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Writing Rights into Thailand's History with Photography

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บทคัดย่อ

ภาพถ่ายเป็นสื่อกลางที่ได้รับการยอมรับในการเผยแพร่ข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับความโหดร้ายและสร้างความตระหนักรู้เกี่ยวกับประเด็นด้านสิทธิมนุษยชน ตัวแสดงทางการเมืองและขบวนการเคลื่อนไหวทางสังคมยังใช้ภาพถ่ายในการสร้างภาพลักษณ์และจุดมุ่งหมายของตนอย่างแพร่หลายอีกด้วย ศักยภาพทางการเมืองของภาพถ่ายเชื่อมโยงอย่างใกล้ชิดกับบทบาทของการมองเห็นในที่สาธารณะ ภาษาของภาพถ่ายเป็นภาษาเชิงสัญลักษณ์และภาษาเชิงข้อเท็จจริงในเวลาเดียวกัน ทำให้ภาพถ่ายกลายเป็นวัตถุพยานที่สร้างปัญหาสำหรับการศึกษาประวัติศาสตร์ นอกจากนี้ ภาพถ่ายยังเป็นได้ทั้งพื้นที่ของความทรงจำส่วนตัวและความทรงจำสาธารณะ เนื่องจากความหมายของภาพถ่ายขึ้นอยู่กับการตีความของผู้ชม หาได้ขึ้นอยู่กับเจตนาของผู้ถ่าย สิ่งที่ถูกถ่าย หรือผู้เผยแพร่ภาพถ่ายเหล่านั้นไม่ สื่อทัศน์ทำให้ผู้ชมสามารถเข้าถึงเวลาและสถานที่ที่แตกต่างกันได้อย่างรวดเร็ว ทั้งยังสร้างความเป็นไปได้ในการเชื่อมต่อกับเหตุการณ์ต่างๆ ที่อาจขาดหายไปในบันทึกประวัติศาสตร์ โวหารทางสายตา อาทิ บทบาททางเพศสภาพ คู่ตรงข้ามระหว่างตัวเอกกับผู้ร้าย และสำนึกที่ผู้คนมีร่วมกัน ทำให้ภาพถ่ายกลายเป็นส่วนประกอบสำคัญในการสร้างประวัติศาสตร์ที่ครอบคลุม

บทความชิ้นนี้ศึกษาการใช้ภาพถ่ายจากเหตุการณ์ทางการเมืองต่างๆ ในประวัติศาสตร์ไทยในการเขียนประวัติศาสตร์ภายใต้กรอบสิทธิมนุษยชน บทความเริ่มต้นจากช่วงกลางทศวรรษ 2510 เมื่อขบวนการเคลื่อนไหวทางสังคมในการเมืองระดับกว้างในประเทศไทยหันมาใช้ภาษาด้านสิทธิมนุษยชน รวมถึงเริ่มใช้ประโยชน์จากภาพถ่ายในการเขียนประวัติศาสตร์ของตนเองในขอบเขตที่กว้างขวางกว่าแต่ก่อน

คำสำคัญ: ภาพถ่าย, สิทธิมนุษยชน, ประเทศไทย, ขบวนการเคลื่อนไหวทางสังคม, ความทรงจำ

Abstract

Photography is a recognized medium to spread information about atrocities and to raise awareness about human rights issues. Photography is also widely used by political actors and social movements to construct an image of themselves and their causes. The political potential of photography is closely connected to the role of the visual in the public. The language of photography is at the same time symbolic and factual, making it a problematic material in the study of history. Photography can further be sites of both personal and collective memory, with the image belonging to the spectators and never only to the intent of the photographer, the photographed or the disseminator of images. The visual media gives the spectator a sense of immediate access to different times and spaces, opening up for the possibility to connect events that in written history might be disconnected. Visual tropes, such as gendered roles, dichotomy of enemy and heroes, and collective belonging, make photography a brick in the construction of comprehensive histories. This is a study of how photography from different political events in Thailand's history is used in writing history within a human rights paradigm. The study begins in early 1970s when social movements on a broad political scale in Thailand adopted the language of human rights and also began to use photography to a larger extent than before in writing their own history.

Keywords: Photography, Human Rights, Thailand, Social Movements, Memory

1. Introduction

"[P]hotography offers a bridge between history and memory. And a very problematic bridge it is."[1]

Opening the October-December 2004 issue of Fa Diaw Kan there is a foldout of four full paper sized spreads with black and white photographs of similar composition. The only captions are dates below each photograph: October 1976, May 1992, October 2003, and October 2004. The photographs show masses of men stripped to their waists lying down on the ground closely packed, some partly on top of each other, surrounded by soldiers with guns. Though we can see the photographs are shot in different places the soldiers and environment define the space as the Thai nation-state. Separated in time the captured events of state violence are connected in the composition. It suggests that the events should be understood in connection, perhaps even as a continuity of state violence in Thailand. A question mark follows on an otherwise empty page. Is the question pointing towards the future – after 2004, what then? The composition gives us a hint about what Thai history the

[1] Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT,: Yale University Press, 2006), 79.

expected readers are familiar with, making the implications of the question mark manifest. It suggests a continuity in the relationship between people and the state, manifested through oppressive violence. The magazine's political stance and focus on people's movements in both Thailand and around the world, suggests that the answer to the question mark lies with the people. A history of the people is also a history of state regimes, but the state is not the only agent.

