That is the circle of ogres, of ghosts, of trolls, of demons" (Lewis, 2008, p. 129). The published rebuke by Luang Ta Maha Bua, who once began a personal crusade to revive Thailand's flailing economy in the late 1990s by encouraging Thais to donate to replenish the treasury, hit Thaksin hard ("Luangta Maha Bua," 2011). Thaksin responded by suing the publishing company for as much as 500 million baht but declined to sue Bua, whose popularity and affinity among Thai people could have caused a public backlash. Both Sondhi and Luang Ta Maha Bua claimed that Thaksin had disrespected the monarchy by holding an improper merit-making ceremony at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in April 2005, where Thaksin has usurped the power of the King to appoint an acting Supreme Patriarch. Bua, the "Forest Monk" assailed Thaksin's attempt to what he claimed was to control the clergy: "I feel Thailand is now under a dark influence. Bad people are in power and good people are being dominated. Not only ordinary people but also monks are now in trouble" ("Luangta Maha Bua," 2011, para. 8).

Red Shirts

The use of force by the state is rather prevalent in Thai society and has become a normal phenomenon, such as the increasing unrest in the three southern border provinces since 2001, Thaksin Shinawatra's war on drugs in 2003, and the ongoing political conflicts which resulted in coup d'états in 2006 and 2014. Between them and most notable of all was the violent crackdown on pro-democracy protesters, or Red Shirts in 2010 and the subsequent hunt by the Abhisit government and the military for political

opponents following the ouster of both Shinawatras from political power. An entire generation of Thais witnessed numerous incidents, where large subgroups of people have been portrayed unflatteringly, both as inhuman or in stark, dichotomous terms.

Chaiwat Satha-Anand, a political science professor and expert on peace studies once noted that,

"a condition for peaceful politics with compassion and care relies on the fight against demonology which depicts people who are different as non-people or even non-human. A variety of conditions makes the use of violence by citizens and by people in power towards people who are different possible and accepted in Thai society, especially the creation of distance between those who use violence and the victims of that violence. The result is that the people who use violence do not feel the effects of their actions on the victims. They make the victim anonymous or even non-human; victims are 'the others' and not 'good people' in society. Furthermore, the use of euphemistic language in reference to the use of violence minimizes the effects of that violence on its victims. These things make the use of violence accepted in society." (Satha-Anand, 2004, pp. 57–58).

Satha-Anand (2004, p.59) argued that demonology has worked on the aesthetic level under the reproduction of dictatorship in guiding the sensibilities and controlling public perceptions in Thai political society. This reproduction has the goal of instilling feelings of disgust towards opposing parties and normalizing hatred either with or without a prior cause or without personal experiences or interactions with those parties. Above all, when the opposing parties are portrayed as inhuman, their deaths are not worthy of the public's attention.

If the focus is on political violence in Thai society, the violence directed at the Red Shirt movement should not be overlooked. During the period between 2006 and 2014, when Thaksin-supported governments were largely democratically elected, People's Power Party (PPP), Pheu Thai Party (PTP) members and Red Shirt leaders were marginalized and victimized by anti-government protests in 2006, Bloody Songkran in 2009, and a mass crackdown on Red Shirts between April and May 2010 where 91 people were killed and

more than 1,800 wounded in violence throughout Thailand's capital city. Most of these deaths were at the hands of the military who had started a full-fledged war against them. The Government spent more than US\$100 million to control and disperse the Red Shirts by mobilizing more than 67,000 soldiers, and spend US\$23.3 million on 25,000 police officers. The total number of bullets used was 117,932, not including 2,120 sniper rifle rounds and 6,620 rubber bullets. Moreover, 1,857 protesters were incarcerated, suppressed, intimidated and prosecuted, and accused of charges ranging from normal political crimes to lèse-majesté under Article 112 of the Constitution after the coup d'état by the military in 2014 (People's Information Center, 2012).

