

Video Art: Everyday Fear within the Three Southern Thai Provinces

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Abstract

The objective of this project was to create a form of video art and utilize it to instill a social awareness of living everyday in fear as experienced by women who lost their husbands through the insurgency in Thailand's three southern provinces. The overall objective of this video was to portray the personal and social atmosphere in terms of way of life, culture, and identity. The video is ten minutes long and consists of three stories: First, the ambience of the rubber plantation illustrating the unique culture in this region; Second, the tea drinking tradition of Thai Muslim men; Third, women suffering the loss during the insurgencies. Together the three accounts depicts how the lives of these women became a life of enduring suffering and loss. It is online at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-5pqeQKpiI.

Keywords: *Video Art, Three Southern Thai Provinces, Insurgency, Thai Muslim , Al-quran, Thai Buddhist*

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Introduction

The researcher conducted qualitative research by collecting data from field trips in the three southern provinces for one month; interviewed 18 women to understand their perspectives, feelings, and emotions of living in the region; and spent 45 hours documenting and recording. The creation of the ten minute video serves to depict the personal accounts and social atmosphere. The reproduction of stills and videos from this perspective were blended with traumatic and nostalgic reflections as representation of their daily, personal reality.

The issue of this violent insurgency in the Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat provinces is known throughout the world and has been continuing for more than 200 years. The conflict originates from the legend of Pattani guerillas fighting with the northern Muslim Malaysians – namely those from Kedah, Kelantan, and Terengganu against the Thai (Siamese) government, since the early Rattanakosin era.

Since 2004, the crisis in the three southern provinces has triggered changes and brought about adverse effects on the economy and way of life and has garnished close governmental scrutiny. Despite continuous efforts to solve the issue by increasing the capabilities of the personnel in the area and by allocating a huge amount of public funding into the region, the loss has not declined and the quality of life has severely deteriorated. Lives and properties, as well as security has been so severely ruined such that the issue has become a national problem.

The cause and the solution still remains to be understood and addressed. Citizens, state officials, including the insurgents, continue to lose their lives every day. People live under the fear of being injured not knowing when or who will be the next victim. The news of attacks on civilians are reported daily. The cruelty remains aggravating. The government set forth a policy by sending military and police into the area. Check points are set up in faraway places, villages, districts, and even in urban areas, with no positive change as police and soldiers are still being killed everyday. This situation has led to the researcher's awareness that people do not want be close to soldiers and the police for fear that they will also be injured. Such thoughts causes the belief that wherever there are police, it is unsafe. The researcher has gone to these areas and experienced the depressive fear in peoples everyday lives. The insurgents have set their targets in advance and will only attack after they have singled-out and selected the target. These targets are not only government officials. However, killing also goes on without selecting specific targets resulting in fear, confusion, disharmony, and at times mutual accusations between Buddhists and Thai Muslims. As the violence continues so does the degradation of careers and the general economy resulting in recession.

Insurgency and Social Degradation

According to the Population and Housing Census 2000, Islamic domestic citizens account for 4.56%. This population uses the local Melayu language and follows Islamic cultural precepts. Their way of life is different from the rest of the Thai population. Muslims follow the laws based on the Al-quran, which is not only a religious scripture with prayers and cultural teachings, but also a set of ordinanc-

es governing faith, religious rites, economy, law, government, medicine, business, science, diplomacy, society, culture, and verses asking for blessing; in other words, it is a textbook for leading ones life from cradle to grave, and even to the afterlife, known as Akirah. Muslims consider the Al-quran as a constitution for living and every deed must comply with it. The Al-quran plays a vital role in life and Islam influences all customs and traditions. The Al-quran itself is a set of strict laws that everyone needs to learn and follow. Every Muslim is a priest. Declaring oneself a Muslim is achieved through simple words stating that one has no god other than Allah Mahamad of the god Allah. Muslims do not revere holy images or pictures. Islam promotes the learning of a domestic language. There are ordinances in the Al-quran which state that education is essential for Muslims. They hold that those who learn the language of another group will be safe from being deceived and secular education is recommended. Therefore, religion is not the cause of the violence in this region, although it is somehow associated with it as this has been claimed by certain groups to legitimize their actions (in Thai, Matichon, 2004).