This paper explores how photography can be used to narrate political events in Thailand's history since beginning of 1970s until today.[2] This is a study of photography as sites of memory – publications, museums, and memorials – produced by political organizations, unions and scholars that assert alternative anti-hegemonic understandings of national history in Thailand. The producers of these sites of memory are not a politically or socially homogenous group. What they share, however, are narratives about oppression, resistance against state violence, and struggles for freedom and equity. Moreover, their use of photography is linked to a both explicit and implicit human rights discourse.

[2] It was born out of a study about the photographic reproduction of 14 October 1973 and 6 October 1976 found in magazines, newspapers, bulletins, and scholarly work. When tracing photographs I came across publications in which photographs from the 14 and 6 October events were combined with photographs from other political events.

The photographs of concern here are mainly produced after 1970. In some publications there are photographs dating back to the 1930s though they are published in connection with photographs of more contemporary date. These photographs are part of a bigger move towards writing a people's history – one that takes aim against a national history focusing on harmony and progress of the Thai state. In this context the photographs are used as part of creating counter-history, one that aims at revealing disharmony and political contestations in Thailand. In the 1970s there was a global political turn towards human rights, and for the socialist movements human rights became a possible language for an emancipatory quest.[3] In Thailand this shows in the language of the strengthened labour movement, the rhetoric of the Communist Party, students' engagement in national issues and the mutual interests for democratic rule bridging a gap between socialists and liberals. How can we read photography from this time on as part of a narrative of rights?

[3] Claude Lefort, "Politics and Human Rights," in *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), 240-241. While Samuel Moyn writes that Asia belonged to a periphery of this human rights turn, Jan Eckel proposes that Asia is "under-researched in the global story". Human rights was a language first adopted by social movements and later by Asian states. Eckel, Jan and Moyn, Samuel, *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s* (Pennsylvania Studies in Human Rights: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania : University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 2, 6, 11, 238.

Human rights are here defined through a political practice, a turn towards framing political participation and social equality in the notion of having or being entitled to human rights. I will first outline how I understand narrative and memory. Then I explore a few places for memory production and the most common tropes I have found in the photographic material, to which narratives are attached. I am not claiming this to be an exhaustive study of photography produced in opposition to governing regimes in Thailand. It is rather a suggestion of how to study photography within the paradigm of human rights.

Photography cannot be reduced to technical aspects, to the photographer's intent or any other person involved.[4] The space for photography is, following Ariella Azoulay (2008), a civil space – a space for relationships between the governed, in which neither of the participants in the photographic act (the photographer, those portrayed, spectators, and disseminators) directs the meaning of the photograph. This further suggests it invalid to determine the significance of photography based in either its value for a political cause, or for its aesthetic attributes. First of all, all imagery belongs to an ontology of the aesthetic[5]

[4] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 85-86.

[5] Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*, trans., Louise Bethlehem (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Verso, 2012), 55.

and second, an assertion such as "this is political photography" prompts a definition of the political as something that is beyond relational: If the content is claimed to be political, then to whom is it political (the spectator or the author) and is it understood as political in all times and spaces? The intent of the author or the spectator's interpretation is not in themselves enough and the political potential of photographic content is bound to a particular time and space. I would like to argue along the lines of Azoulay that the photograph in itself can only be political as far as "people make it exist among themselves, in plurality, in public".[6] Then, what is the public where photography is made political? In Judith Butler's words "[t]he public sphere is constituted in part of what cannot be said and what cannot be shown."[7] Because of the power of the visual in public photography is potentially political – showing what cannot be shown and not owned by anyone.

2. Memory in Photography

Photography in its most basic form is a frame capturing a moment in time. We readily expect photography to convey moments of events, if not events in their entirety and complexity.

[6] Ibid., 54.

[7] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life the Power of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso Books, 2004), xvii.

A photographic frame can be complex enough to draw history from and interpret meaning. Imagery aids the reader to take a leap through history, connecting and disconnecting events and time, without the reader having to be present at the moments themselves or even informed about the context of the events.

When it is published, reproduced, cropped and put in different compositions the photograph becomes an integral part of imagery representing history, creating narratives, engaging in memory. With the dissemination of photographs – shot by bystanders or agents of violence, sometimes by victims – what could have stayed in the private realm enters the common and sometimes becomes part of collective memories of events. Though there are some iconic images in world history that we are familiarised with through their strong composition, I would argue that what determines which photographs that get stuck in the collective depends more on dissemination than on aesthetics in composition. Sontag argues that collective memory is not about remembrance but the stipulation "that *this* is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds."[8] Further Sontag explains the political function of photographic imagery in memory: "Ideologies create substantiating archives of images,

[8] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 86.

representative images, which encapsulate common ideas of significance and trigger predictable thoughts, feelings."[9] I would like to argue that ideology does not necessarily precede the production of imagery. Through reproduction however, images can lock *a* story in our minds, one of many possible, about how something happened and why it should be remembered. Jay Winter stresses that the politics involved in the practice of remembrance, positions groups against each other's narratives of the past.[10] Winter describes collective memory as "the practices of remembrance of different collectives… to interpret the past… These collectives contest narratives about the past."[11] Photographic imagery is an important part of this practice of remembering. In a study of royal photography in Thailand, Sarun Krittikarn makes the claim that "the creation of memory […] has been increasingly regulated by visualization and the desire to gaze."[12] This type of memory does not belong only with the individual who partook in an event, but is also shaped by the spectators of photography. Sudarat Musikawong has made similar claims of how memories of Thailand's 1970s

[9] Ibid.

[10] Winter (2006), 276f., 286f.

[11] Ibid., 276.