Thailand does not often afford a political forum for the open sharing of ideas. It is a system where only "good men" can govern (McCargo, 2005, p. 501), and the order depends on the national ideology of "nation, religion and monarchy." These fundamental truths about Thailand's political system are widely known and documented; however, the nature of morality has been known to change from time to time. In the case of the Red Shirts, they have been perceived as unhealthy, dirty, and "contagious" (Winichakul, 2010) because of their instant association with Thaksin. Red Shirts are often seen as inhuman and often portrayed as animals, being called "red buffaloes" (*khwai daeng*), a derogatory term in Thailand as buffaloes are considered by some to be stupid animals (Sombatpoonsiri, 2017, p. 138).

Red Shirts have been accused of being terrorists or having endorsed the use of violence. Over time, Red Shirts received contradictory labels. In 2010, a majority of Pheu Thai-linked individuals were accused of organizing to overthrow the monarchy, with Army spokesman Col. Sansern of the Center for the Resolution of Emergency Situation (CRES) producing a chart aiming to discredit them. As confirmation of their aim to overthrow the institutions in the country, Kraisak Choonhavan, an ex-member of Parliament for the Democrat Party, once said, "the Red Shirts are Thaksin loyalists [as opposed to royalists]. They are a group of extremists, socialists, republicans, leftist academics, and somehow they are difficult to get through to" ("Considering the Red-Yellow in Sociological Views," 2010, par. 5). Kamnoon Sidhisamarn, an appointed ex-senate member, said that "they are overconfident capitalists and bad tempered communists who join to

reduce the role of the monarchy and create a new Thai state" (Sidhisamarn, 2007, p.2).

In March 2010, the Red Shirts marched to the Government House and the residence of then Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, collected blood from the more than 100,000 protesters that had gathered there "and [soaked] the Prime Minister's Office" (Cohen, 2012, p. 221). Although some called the symbolic act a gesture of patriotism, the anti-Thaksin antagonists criticized the blood protest as being dirty and unhygienic, partly because some medical associations warned that the spilling of blood could be considered a health hazard, as well as a waste of donatable, potentially life-saving blood. In the days surrounding the protests, there were rumors that the collected blood was mixed with water, that human blood had been mixed with pig blood, and that some of the blood was infected with HIV or various forms of hepatitis. Criticisms were leveled at protestors, including from Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban, who remarked that the blood spilling would give the impression that "the world sees some people in Thailand as believers in black magic and as uncivilised" (Cohen, 2012, p. 227). Some suggested that the rituals performed by a Brahminic priest were illegitimate and that the ceremonial rites were Khmer sorcery rituals and black magic. Pichet Punvichartkul, former Democrat Party Deputy Finance Minister, said that the Red Shirt protesters were "demonic animals that burn the city, burn city hall and pour human blood mixed with animal blood in front of the Democrat Party building and Government House. They shoot and assault soldiers and the royal institutions" ("Reconciliation Fierce," 2012). A member of the Mahidol Brotherhood, a royalist association of healthcare professionals, also insisted that some of the blood came from pigs (Cohen, 2012, p. 226).

In May of 2010, Red Shirts were hunted down and depicted as institutionalized demons through the use of photographs, television, textbooks, and right-wing mass media, which claimed that their deaths would be justified because they had promoted violence and attempted to overthrow the monarchy. Red Shirts were ostensibly silenced through the use of government surveillance and numerous threats. Parts of the state considered themselves to be vigilantes who judged, cursed, and aimed to keep the pro-democratic proponents out of the political arena. After the suppression of protesters, many news articles stated

that different hospitals in several provinces did not treat Red Shirt villagers (“Lampang Red-shirts Protest against Medical Treatment,” 2012). Recently, a hyper-royalist doctor and the director at Mongkutwattana General Hospital announced, “We do not treat buffalo in the form of people” (“We Do Not Treat Buffalo in the Form of People,” 2018). Some had suggested that the Red Shirt protests were an invasion of Bangkok, a city that was a class above them. Others suggested that the arrival of the Red Shirts and their demand for democracy clashed with the beliefs of the Thai elite. Therefore, as some have noted (Eoseewong, 2011; Winchakul, 2010), their deaths were less memorable than the remains of destroyed buildings, they had become “germs, [invading] the moral political body that has been represented by the urban elite throughout Thai history” (Winchakul, 2010, para. 22).