Thai Muslims believe now they are being threatened by the insurgency as it directly impacts their well-being and mental health. It has brought forth an pervasive fear among themselves, Thai Buddhists, and government officials. In general, attitudes and behaviors expressed between the majority of Thai Muslims and state officials are negative, which resulted from delicate misunderstandings of the following factors:

The number of Muslims in Thailand accounts for 3.69% of the total population. This leads to fear and concerns that the majority will threaten their culture.

A lot of Thai Muslims and government officials in this region are not fluent in the local Malay language leading to misunderstanding and misinterpretations resulting in fear.

3. Some government officials do not comprehend the core and principles of Islam and the related local traditions. They undervalue the feelings of Muslims towards the preservation and continuation of their religion and culture.

4. The lack of safety and the violence of the insurgency even when committed by a minority as well as the propaganda based on religious differences as the basis for selecting targets; affect the national security and unity. These issues causes widespread fear, distrust, and leads to retaliation.

5. The attitudes and actions of some low-ranked state officials who do not fully understand or fail to comply with state policies have exhibited inappropriate conduct leading to negative attitudes among the people.

6. Slow economic development and lack of social opportunities in this region are why Thai Muslims and especially some leaders, feel the government is not being sincere. In addition, there have been limitations for some Thai Muslims in new

economic development venture where the terms and conditions produce conflicts with their traditional way of life. This limits the effectiveness of government's attempts at reconciliation (in Thai, <http://dc.oas.psu.ac.th/dcims/files//03884/ch3.pdf>).

Today, the fear and the unfair treatment continues engraving fear into the hearts of Thai Muslims, even though improvements have been made. Furthermore, attempts made by the government to improve public relations cannot reach the people through differences in communication practices and language. Ideas are set forth, news, and information are given and yet negative criticism persists. These result from the a failure of law enforcement to comply with the rule of law safeguarding people's basic rights and freedom. For example, the arrest of suspects precedes evidence, or there is an unlawful exercise of authority, such as kidnapping, making threats, and mistreatment. These factors are structural problems in the entire judicial process and have caused violent reactions in the region as the local population functions as a network ready to retaliate to these actions by authorities.

The Religious, Cultural, and Political Complex

Police Lieutenant General Dr. Peerapong Manakij, national security specialist, stated the following:

This war represents a war of belief, rooting from ethnic and religious differences, which led to the complex of terrestrial occupation. Problems were set up on the basis of the big perspective to derive the most efficient solution. The first perspective deals with management where the government will participate more actively in the development, that is, the incessant insurgency in the southern provinces from the important incidents affecting the issue in the southern border provinces which started during 2004. Such incidents include a gun robbery on the 4th of January, the killing of Buddhist monks on the 2nd in the same month, the violence on 28th April, and the Tak-bi incident on 25th October, as well as countless subsequent incidents which seem to have no ending. All the incidents continuously impact and expand into the vicinities in Songkhla and Satun, for example. Nevertheless, past governments, including the current one, have stressed on the solution to this issue by announcing the southern Thai provinces issue a national agenda, and passed policies and allocated budgets for the development and the solution to the southern insurgency to their fullest extent. In terms of the effects of the insurgency, Narathiwat seems to suffer the most frequent and is the most severe area, with the most casualties. The tragedy has engraved a profound lesion in the hearts of the local people, some of whom have died, while others lose their breadwinners. There has also been a rise of more than a thousand orphans. According to the study of the social, life, and economic aspects in the south. The broad conclusion reveals that the gross domestic product (GDP) in the south ranks the lowest in the country. Most people in the south hold an agricultural career, except for those in Phuket whose income is derived principally from tourism. The economic growth rate is also the lowest too. Apart from the conflict, the southern region also faces a higher rate of big disasters when compared to other regions of the country. As for overall education, southern residents are of a

higher average than the rest in other regions. Yet, by considering the three provinces – Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat – in detail, the average value seems to be declining than the country's average education. So do their technological competency and prospects to continue high school studies, which are possibly next to zero. The relative quality of life makes overall health unpleasant, and this is even worsened by the conflict of insurgency in the three southern provinces. There have been rising mother-child problems. The government, however, never abandon its southern people. It can be said that the government has allocated even more budget to the south more than to the rest of the country, because the south is threatened with more problems than the others. Such problems include education, public health, quality of life, and transportation, all of which make the government have to allocate an even higher budget to the South, especially when the war of belief in the three southern provinces began to simmer (Manakij, 2011:14-6).