[12] Sarun Krittikarn, "Entertainment Nationalism," in *Saying the Unsayable: Monarchy and Democracy in Thailand*, ed. Lotte Isager and Søren Ivarsson (Copenhagen: NIAS, 2010), 61.

have been shaped and reshaped through cultural practices.[13]

Photography cannot belong to anyone, not even the author or the people figuring in a photograph. A photograph cannot be owned by ideology either. The meaning belongs equally to disseminators as to spectators; and it becomes common goods as soon as it has been publicly displayed. The public realm for photography is not restricted to printed material or the Internet. It can also be integrated in imagery of events remembered through physical places, such as statues and monuments.

3. Places as Sites of Memory

To start with it must be admitted that this study is Bangkok centred. The events referred to through the photographs studied are largely Bangkok based; and though there are exceptions the publication and dissemination of the photographs, the places for display and repositories are predominantly located in Bangkok. Some of the photographic imagery has been disseminated through memorials and statues. These places can have a democratizing function: Physical space

[13] Sudarat Musikawong, 'Mediating Memories of the 1970s in Thai Cultural Production,' Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (University of California, 2006).

is necessary for the freedom of assembly, a sister right to free speech,[14] but these places are also physical manifestations of a struggle for freedom against oppression and they contribute to making the plurality of historical narratives public.[15]

I here adopt Pierre Nora's *lieux de memoire* (sites of memory) in an attempt to explain why memory, however controversial the term is to historians, seems inescapable. To Nora memory is something that "takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects…" Memory is "open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation."[16] As Nora and others have noted, while memory and history are not the one and same, they are not completely oppositional either. Openness to histories in the plural and pragmatic sense makes us aware that history is a political project. Memory is a space for particular parts of histories,

[14] Don Mitchell, "The Liberalization of Free Speech: Or, How Protest in Public Space is Silenced," in *Spaces of Contention: Spatialities and Social Movements*, ed. Walter Nicholls, Justin Beaumont, and Byron Miller (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 49.

[15] Musikawong writes that the memorials gave "an abstract social movement physicality," which opened up for a public debate., Musikawong, 'Mediating Memories of the 1970s in Thai Cultural Production', 293.

[16] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire," *Representations* 26, no. 26 (1989): 8-9.

remembered individually and collectively. Memorials are the sites of memory making remembrance and commemoration a public act, mediating the private memory. While memorials do not have to contain imagery, in Thailand they tend to be concrete depictions of humans, things, deities and events.[17]

The physical aspect of memorials and museums as sites of memory, help us to understand the limitation of thinking imagery and memory in opposition, or alternative to, a Thai state version of historical events. It is part of the nationalist project to write its own history, to consolidate its heritage and the control of physical space, place and territory, is a key feature of the nation-state's power. States' interest in commissioning public statues is part of this national construction. The struggle to construct sites of memory with an aim of remembering events different from an official historiography is thus highly political in two senses: First, the immediate control of the meaning of a place is democratized. It is not privatized and it does not belong solely to state authorities, it belongs to those who brings it into being and who use it. Second, with the public

[17] The use of human images for statues and not only the Buddha or deities is a phenomenon that belongs to 20th century Thailand and especially took off in the 1980s. Grant Evans, "Immobile Memories: Statues in Thailand and Laos," in *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory: Modernity and Identity in Thailand and Laos*, ed. Charles Keyes and Shigeharu Tanabe (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002), 157-158.

presence, remembrance of the event for which a memorial is built can no longer be controlled by any one power. However, we must not forget that the places are not given and all land is to some degree regulated by the state. State agencies also maintain the prerogative of upholding "order" of any place within its jurisdiction. People who fight for a physical site of memory must do it in some kind of negotiation with these authoritative powers. Whether the site is acquired through protest, through cohesion or it is given – its ultimate function is granted through some form of state power. To regulate what can be said and done at the site the state has many more tools than direct legal restriction of speech and assembly. Public places can be privatized, and the state can create zones for demonstrations, indirectly infringing on possibilities to voice dissent.[18]

Though Pierre Nora focuses primarily on how nation-states create sites of memory for the cause of writing its own history, the principal assertion – that creating repositories is a political act – can be applied to other institutions as well. In the back streets of the central Bangkok district Makkasan, just next to the railroad, a small red building inhabits the Thai Labour Museum. An independent museum opened in 1993 with the mission of trying to save a history that the labour movement thought had been overlooked by the political

[18] Mitchell, 52, 59.

elites of Thailand.[19] The objective of the museum is to write labour history into a narrative of struggle against capitalism and dictatorship: "…every time dictatorship emerges, the destruction of labour unity always follows."[20] Photographs of labourers are used to illustrate the events of 14 October 1973 and 6 October 1976, despite the otherwise student dominated records of the events. In the museum the October events are written into a short history of growing labour organization and subsequent crackdowns in the years 1973-1976, illustrated with a group of women in civilian clothes with raised fists.

The 14 October memorial on Ratchadamnoen Klang was built after more than two decades of pressure on the Bangkok administration. The main hall is made up of an exhibition guiding the visitor step by step through the final days leading up to 14 October, with a photograph illustrating each day described. Framing the exhibition are walls made up from photograph posters. It is a direct way of writing history. The photographs are both illustrations to text and carry a narrative in their composition. The group behind the memorial has been very active in publicising and disseminating photography from the event and related to it. Another place in the same style is

[19] Thai Labour Museum / About: thailabourmuseum.org (accessed May 28, 2015).

[20] Poster in the Thai Labour Museum [visited January 13, 2013]

the Pridi Banomyong Institute, an active disseminator of the narrative of Pridi Banomyong. The institute is both a meeting place and a producer of iconic imagery to remember the legacy of Pridi.