The Red Shirts and their grievances were clearly the subjects of irony when, after the 2010 massacre, Doctor Tul Sittiomwong, one of Yellow Shirt leaders, addressed the demonstrators when they were lining up to go back home. Doctor Tul looked down on them, and diagnosed them as having germs that they should take back to their rural homes and never bring back to disturb the daily life of Bangkokians again (Sripokangkul, 2015). In summary, the Red Shirt’s quest for democracy, demand for the government to dissolve parliament because the government had come to power illegitimately, as well as insisting on being treated humanely based on one person, one vote to determine their own fate in politics, had a very high price to pay.

After the May 2010 crackdown, the compensation for Red Shirt victims was both meager and inconsistent. Phayao Akhad, the mother of volunteer medic Kamonked Akhad who was shot dead at Pathum Wanaram temple, noted the disparity in compensation. After an investigation of the names of those killed or injured, some people received only 200 baht (\$6) in compensation, whereas families of those killed received up to 100,000 baht (\$3,000) (“Victim Gets Compensation Only 200 baht,” 2011). After a change in political leadership in July of 2011 under Yingluck Shinawatra, adjustments were made to the government’s compensation policy, where more than 7 million baht in financial assistance (\$250,000) was given to the families of those killed. However, this policy drew criticism from Yellow Shirt and Democrat Party leaders. Vorakorn Chatikavanij, the wife of

Korn Chatikavanij and former deputy leader of the Democrat Party, said that Red Shirts had discovered “a new kind of business with good profits... the business of demanding democracy” (“Vorakorn Chatikavanij Views toward the Compensation Policy,” 2012). Vorakorn claimed that “whoever did not die or get injured has another way: pretend to be crazy and let relatives ask for money” (“Vorakorn Chatikavanij Views toward the Compensation Policy,” 2012). Furthermore, those who had dishonored the dead should pay compensation on their own: “If you feel bad that you stepped on dead bodies, just pay [your] own money to them” (“Vorakorn Chatikavanij Views toward the Compensation Policy,” 2012). General Somjet Boonthanom, an appointed ex-senate member, said:

Just like the 7.75 million baht being regarded as compensation, from another perspective it is life insurance because 7.75 million is a lot when some people cannot even accumulate 1 million baht. There are people who willingly cause people to get wounded or die. Some hired hit men to kill others for as little as 30,000 baht and received the death penalty. In this case people were hired to cause violent incidents and the life insurance is 7.75 million baht. This is a very interesting amount. (“Interview with General Somjet Boonthanom,” 2012, p.4).

The Yingluck Era

The reproduction of demonology continued intensely with the protests of the People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), also known as the People’s Committee for Absolute Democracy with the King as Head of State (PCAD). The PDRC was composed mainly of the Yellow Shirts, upper middle class and conservatives. They showered widespread scornful mockery and distrust towards proponents of democracy. Even though they accepted conditions for dissolving parliament and new elections, the network of the upper middle class in cooperation with the PDRC threatened those who had intended to vote. Damning and vile words were abundant on PDRC podiums, for example: “Three hundred thousand votes in Bangkok are worth more than 15 million worthless votes upcountry” (Chanruang, 2013). Chitpas Kridakorn, whose family owns Boonrawd Brewery Co. Ltd., the maker of Singha Beer in Thailand and PCAD leader,

said during the protests: “We have to fight and to reform until it is clear that not everyone should have an equal vote; evil people should not have the same vote as good people and stupid people should not have an equal vote as smart people” (“Chula Students Oppose Tun to be the Leader in Graduation Day,” 2014).