Based on the viewpoint of Lieutenant General Dr. Peerapong Manakrit, Islam is not only a religion but also the highest charter of Muslims. This reflects that religion and culture are inseparable. It can be seen that while Islam culture defines a social boundary for Muslims, it alienates them from others in general. The characteristics which differentiate Thai Muslims from others are the religion of Islam, their language, and dress code. These are the origins of their unique culture, sufficiency-life goals, and easy-going lifestyle. However, development data in the area is hard to obtain. Moreover, their population is limited by declining education levels. This gives rise to the vital issue of how their traditional identity can be preserved.

Thai Muslims in the three southern provinces want to preserve their identity by using their local Malaya language and Islamic religion and culture congruent with being a good Muslim. In another aspect, the authorities tries to use state mechanism to merge Muslim society into a single Thai society through bureaucratic processes. For example, there are attempts to reform Islamic education and to change local Malayan names to Thai ones. For this reason, certain groups in the area refused to accept the Thai language, which indicates that the Thai government has failed to understand Islam as these types of methods would ruin the traditional Muslim identity – thereby becoming a root cause of more conflict and violence.

This Buddhist-Muslim dichotomy have turned people into opponents and propaganda through media has tended to deepen the conflict. Yet, the eyes and the verbal communication between conversation partners reveals ongoing distrust. Many past insurgencies were seemingly aimed by terrorists to injure and cause a deep wedge shaped wound leading to even more fear among the people. At the same time, waiting for those in power to solve the issue seems futile. The terrorists meanwhile, keep holding on to their tools of success – death and disaster.

A Holistic View Towards the Southern Insurgency

The conflict in these three southern provinces has developed into the issue of who benefits? Conditions were set and led to long lasting battles; words became actions, starting from light to grave ones, and eventually ended up with the unimagi-

nable decision to use weapons and cruel death. This dilemma falls even deeper into a religious trap. Despite the attempts made by many parties to find peaceful way to end the southern blaze, the terrorists still have never been clearly identified. Their motivations are also unknown. The more violence is used to realize a solution, the more violence will be returned as a mirror reflecting back the same. Buddhist and Islamic leaders have to show their followers how to avoid falling into the trap of violence. Peaceful communities need to be able to bear witness to the disharmony of residents base on differences in religion without escalating to violence.

Teera Mintrasak, the governor of Yala province and a Muslim, once analyzed the three southern province issue holistically. He stated the problem has three levels:

1. Structural: Poverty, unemployment, education
2. Social: Drugs, contraband, weapons, and prostitution
3. Soul: Religious beliefs, Identities (Teera Mintrasak is referred to in Nararatwong 2008:91-2)

The most important problem is related to the soul in terms of belief and faith. This is because religion has transformed a fight of might into a battle of ideology. Teachers of religion may distort the thoughts of youngsters, causing the problem to spread; leading to guns serving as a means of judgment and a way to stir fear and disbelief.

The problem in these three southern provinces is very challenging and tough to solve by the governmental agencies. Local violence has become an universal issue. The insurgents stick to their old method of fighting via violence and ruining towns, cities, and governments. They keep on inserting fear into the local residents and took advantage of Muslim festivals to build up unrest through terrorism. Their strategy is aimed to psychologically rouse the people. The government, in the meanwhile, attempts to seal off the area and set up checkpoints, which has not proven effective, as losses through sabotage, car and motorcycle bombs, and other explosions continue on. Bombs are buried or hidden in different and random places. While arson and murder threats remain powerful tools.