At Thammasat University Ta Prachan Campus there is the "Memorial Sculpture Garden Project: A Search for True Meaning, Thammasat University and the Struggle for Democracy." In the sculptures for 14 October 1973 and 6 October 1976, imagery has been deducted from photographs. In the 14 October sculpture different photographs are entangled with each other eradicating both time and space from a narrative of the event. In the 6 October sculpture cut outs of details of photographs are squeezed in between the stone letters that form the date and year of the event. Each death and person, including the exiled Dr. Puey Ungphakorn, is singled out in the sculpture.

The memorial sites of 14 and 6 October resemble war-memorials in that they encourage remembrance of sacrifice and suffering, while they are also places that signify cultural norms and religious practices.[21] Garlands are hanged and

[21] Winter describes war memorials as places for collective and individual grief that encourages remembrance of cultural norms and religious traditions, focusing on suffering and sacrifice. Jay Winter, *Sites*

incense lightened when memorial rituals are performed at the sites – symbols of religion and cultural norms that confirm community. Commemorations at these memorial sites are civil acts, just as commemorations of war memorials are, but when war memorials confirm citizenship unity in the nation, 14 and 6 October are memorial sites of national disunity. These sites do not remind us of a conflict that led to national unity, but they remind us of pending social and political contestations and active participation in creating memory of contested events.

4. Oppressive Visual Tropes

It follows the logic that if you have to struggle for something there must be something or someone else that withholds or hinders your access to this something. In social movements there is a dichotomy between emancipation, freedom, liberty, access to rights and an oppressive factor: institutions, powerful networks, corporations, world-order etc. In the photography used to tell histories about struggles for freedom, rights and social justice in Thailand the prime antagonist is the military. The military is here the threat to both personal security and to the political goal, mostly depicted within the frame of democracy. The Democracy Monument, erected

of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 78-79.

between 24 June 1939 and 24 June 1940 under the regime of field Marshall Phibun Songkram, has become an important symbol for a struggle over democracy in Thai political history. Democracy or *"prachathipathai"* is a highly contested concept.[22] From originally meaning "republic" the meaning of democracy changed after the coup 24 June 1932 and the settlement for a constitutional monarchy instead of a complete overthrow and republicanism.[23] The Democracy Monument was originally to establish a monument to signify a military ruled constitutional state that overthrew an absolute monarchy. Deciding over the content of the constitution means to decide formally over the meaning of democracy in the Thai state. The military regimes throughout the past century have not dispensed completely of constitutions. As a symbol the monument is ambiguously claimable. There is one impression of the military as protector of state and constitution, while another emphasises more the monument as part of a movement to replace absolutism with democracy. The monument is a widely used signifier of this battle over constitutional democracy.

The symbol of the military is one of force – guns, uniforms, and acts of subordination. Imagery in opposition

[22] Kasian Tejapira, "Signification of Democracy," *Thammasat Review* 1, no. 1 (1996): 9-10.

[23] Ibid., 8.

does not allow nuances in portraying the enemy. Photography is used explicitly to remind the spectator of a long history of military regimes and general oppression by military might, but also of specific atrocities never accounted for. In this context soldiers are those who follow orders as part of oppression. Giving them identities would remind us of their human relations. Soldiers are thus to a large degree portrayed in groups, anonymised, just as they are organised in the military rank and file. In the exceptional cases of singling out a soldier, one who is caught on camera with a hand grenade in his hand becomes a symbol of the deadly outrage in the service of the state. When caught as single agents on photographs, they need not always be anonymous. A single police officer, aiming his gun towards the gate of Thammasat University can in these contexts become a symbol of the moral corruption of the uniformed institutions – there he is, arrogantly sucking on a cigarette while ready to kill.[24] Photography can thus be read as witnesses of the real face of the oppressive powers. The soldiers marching on Ratchadamnoen Klang with the Democracy Monument in the background as in photography from 17 May 1992, is in this context not a symbol of protection of the common nation-state but a symbol of the threat towards the people that should have been protected. The military is protecting their own version

[24] The police officer serves as a symbol in some photographic contexts despite being named in some records.

of the state. The battle is about defining the state, through symbols for unity of a people in the nation: constitution and democracy. When soldiers are seen pointing their rifles towards a group of people with the national flag waiving above their heads we are sure to think about the state threatening the lives of its own citizens.

5 . Gendered Tropes

The gendered tropes found in photography correspond to a dualism between narrating oppression as well as power of one's struggle. Reading the photographs through a human rights lens we see that self-empowerment (heroism) and oppression and resistance (violence) is differentiated by the representation of women and men.

In Thai official history, the hero is a central figure. In the curriculum for basic education, it is stated that children should learn about "The heroic deeds of the Thai ancestors who participated in defending the nation".[25] These heroes are quite often royals. They are the kings of early Sukhothai and Ayuthaya periods, the kings who established the capital where it is today and the line of the Chakri dynasty. The national

[25] Thailand The Ministry of Education, "The Basic Education Core Curriculum," (Thailand: B.E. 2551 (A.D. 2008)).

hero cult includes strong female characters – typically queens who fought in battles such as Phra Nang Camadevi – queen of the Mon kingdom, Phra Suriyothai – who gave her life in a Burmese-Siamese war, and Ya Mo – saving Nakon Ratchasima from the invading Lao forces. Their images are made eternal through statues and paintings. The kings of 20th century, starting with Rama V, made statues that positioned them, with Grant Evans words, "in the permanent gaze of the public."[26]

In an alternative history, the hero trope is present as an embodiment of a struggle. It is in the nature of opposition that their heroes are not national heroes, however through time and political changes, some figures can transgress the political boundaries. Images of Pridi Banomyong and Puey Ungpakorn are used both by official institutions and by a broad spectrum of political movements – progressive liberals, social democrats and further left.[27] These men are made symbols for

[26] Evans, 154.