At a PDRC anti-government protest in January 2014, a renowned doctor and lecturer at Songkhlanakharin University Faculty of Medicine, Assistant Professor Prasert Wasinanukorn, verbally attacked Yingluck on the main PDRC stage with highly-charged misogynistic sexual references. Translated from Thai, Dr. Prasert recommended four things for Yingluck:

1. If Yingluck resigns from her position as a Prime Minister, all Thais might award her a medal with her naked picture on it.
2. If Yingluck is expecting a baby, please listen carefully, I will send her an ox-cart to pick her up to give birth in Hat Yai (a province in the south of the country). I will also do virginal repair surgery for her as a giveaway. I guarantee that her next husband will definitely give her a thumbs-up.
3. It’s not too late for Yingluck to resign from her position as Prime Minister because she’s not too old to be a nude model and she hasn’t stopped having her menstrual periods.
4. If no one really wants Yingluck, I am willing to be her servant. I will buy and change her sanitary napkins forever. (Lgbtdemocracy, 2014, par. 5-8).

According to Harrison (2017), Prasert’s wishes to intrude into Yingluck’s private physical spaces exemplify a near-obsession with controlling and defiling the sexualized female body deemed to have betrayed the national, communal, or familial good. The speech comes from a position of power as a doctor over the patient but also a “position of imagined ‘moral’ authority as a restorer of ‘good’ forces over the ‘bad’” (Harrison, 2017, p.70). Similarly, another lecturer in political science makes similar sexual innuendos at Yingluck’s expense.

...Today it is said that Dr. Seri and Pong [PCAD leaders] went to the home of Yingluck. I told them last night that if they go there to chase her away Pong and Dr. Seri can go, but if we

want to send someone to have sex with her, she would be welcome if that guy is me. Next round, we should choose only the handsome young boys to have sex with her. Surely, she will not disappear. Believe me, I think myself may be one of many top guys, therefore I would like to have sex with her in devotion to the nation. (Freedom Thailand, 2014, 6:00:7:58).

The same lecturer scolded the people of the Northeast for wanting to have a high-speed railway, a part of the Yingluck Government policy:

... I went to one province in the northeast and met with someone who was wearing a red shirt. I did not ask for her name, but she told me that she needs to have a high speed railway. The old lady asked to sit in this train once in her life before she dies. This gave me an idea. I can pay for her to take a high speed train elsewhere and please go to die after that. Take the train and then go die. (Harumigi, 2014, 0.29:1.06).

Demonology and the 2014 Coup D’État

The 2014 coup d’état by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), which was led by Royal Thai Army General Prayuth Chan-Ocha, became the 13th coup since Thailand became a parliamentary democracy with the monarchy as head of state. The military takeover was carried out with strategic care to eliminate the Shinawatras from politics, crack down on democratic supporters, and discredit electoral politics as a source of corruption and dirty politics (Chachavalpongpun, 2014, p. 176). After the coup d’état, the government relied on martial law to stop the people from gathering in public in numbers exceeding five people. People were called in for “attitude adjustment” and had to sign agreements not to get involved in politics or else they would be prosecuted and their financial assets frozen. Similarly, if they wanted to travel abroad, they had to ask for permission. Opponents were incarcerated, the freedom of academics and the mass media were restricted. Furthermore, a larger number of websites were closed down than in China (Sopranzetti, 2016). The population was forced into a state of self-censorship.