Soraya Chamruchi (2012) studied the insurgency in this region and found there were tens of thousands affected. With closer scrutiny the human and social loss, from 2004-11, there were at least 4,455 children left without one or both parents. Women became widows and had to struggle for life alone in fear. Again based on the statistics from 2004-11, there were at least 2,220 widows in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat.

The severity of the scale of violence continues to aggravate daily life and causes widespread personal and psychological loss. The insurgency affects both the community at the individual, community and country levels. The root causes are comprised of the following seven elements:

1. The capture of important religious leaders without due process of law by successive governments.
2. and communities. The pronunciation of the Malayan language is deemed closest to that in the Al-quran and is used in deeper study of religion.
3. The closure of the traditional religious school, Por Nor, which is an academic institution in Muslim society for centuries. Instead, people are forced to learn Thai, taught in the Buddhist style, which frightens Muslims with its compulsive nature.
4. The prohibition of speaking Malayan at school. Some Muslims refused to go to state schools as they do not want to change their faith.
5. When Muslim women are forced to wear short hair, uncover their hair, wear skirts in place of a sarong, and while men are forced to change from white or black hats to helmets, and sarong to shorts or jeans. Traditionally Muslim women must dress appropriately covered to avoid unwanted sexual attention.
6. The change of local religious names to Thai names causes fear and difficulties when interacting with the state as they do not know Thai. This has been going on for almost 60 years yet never forgotten by Thais who love justice. These processes are still forced upon these underprivileged people.
7. The drastic fear of forced religious change. Drastic in Islam means the fear in a change in one's faith (Akidah) and means they become an unorthodox. What is worst, it is next to the risk of falling into hell as the Muslim way of life is filled with faith and belief in the existence of the afterlife as one of their strongest beliefs.

The administrative policy in the three southern provinces is an occupant policy rather than administrative one. Almost all administrative officers sent to the area are unaware and ignorant of the importance of the social, economic, and educational traditions of the local people. Failure to understand the differences has resulted in an image of the rebellious local Muslim. It is necessary that the government take the following into consideration and revise accordingly:

1. Using force in the problematic southern area by the government does not only hurt the local people, but also represents the wrong solution. Setting a simple target may seem an effective strategically to frighten one's enemies, but it is not always the right choice. The true goal is to get into the hearts of the people with a different culture to make them feel that they are not aliens in this country. This is only the beginning part of one's experience towards a solution.
2. Dismantling communities by implementing divisive policies through various tactics such as imposing outside values into the area and moving people from northeast Thailand to create more Buddhist communities.

3. Sending government officers to the area disproportionately and without considering their capabilities, potential, and their understanding of cultural differences. They may pressure, take advantage of, or insult the locals, or even worse they may lack the ability to realize economic, social, and educational development objectives. This has been going on for 30-40 years and creates negative and adverse atmosphere in the communities. Consequently, many migrate to Malaysia for work.

4. Sending armed troops to search peoples' houses, causing frightened villagers, children, and women; operations to suspiciously search through Por Nor schools and forcing students to give their fingerprints for fear that some of them may be involved in gun robberies and school arsons. This hurts the students' hearts and made them move to other schools. Such memories will be passed on from one generation to another endlessly. Searching for villains or illegal items in Muslim communities by using sniffer dogs must be done with caution; Muslims do not fear dogs; yet, where dogs walk past, their footprints and saliva stains must be cleaned with pure water seven times. The foulness caused by dogs negatively affects their religious practice which is a core part of their community's path.

6. It is important to know that Muslims in the south support the authorities to solve the problem. Most people wants the country to be happy and peaceful, but the government must act with understanding, caution, and determination to preserve the rights and the dignity of Thais as guaranteed by the constitution, not by emotions. This crisis is grave and Thais may not be aware of once this problem arises, the loss of local intellectuals and of those who wish the country to be prosper follows.