[27] Different groups revisit the writings and images of Pridi and Puey for moral and political guidance. The Thammasat University also maintains their respective legacies through more institutional forms such as The Puey Ungpakorn Library at the Rangsit Campus and the Pridi Banomyong Library and the Pridi Banomyong International School at the Ta Prachan Campus. National official agencies, banks, development foundations and the Thammasat University are engaged in the centennial commemorations of Puey Ungpakorn, webpage: http://puey-ungphakorn.org (accessed September 10, 2015).

the possibilities that higher education offers, embodying the national myth of how young aspirational minds will contribute to the progress of the nation. Their statuses as statesmen are strong, despite controversies over their socialist pathos and lives partly spent in exile.

Sudarat Musikawong describes the typical Thai hero of the opposition as "an innocent optimistic leftist student."[28] It is quite noticeable that there is a male domination in this hero trope. The male student leader icons of the 1970s have overshadowed women of the same struggle. The most prominent figures have also been engaged in political movements and debates of later date, which cautions us not to talk about a homogenous political movement of 1973-1976. The photograph itself is clearly not enough to construct a hero but imagery aids preserving a legacy. In the 1970s these students looked back and found Jit Phumisak, an academic, poet, and writer, to embody their ideal of the leftist hero.[29] They picked up his texts and spread his photograph establishing his face as an icon of the Thai people's struggle to "…become the masters of their own fate, to make

[28] Sudarat Musikawong, "Gendered Casualties: Memoirs in Activism and the Problem of Representing Violence," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism,* 11/2 (2013), 184.

[29] Craig J. Reynolds, *Thai Radical Discourse: The Real Face of Thai Feudalism Today* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1987), 16f.

their own history, to become the subject of history rather than its passive object."[30] Jit, considered a brilliant young mind, was only 36 when he was killed in the anti-communist surge of his time. The most common photograph of Jit clearly resonates with this memory of him. It is a facial portrait taken from front. He looks straight into the camera from behind round glasses fixed on a youthful face. Another famous photograph is of Jit casually resting on the stairs leading up to Angkor Wat, an odd portrait in contrast with his personality, according to his friend William J. Gedney.[31] The statue of Jit raised in Nakhon Sakhon to commemorate the 47th anniversary of his murder, depicts him in simple clothes, wearing a farmers' shirt and trousers, barefoot in one-strap sandals. Jit's image carries the symbol of simplicity that is part of a romanticising of an authentic Thai life as opposed to the urban consumer society.

There are basically two feminine figures in the photographic material: The capable woman and the violated woman. The capable woman is typically on a podium speaking to a congregation of protestors, she is marching in the front line of demonstrations, and she is recognized as a labourer, a farmer, an environmental and social activist or a student. The capable woman can become an icon, such as the student leader

[30] Ibid., 14.

[31] Interwiewed by Craig J. Reynolds, 1980. Ibid., 22.

Saowanee Limmanon in 1973, figuring in many photographs from the 14 October event and remaining a public figure later in life. A recent heroine appeared in the fight over elections in February 2014: Picharinee Ratonchamnong became an icon when she, with a torch in her hand during daylight, tried to walk through the crowds who had set out to hinder her and others from casting their votes.

The female figure plays a key role in the reproduction of collectives – cultural, national, and biological.[32] Violence against the female body builds on this trope and its connection to the loss of sovereignty. The naked body subjected to violence in conflict is a defenceless object to our gaze. Sexual violence is more than a moral issue and rape, the ultimate violation of the female body, "has a cultural, economic, political, and legal existence…"[33] The collective in the political conflicts in Thailand are identified through their political views and positioned opposition towards the state. In the 1970s the opposition was portrayed as different and threatening to the state, up to the point that their Thai identity was questioned, obscuring any boundaries between the cultural, national, and biological. The photographs of sexual violence found in the

[32] Nira Yuval-Davis, "Gender and Nation," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 16, no. 4 (1993).

[33] Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 222.

material I have studied exclusively derive from the events of 6 October 1976, and these photographs are not well spread or reproduced.[34] I have not come across similar photographs from any other event in Thailand. The rhetoric against those who became victims of violence at the event built on anti-communist discourse rooted in Thai political life since the 1950s. The women in this collective of targeted threats to the nation are to that logic the biological carriers of an estranged culture and worldview. The punishment against parts of bodies that represent reproduction is the image of an attempt to extinguish root evilness. This is a common theme in imagery from conflict areas: It is a combination of discourses of power, estrangement, hatred and biology that is difficult to decipher in the moment of the event. Studying the imagery reproduced from the event, how these photographs are used, I see three possible interpretations. One is the violence and shame caused on the individual woman and the attempt to restore this through exposing the truth of her death. This relates to the second interpretation, that these photographs are reproduced to tell about the dehumanising act of rape. The third interpretation is how the naked violated female body fits into the collective experience of oppression. In the newspapers following 6 October there are beaten, burned, slaughtered humans, but no

[34] Newspapers, popular magazines and journals, left-wing magazines, student publications, academic books and journals.

photograph that hints at sexual violence.[35] Three photographs of violated women were used by the artist Vasan Sitthiket in the piece named "Whoever raped and killed, please come and take a medal of courage," as part of his exhibition "Blue October 1996".[36] The action of rape was not recorded neither in the original photography nor in the artwork by Vasan, but sexual violence is suggested: one woman is dead or unconscious and the image shows her bare breasts, another one is completely stripped apart from her clothes pulled up covering her face and there is a wooden pole partly over her body. [37] There is

[35] A special issue of Suntiparp (n.d.) has a photo of a female body – hair floating out on the ground, shirt pulled up around her neck uncovering bare breast, her lower body covered – that was in a censored issue of Prachtipathai. *Suntiparp,* n. d., 4. There are possibly other exceptions but restricted publication of the major dailies followed 6 October, "Calm, Cool and Hopeful," *Bangkok Post*, Sunday 10 October 1976, 1.