According to data from the Internet Law Reform Dialogue (iLaw, 2016), a Thai human rights NGO,

at the end of June 2015, at least 772 people had been ordered to report for an attitude adjustment. There were many instances where those who were called in were abused or physically tortured, and the NCPO had a team of psychologists who systematically mentally tortured them (iLaw, 2016). Of the people who were called, 475 were imprisoned for various reasons and another 209 who were jailed for peaceful protests. The military courts and 46 in civil courts prosecuted 143 people. Another 51 people were put on trial for Article 112 violations (iLaw, 2015). After the coup d'état until 2017, at least 2,408 people had appeared in military court charged with 1,886 offenses. The predominant charges were Article 112 violations (*lèse-majesté*) (United States Department of State, 2018, p. 10). Four years after the coup, on May 22, 2018, the NCPO had prosecuted 640 people which can be divided into 131 sentences for Article 112 violations, 78 accusations of provocation under Penal Code Article 116, 41 people were charged with violations of the constitution referendum, and another 390 people were sentenced for violating the orders of the NCPO which forbid political gatherings ("4 years since coup: Stability, prosperity and sustainability for whom?," 2018).

A number of the abovementioned groups were students who have been persecuted for criticism through posts and sharing messages on Facebook or communicating in private chat rooms. Moreover, areas within universities, journalism clubs, and bookstores are being watched closely by security officers (Soprancetti, 2016). A number of politically-active academics and activists have fled the country. Although some were not political fugitives, a number of men and women chose to emigrate to find a better future and escape a climate of fear under the military government (Wongsmuth, 2016). The authorities viewed those holding democratic ideologies with hatred, disgust, and suspicion. The areas which were most under surveillance by a large number of security officers who followed every movement were the North and the Northeast regions, which are the home areas of the majority of Thai voters and the Red Shirts (Chachavalpongpun, 2014, p.173). After the coup d'état, these regions were the subject of repeated harassment when the army stepped in to close down and remove anti-coup and pro-democracy signs in 15,000 to 20,000 villages, or about 20% of all villages in the country (Sitthi, 2017). Thailand has been intensely centralized, and pro-democracy groups

who created their own village signs were labeled as separatists. Many symbols like red t-shirts, red scarfs, red flags, red bathing bowls, as well as books and magazines which had pictures of Thaksin and Yingluck Shinawatra or other Red Shirt leaders and photographs related to Red Shirt protests were seen as dangerous. These symbols were burned, destroyed, or confiscated (Sripokangkul, 2015, p.125), if the villagers had not hidden them well (Presser & Drahmoune, 2014).

There were many threatening stories from villages. For example, one village in Khon Kaen (in the northeast region) was raided by soldiers at night and confiscated everything they regarded to be potential weapons. These items included gardening tools, kitchen knives, and even fuel. Such stories were not widely publicized because there were limited communication channels. The local radio stations, which were once the main source of news, were closed down all over the country after the coup d'état (Presser & Drahmoune, 2014). More tellingly, one Red Shirt leader in the northeast area said that he was embarrassed that he was held, intimidated, his home searched, and some of his belongings were confiscated. Red Shirt members were forced to shut down their villages and red flags were burnt. Another leader of local Red Shirts was held in a secret location; even he did not know where he was held captive or when he would be released (The Isaan Record, 2014). This also occurred with another provincial political activist whose family was threatened if he did not end his political activities (Sitthi, 2017). Similarly, villagers were forbidden from wearing red shirts because it was regarded as a betrayal of the nation and the monarchy (Sitthi, 2017). It is strange that interviews with villagers in the province of Khon Kaen by the author revealed that even villagers who hung red shirts outside their homes out of a superstitious belief to protect themselves against a ghost widow had to ask for permission from the military who would come to investigate if these villagers had political motivations.

Another instance of the systematic demonization of the Red Shirts is the case of the "Khon Kaen Model." One day after the coup d'état, military officers arrested 22 people at the Chaiyapreuk Hotel in Khon Kaen in the north of Thailand. During the time of their arrest, the Royal Thai Army told reporters that the suspects had been planning a "large scale attack" within the city. Those arrested were allegedly holding a meeting to plan terrorist activities. At a police press conference,

the alleged rebel plot had four stages: mobilize as many people as possible, negotiate with the authorities to have them disarmed, negotiate with the military, and finally, overthrow financial institutions to give money to the poor. Police alleged that if the Khon Kaen Model were successful, other provinces would follow (“Military Court Jurisdiction questioned over alleged red-shirt ‘Khon Kaen Model’ rebellion,” 2014). The Thai military court eventually indicted 26 people for their alleged plot, which also included charges of weapon possession and conspiracy to commit terrorism. The 26 individuals, who ranged in age between 40 and 70 years of age, were held and imprisoned until February 2015, when they agreed to not take part in any political activities (iLaw, 2014). During captivity, however, they were not able to contact their families.