Many people fear the authorities so much that they run away from traumatic interrogation experiences and leave their families behind. Currently, there is news in which families of convicts are pressured. For example, some governmental agencies pressured people even if they held official positions. Some Muslim officers are satired and accused of school arson, which caused interruption in many students education. These Muslim officials were accused of being terrorists. These type of events have been going on for a long time and the policy to resolve the conflict in the southern area is still far from being resolved. The government needs to seriously rethink and redesign policies and enforcement that leads towards peaceful solutions. The Office of the National Security Council has established a strategic committee for developing a peaceful solution and their suggestions should be adopted.

Many past traumatic memories remain vivid in the community, such as the attack against Muslims who were at their morning prayers in Dusongngor, and whom all later were accused of being arsonists of the Baluka Samor in Bajor district. In 1975 five villagers at a hillside temple in the same village were killed which led to a large protest in Hari Raya. There was a bomb thrown into a crowd causing the immediate death of 13 in front of the Pattani town hall on December 13, 1975. The secret killing of individuals and denouncing the dead who may or may not have been terrorists. These are memories among the people and continue to case ongo-

ing pain of loss. Teachers, community leaders, Muslim officials, and local people find it hard to find a way to resolved this situation.

Therefore, to establish a quality media platform to reinforce the understanding of events for the locals and the nation one cannot only focus on what modern equipment to use, but it also must stress the importance of nation's diversity of its people and their culture. So, now, the only way out of the conflict appears to be one based on religion. Most religions shines the light to soften the hearts with its teachings and embraces the hearts filled with loss with its strength so that people can once again rise to face life's challenges and somehow transcend the loss of their beloved.

The Researcher's Fear

The impact of the insurgency in this region is continuous and has caused immeasurable losses of not only life but of culture and community. It is undeniable that fear prevails as it is only a question when and where violence will occur. Will it ever pass and end is the question. Even if some families have relocated, they still fear the past or what is yet to come. The researcher is also one of those with the fear that an incident could strike at any time, regardless of ones awareness of the news on ones phone, radio, TV, or in the newspaper. When thinking of my homeland, my parents, or relatives layers upon me a palpable sense of fear. This form of loss has happened to the researcher and has brought an even more unpredictable sense of fear and concern about other consequences.

The researcher recorded an incident that took place on March 25, 2010 as follows:

The roaring sound of six gun bullets burst into the midst of a rural area not far from the Muang district in Pattani province. People who were shopping for dinner after praying to Allah for his kindness immediately closed their doors, not knowing if the incident was good or bad. It is almost assured that one of the households will be in tears from a loss. Such incidences cannot be laid aside or forgotten in a short time or maybe never. The six bullets riddled in the bloody body of the man lying in a car-less, silent street from no apparent reason. Death and fear now dominates the heart of a small-bodied woman, his wife, who from then on carries the full burden to provide for her three children. This incident was the most heart-shaking experience of the researcher's extended family as she had lost her uncle who was like her second father in raising and teaching her. The unprecedented grief from this loss through violence was so immense that fear laid its hand everywhere. In his Muslim burial ceremony, our pouring tear stains seemed that they would never dry and would be engraved in our hearts relentlessly.

The huge burden upon the wife who is forced to become the family's sole leader requires her full strength to support them. She has to raise and teach her children to be valuable assets in the society and to not be angry with what had happened. It is very difficult to fulfill the loss of her husband in less than one days time. It is a very heavy burden as the pain in one's heart never disappears. A mother is her children's first teacher and a root in society. The awareness of the impact of the

insurgency in this region on widowed women and their need to play an additional role in assisting with conflict resolution seems to be neglected as no one is interested on how much the crisis affects women. Even in times of peace, women have had to bear gender discrimination and a lack of security in life. However now in the present situation they also experience the revenge between some people in the area and the authorities. This is the evil game of the terrorists. Women who lose their husbands and have to raise their children on their own keep experience an increasingly difficult life. In spite of the laws of social equality in this region, Islamic women do not often call for their own rights or compensation for the losses they have suffered. These women have become silent and have tended to keep everything in their hearts; yet, most never want to revenge as they tend to remind themselves that everything is destined by God. They only live in fear on and on.