[36] In the oil-on-canvas exhibition the artist incorporated violent contents from photography of the 6 October event and gave them satirical names such as "For the Thai High-culture", "For the Happiness of the Nation". Vasan, Sitthiket. *Tula Lai 1-31 Tulakom 2539 [Blue October 1-31]* (Pathumthani University: Sunday Gallery,1996). For more on this artwork, the role of the artist in commemorating 6 October and the exhibition see Musikawong, Gendered Casualties: Memoirs in Activism and the Problem of Representing Violence, 194f., and Musikawong, 'Art for October: Thai Cold War State Violence in Trauma Art', 34f.

[37] Vasan Sitthiket's painting shows only the body and not the head or face of a completely naked woman lying on the ground with a wooden stick partly over her body. Photograph found, shows also head and

a photograph from the sports field inside Thammasat where students were rounded up on 6 October. All we see are back of heads of people, but two women are turned towards the camera trying to shield their upper bodies, stripped of their shirts but wearing bras. Their faces are made anonymous by a black strip across their eyes.[38] The first commercial magazine to reproduce photographs from 6 October since the newspaper coverage in 1976 is Sarakadee. In the October issue 1996 the most well-known photographs of the violence are included, but there are no photographs of sexual violence against women.[39] Musikawong makes the claim that the lack of representation of gendered violence in the 1970s marginalised women, first by the violence directed against them, and then by the masculinity of their own movement – making them invisible in the memory of the 6 October event. I do believe this is a valid claim, looking at the overall publications covering the

face, the wooden stick partly over her body. anon., *Bueang Lang 6 Tula* (1978), 33. The other one is the upper body including face of a woman lying down. Her shirt and bra is pulled up showing her breasts. It was used to locate relatives of dead persons in a pamphlet circulated 20 years after the massacre, "Tamha Yatimit", TUA 2.4-1, (Thammasat University Archives, 1996).

[38] Only one exception to the anonymised copies found, in Chueathai Somyot, *Khadi Prawatsat 6 Tulakhom 2519 Khrai Khue Khatkon*, 2 ed. (Bangkok,1988), 285.

[39] Photo exposé in *Sarakadee,* October, 2539 (1996), 105-111.

event. However, the fault might not rest in failed or imbalanced representation alone, as it should be noted that photography of sexual violence in conflicts are generally difficult to find.[40]

The gendered trope in relation to the rights issue of gender equality is two folded in the photographic material. One is the boundary of the male and female figures as heroes, as capable or victimized. The other way to read gender is through sexual violence. In the photography it is women who are victims – the sexual violence becomes both a violation of a person and the collective to which she belongs. The absence of more and varied photography of sexual violence obscures knowledge about the extent of the issue.

6. Death and the Power of Mourning

Decisions over life and death are in the core of the relationship between the state and its citizens. The state regulates who is born to belong, who is no longer entitled to life, and who cannot kill whom. For many social movements the issue at hand is based on ideas of self-determination over body and life – against the plight of hard labour, for land rights, against exploitation, for LGBTQ rights.[41] Death is a strong

[40] Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 217ff.

[41] Butler, 25.

trope to the community of movements fighting state violence and it makes itself present in photography as the moment of violence, in bloodshed, corpses and the rituals of mourning.

In the calendars, pamphlets, and at the memorial sites of social movements death is also strongly connected to a sort of triumph in struggle. The spectators' entrance to this triumph is through the remembrance of state atrocities in photography. The death in such photography can become a source of power, a source that unites when it is put next to photographs that signals struggle – marching people, fists raised, placards, and celebration at the foot of the Democracy Monument. So can also the funeral and other rituals related to commemoration of the dead (offerings of flowers, garlands, and incense, tying colourful ribbons around trees), be sites for political protest.[42] Though the Thai rituals for death and commemoration are particular, the phenomenon of drawing political power from death in social conflicts is a global phenomenon. In the

[42] For more on political funeral culture, see Alan Klima, *The Funeral Casino : Meditation, Massacre, and Exchange with the Dead in Thailand* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), 54-55. The Krue-Se Mosque became a site for pilgrimage after 32 men had been shot dead by police in April 2004 and their photographs put up on display. Rosalind C. Morris, 'Photography and the Power of Images in the History of Power', in Morris (ed.), *Photographies East: The Camera and its Histories in East and Southeast Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 151-152.

nationalist myth dying for your nation is the highest form of martyrdom. Your coffin draped in the national flag is for everyone to see for what your death was worth.

In Thailand both opposition and state power are claiming the flag as a national symbol to lend legitimacy to their cause. On 14 October 1973 the flag was used to drape the bloody corpse of the first student killed, others were paraded on the streets as to show the public evidence of what had just happened – that the state had killed its own citizens.[43] On 26 February 1975, Samran Khamklan, a ceramic worker in Samut Sakorn was shot dead by a factory guard while striking. Her sacrifice is made eternal in a photograph of her in a coffin covered with the national flag.[44] Some groups on the left would not use the national flag because it is also a symbol for the state's exploitation of territory and people. The People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), a movement against the elected government in 2013-2014 took the flag as their personal colour; like other political movements had used red, yellow and white before them. They marched with raised fists printed on the colours of the flag connecting them to both an imagined people's movement and their imagined vision of

[43] See e.g. *Chomna Prawatsat Chut Prachathippatai Lueat [The Memory of the Bloody Democracy]* (Bangkok: Siam Publishing Ltd., 1975).n.p.