The narrative painted by the Army has been that it has tried to quell fears of a violent uprising in the North of Thailand by militant Red Shirts, a fear shared by conservatives and elites in Thai society. By demonizing the Red Shirts and linking the pro-democracy movement to a countersubversive movement to undermine the coup makers, the military government effectively silences activists in the North and solidified support through right-wing anxieties. Sitthi (2017) argued that in the suppression of Red Shirts, the military used tactics of repression, targeting certain groups and individuals to create a demonstration effect in an attempt to dismantle solidarity among villagers and mobilization networks (p. 10). The military was effectively using the Khon Kaen Model to solidify support for the junta among the public at the expense of the Red Shirt identities who, as countersubversives, are now connected to acts of suspected terrorism.

The contrasting narrative to which the military officers and government supporters never listened was that this meeting (later found out to be on agribusiness) had been planned for a long time and that the attendees were predominantly strangers to each other, as well as either not being affiliated with the Red Shirts or from Khon Kaen. Still, some claimed that the soldiers, after arresting the 26 victims, found illegal weapons including bullets and bombs, a claim all of them subsequently denied. The Khon Kaen 26, as they have been called, described their time in captivity as hellish because of the dirty, inhumane, and overcrowded state of Thai prisons. Upon their release, they said that they had only their bodies left, their spirits having been broken. People who came to visit them while they were

detained or volunteered to take care of them were also interrogated and followed by army personnel (Sitthi, 2017).

Similar practices took place in other rural provinces where numerous students and political activists in Bangkok were threatened and intimidated and shadowed even around their homes. The names and details of citizens of any profession, if ever involved in political movements, were stored in a military database. Such is the case of Yai, a taxi driver in Bangkok who was once a political activist for a pro-democracy group. Yai claimed that his family was like any of the countless families who fell victim to these tactics. His house was ransacked by the military several times, mostly when his wife was at home alone; their son’s teacher was interrogated about the family for prolonged periods (Sopranzetti, 2017, p. 233).

Surveillance set up against the political opposition has been strong and systematic after the coup d’état. The power of the Army has been expanded to cover several internal affairs, among which are the investigation of suspicious individuals and events, mobilization of the mass media, and activities to build reconciliation in villages countrywide through an apparatus called the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC). This organization employs psychological activities with villagers similar to those employed to fight Communists in the 1970s. ISOC organized a total of 173,073 projects for reconciliation in different villages. Under these projects, 9,151,850 people have been mobilized (Prime Minister’s Office, 2014). A project called “One Thai, One Heart Project” which was held in all districts around the country aimed at instilling harmony under the royalist-nationalist ideology under the assumption that large numbers of people in the North and Northeast regions did not love the Thai monarchy. The ISOC organized these projects to urge the people to realize the work of the late monarch.

ISOC’s role included acting as a promoter of the government’s ideologies in 81,084 villages and communities under the “Thai-ism project” in 2018 (“Direct Online on Thai-ism,” 2018). Investigations were also carried out by cyber specialists to look into cases which the government thought were online threats, especially when people clicked “like” or “share” on Facebook or visited Facebook accounts which the government deemed illegal for humiliating the institution of the monarchy (“Government announces plans to create ‘Cyber Warriors’”, 2018).

In fact, the creation of the government's reconciliation program for the past couple of years reflected it to be merely interested in surveillance, threatening, and silencing protesters, detaining and inflicting violations of human rights, and erasing memories of the Red Shirts and their fight for democracy in the country. This was done through royalist-nationalist ideologies aiming to crush the dissidents (Sripokangkul, 2015, p. 125). In reality, routine surveillance and attacks on those who have different opinions toward the monarchy have occurred repeatedly in the past decade, particularly in the case of opposition to Khana Nitirat (Enlightened Jurists), a group of seven progressive law lecturers at Thammasat University. The academics presented a revision of Article 112 in order to prevent people from taking advantage of the monarchy for political purposes and ensure sustainability of the monarchy as an institution in the long term. Consequently, they were recipients of verbal insults and abuse from the media and right-wing groups which called for the lecturers to be demoted to a lower status, said they were less than human and that they should be beaten. Reactions included: "Soldiers should make the members of the Khana Nitirat disappear by throwing them from helicopters," "the members of the Khana Nitirat and their families should be chained and burned alive in front of their houses," and "the members of the Khana Nitirat should be beheaded and their heads put on stakes outside the front of the entrance to Thammasat University" (Haberhorn, 2016, pp. 234–235). The climax of this demonization occurred in February 2012 at Thammasat University when a pair of male twins who proclaimed themselves as vigilantes punched Professor Worachet Pakeerut, the leader of the Khana Nitirat, several times in the face.

There were regular calls for anyone accused of disloyalty to be chased out of the country. The ultra-royalist Rubbish Collection Organization (RCO) carried out surveillance and published names, addresses, and telephone numbers of people accused of perceived disloyalty. RCO regularly mobilized others to harm such people. After the death of King Bhumibol, a systematic witch-hunt began to investigate those who did not mourn or did not wear black clothes. They were directly labeled as devils. During this time, numerous people were reported to have been charged under Article 112 (Haberhorn, 2017). A similar trend was seen during the coronation of King Rama X. In the past, Thai society had admired a group of young students

from Khon Kaen University called Dao Din after they helped villagers to protect natural resources from being destroyed by capitalists. However, following the coup d'état they were painted as a dangerous threat when they stood up and made a three-finger salute as a symbol of opposition to the coup d'état. One of the members of the Dao Din students, Jatupat Boonpattanaraksa, was jailed under Article 112 for sharing on Facebook a BBC Thailand news biography of the new king. He was the only one of 2,600 people who shared the item that was prosecuted. These individuals were labeled as the worst and not Thai. The military government organized many rituals to promote loyalty to King Rama IX and his Sufficiency Economy philosophy, with massive numbers of people mobilized to join in prayer ceremony sessions and holy water drinking ceremonies, as well as pledging their loyalty to the ideology of the nation, religion, and the monarchy. As soon as these rituals were completed, it was believed that goodness would soon follow. However, their good deeds have gone in the wink of an eye because they are regarded as slaves to Western democracy and do not understand Thainess. It cannot be denied that the "industry of goodness" has produced a plethora of beliefs. Anyone can be redeemed and be whitewashed as a good citizen if he or she supports the state ideology and is forbidden from expressing that their political views oppose conservatism. In a sense, goodness has been made synonymous with political principles.

Conclusion

This essay has documented several instances of demonology by countersubversives (the state and supporters of the state) in Thailand. Through vignettes, we have shown a pattern of direct and structural violence launched at suspected subversives, through misinformation campaigns, protests, targeted violence, and repression tactics. Many examples of this phenomenon that have been woven into this article showed that demonology of opposing parties to accommodate the use of violence is often widespread. Thai political society is redolent with the dehumanization of opposing groups of people, which results in harm to the other party often without the protection of the legal system. This is prevalent in Thai political society because when the thing that they harm is perceived to be a demon, their actions are seen as just. Demons and animals are convenient

scapegoats for those opposed to democracy. Students at Thammasat University can be labeled as Communists and worse; whereas Thaksin was portrayed as Satan, intent on destroying Thai-style democracy (Nelson, 2006). Red Shirts are reduced to the lowest of animals and ogres. Demonization is a durable form of repression and social control in Thai society that has remained unchanged from the Thanom era.

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