[44] Poster in the Thai Labour Museum [visited 13 Jan. 2013]

the perfect Thai nation-state. Imagery is created at the event of photography and so the national flag is made sure to be present when groups of people make claims to legitimacy for their cause to the public or governing authorities.

Butler recognizes the political act of mourning where it is absent, as for thousands of victims in wars around the world. This non-mourning is put in contrast to the loss of one single person that the spectator can feel some kind of familiarity with.[45] The collective ceremonies of mourning of some victims but not others makes the political act manifest. Through photographs the spectators are given a chance to engage in mourning. For those present at the event of death it is a second time, for others the first. The trope of mourning is however more commonly found in Thai newspapers than in the material produced by interest groups. The mourning mother, a trope of war-photography that is particularly "accessible" and "versatile,"[46] occurs specifically in connection to the fallen of 14 October 1973, where the figure of the mother is represented by biological parents, widows and royals. It is occasionally found in photography relating to 6 October 1976, particularly in portraits of the elderly that come to Thammasat University to

[45] Butler, 32.

[46] Marta Zarzycka, "The World Press Photo Contest and Visual Tropes," *Photographies* 6, no. 1 (2013).

commemorate their children or children of others. Mourning of those who lost their lives in the 6 October massacre at Thammasat University has been a particularly sensitive public affair for reasons that are not the focus of this article.[47]

Photography from 1992 Black May is dominated by the pacifist hunger strike led by Chamlong Srimuang. The days 17-19 May when 200,000 protestors were met with state bullets on Ratchadamnoen Klang have been left in the visual memory as representation of a sacrifice for democracy.[48] It all ends with a

[47] Though private or small congregations had been held on the anniversary of 6 October, it was not until 1996 that an open event could be organized. Some of the photographs had until then only circulated in smaller publications but were in 1996 made more available through, e.g. Sarakadee and exibitions. See e.g. Thongchai Winichakul. "We do not Forget 6 October" – the 1996 Commemoration of the October 1976 Massacre in Bangkok." (2001); Musikawong, 'Mediating Memories of the 1970s in Thai Cultural Production', 2006. Though photographs of the dead were first left out of newspapers, they were later "incorporated in the protests themselves, where they functioned as seemingly self-explanatory signs of the movement's justness." Morris, 139-140.; *The Memory of the Bloody Democracy (Chomna Prawatsat Chut Prachathippatai Lueat)*. Bangkok: Siam Publishing Ltd., 1975.

[48] Though photographs of the dead were first left out of newspapers, they were later "incorporated in the protests themselves, where they functioned as seemingly self-explanatory signs of the movement's justness." Morris, 139-140.; *The Memory of the Bloody Democracy (Chomna Prawatsat Chut Prachathippatai Lueat)*. Bangkok: Siam Publishing Ltd., 1975.

reconciliatory meeting between the general in power, Suchinda Kraprayoon, and Chamlong Srimuang, the general leading a civilian opposition, sitting down listening to the teachings of his Majesty the King. These photographs have not been censored from the public. The mourning of the 52 officially declared dead and the thousands wounded has been offered to the public as a reminder of sacrifices made to reach common understanding of democracy. The involvement of Chamlong, a prolific Buddhist politician with a past in the anti-communist forces in the 1970s, shall not be underestimated. However, as the evolvement of events, after his arrest in the midst of protests, when the demonstrations grew bigger, shows that the quest for democracy belonged to the masses. Despite that Chamlong was supportive of later military coups and has a strong political profile, the images of the military violence in May 1992 has been adopted by many sides and the focus lies in the innocence of pacifism.

Since the events of 14 October 1973 there is a decline in photography that shows people resisting aggressively or violently. From 14 October there is the male Kasertsart student almost alone in the street with a stick raised as in defence or attack to meet bullets from the military guns.[49] There is havoc on the streets, cars and busses overturned and put on fire, and

[49] Front page of *Thai Rat*, 20 October 1973.

people cheering as the Metropolitan Police Headquarters burn, There was a space in media following 1973 that allowed for both victory and sorrow in the narrative, making it possible to spread images of different sides of protests. After 1976, the focus seems to have turned to a one-sided violence – people's innocence towards the guns of the state. 1992 is particularly pacifistic despite stories of violent resistance. Even if later dated photography of workers and farmers protests can be confrontational, they normally do not use images of weapons or fighting to symbolise their cause. Violence in the photography after 1976 functions as symbol for oppression more than resistance. There might be a correlation between this use of photography – underscoring sorrow and defeat rather than struggle and triumph – and the severe repression of political movements in mid-1970s, especially following October 1976, and later, in the early 1980s, the Communist Party laying down arms.[50]

Photography can be a welcomed act at the scene of violence to document what the powers of violence would rather not have documented. (Though, in some cases, a violent regime creates its own archives of atrocities.[51]) Violence

[50] Note that the material studied is not produced by militant movements.

[51] For studies on archives by oppressive regimes, see e.g. the dis-

against the body is a strong symbol – marks are left visible or the body ceases to live. Through photography the dead "continues to exist."[52] This type of photography that focuses on the act of violence as symbol for human rights atrocities, risks disconnecting the single act from a larger structure of violence.[53] The compositions created by independent groups, combining different moments of violence and death, can break away from this narrow focus and turn it towards a regime of violence and oppression.

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covery of Guatemala's police archives, the unveiling of the USSR state archives, the digital archive over the Brazilian dictatorship. Kirsten Weld, *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); "Brasil Nunca Maís Digital", Public Archive of the State of São Paulo Brazil's Federal Public Ministry Armazem Memoria http://bnmdigital.mpf.mp.br/#!/ (accessed June 15, 2015).; Paul Gregory and Mark Harrison, "Allocation under Dictatorship: Research in Stalin's Archives," *Journal of Economic Literature* 43, no. 3 (2005). For Thailand see e.g. Tyrell Haberkorn, "Tracing an Uneven History: Notes on Sources and Trajectories of Thai State Violence," *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 1, no. 1 (2013); Tyrell Haberkorn, "The Hidden Transcript of Amnesty: The 6 October 1976 Massacre and Coup in Thailand," *Critical Asian Studies*, (2015).

[52] Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 386.

[53] Azoulay, *Civil Imagination : A Political Ontology of Photography*, 246.

7. Photography in the Paradigm of Human Rights

If the public is a space defined partly by what is not to be shown, then it is also where disunity will be performed through visibility. I have here suggested that photography opens up for histories in the plural, challenging hegemonic national narratives. I would like to nuance this a bit by further suggesting that photographic reproduction can limit the possible versions of history. While there is space for some tropes, partly embraced in national cultural norms, such as the capable farmer (female or male), or the righteous moral student (socialist or not), other tropes belong only to an oppositional space – such as violent resistance and calls for societal transformation beyond compromised democracy.

Exploring further the issue of dissemination, politics and ideological production of imagery, I see two layers of spaces for photography. In Thailand there is a familiarity with photographs of the monarchy – seen in introductions to movies in the cinema, on billboards over walking bridges, in calendars and decorations in homes and public administrative offices. These photographs can be divided in two categories, one is of eternal personification, the portrait that gives only a hint of time but does not represent any particular event. The second category is of events of engagement between royals and subjects, part

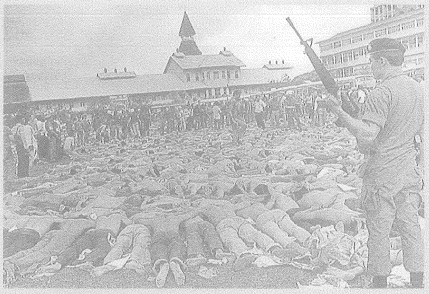
of a narrative about the present monarchy.[54] To this category can be added the production of official photographs from graduation ceremonies at colleges and universities displayed in private homes. This layer is a successful creation of collective memory in the way that Sontag understands it: Images trigger specific and shared sentiments.

A contrast is created within the second layer where the civil act of photography dominates. This is the space I have here tried to explore wider; it is a layer that sometimes but not always and not by necessity contests the first layer.[55] These layers are of course an abstraction to some extent – the civil space of photography includes also the hegemonic national production. Photography as a civil act does, however, not belong to any ideological intent that might have authored them. Social movements are aware of this, as they are aware of the symbols carried in photographic tropes. These tropes are not particular to a human rights language but they can

[54] Though this categorization is my own, Rosalind Morris writes about the different dress codes of monarchs through time: Morris makes the claim that it is thanks to photography that the present king do not need be dressed in "legal forms" to be recognized as monarch. Morris, 143.

[55] While these layers serve an analytical purpose, Morris has approached their commonality through the concept of "power." Morris, 'Photography and the Power of Images in the History of Power'.

be explicitly used within the human rights paradigm. In the time frame of this study the human rights language has been adopted by a variety of political movements in Thailand: for land rights, for LGBTQ rights, for civil rights and economical justice. A photograph of a dictator or powerful politician next to a photograph of tortured, submissive, or protesting people implies power relationships, but it does not tell us how events came about, what powers were behind or how they ended. The production of these photographs points to two sides of the human rights discourse. One is putting light on the right–issues themselves: for freedom and rights, against oppression and abuse. The other is the performative side of claiming rights in the public – a self-empowering, emancipatory act. Neither of these makes claim to full historical accounts but they none the less contribute to a historical consciousness and the construction of a collective memory. The strength in photography for telling histories lies in the public sphere, where visibility is political. This is clear in the way photographs have been used in Thailand in the short period studied here.



ตุลาคม 2519

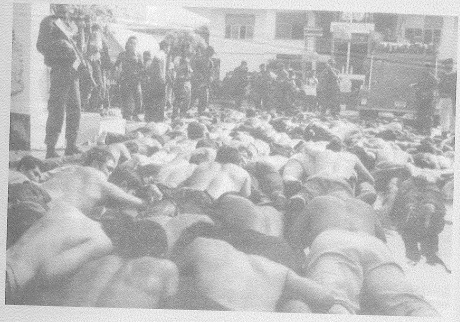


พฤษภาคม 2535

Fig. 1-2. *Fa Diaw Kan* 2004 (2547), 8-11.



ตุลาคม 2546



ตุลาคม 2547



Fig. 3. Front cover of the People's Calendar. Photographs from different political events are connected in the calendar through the months they took place. *People's Calendar (Patithin Prawatsat Prachachon)*. Bangkok: Friends of the People (FOP).



Fig. 4. Artwork promoting an exhibition organised by the 14 October foundation. Photographs are copied in the painting that makes up the foundation of the young person painting and writing democracy on a wall.

"Prachathippatai Baep Mi Suanruam" Nithatsakan Sinlapa Dek Lae Yaowachon Khrang Thi 10 [Participatory Democracy: 10th Exhibition of Children and Youth Art]. Bangkok: Munnithi 14 Tula, 2547.

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