Based on the full story from this region and the experiences of the researcher is also a Muslim woman that has been affected by these cruel incidents feels the need to pass on these stories of fear and human rights abuses.

Some of the mitigating factors include the social conditions, a low educational background, and incidences of premature and forced marriages. These Muslim women's stories need to be reflected back to society to illustrate how they are suffering from mental pain, loss and live their lives in fear. Whether villagers, teachers, nurses, or merchants, the whole community are all humans living under fear. The researcher has chosen to collect research data from women aged from 25 to 45 years as this age group is the time centered on hopes, dreams, and family building. For this region it is also a period with the highest prevalence of lost husbands. Meanwhile, women aged over 45 have adult children who are independent meaning less burden to their mothers. Thus, it can be said that women between 25 and 45 have had more dreams broken and are more likely to have fear dominate their lives.

Objectives of the Video

To promote social awareness of the daily lives under fear and the impact of the insurgency on the stability of the individual, the society, and the country, the researcher would like to utilize video art as her artistic medium to vividly reflect the way of life of those living with loss through these women's personal stories. The video reflects the attitudes and the culture of the local people through stills and video while expanding the social role of art. The purpose of this video art project was to communicate and convey the truth as seen from the perspective and attitudes of the researcher by utilizing the portrayal of the five senses namely: visual, sound, smell, taste, and touch. It will also appeal to one's imagination to heighten the understanding of these women's traumatic experiences.

The researcher presents this creative research project *Video Art: Everyday Fear Within the Three Southern Thai Provinces* to address the problem of the lack of public awareness of the personal effects of violence on women and the resulting trauma as well as the familial and economic struggles it causes. It details how the insurgency continues to exacerbate the region's living conditions while the general

public isn't aware of the pain of those who have lost everything ranging from their loved ones, privacy and property. Some say the effect of these losses will never fade away and the broken-hearted will never be healed. The locals still fear and wonder why and how long they will be victimized as they remain unsuspecting targets. What exactly is the cause of the insurgency? This question has been raised time and again by many and their various answers have offered no pathway towards resolution. The one thing that keeps the local people alive is their religion, which they hold onto. Their religion is the key to their survival.

The never-ending loss causes fear in the locals because of its unpredictable and mostly random nature. Humans and animals instinctively protect themselves all the time and thus can become overly cautious (fearful) just to ensure their survival. Excessive fear can have a detrimental effect if one cannot put it aside. Excessive fear is not self-protective and it happens without conscious control and is paralyzing. If fear is limited, not excessive, it can be beneficial, as it is a basic human emotion and is involved with a self-protection mechanism by our body and brain as they work together. Therefore, if we have an appropriate level of fear it can serve a valuable function of self-protection.

Conclusion

The insurgency has been disrupting the peaceful lives of the residents in the three southern Thai provinces and appears aggravatingly unstoppable. Whether this grave issue has its roots in religious, social, or political issues the loss has become an unavoidable part of their lives. Fear has long dominated nearly every single person, family, and community. The researcher is one of those affected who has a beloved relative. This tragic loss has remained in her heart. With this ongoing situation the researcher has decided to utilize media to create a form of video art to convey all the essentials gathered during the course of her interviews and research needed to comprehend this situation. The researcher hopes that this research will be of benefit to those who wish to do more in-depth research and/or educational projects in this region with the goal resolving the crisis to assist in creating long lasting happiness of the people who share the same nation.

Suggestions for Future Study and Research

The project titled *Video Art: Everyday Fear Within the Three Southern Thai Provinces* enables the researcher to discover the approach to create a video that conveys the fear of those who lost their beloveds so as to induce a broader awareness. The researcher has developed storyboards and taken stills, audio samples and videos of which all can serve as examples or guidelines for others concerned with improving this region's quality of life. Although those who are involved or strive to sort out this insurgent crisis may have a different understanding and perspective from Islam or may not understand the way of life of Thai Muslims but communication through the art of video and its related techniques can provide an understanding of the unhappiness in the lives of those in this region. Such understanding is essential, as the issue in Thailand's three southern provinces is complicated and influx. It is important to closely examine the problems in this area as the problem is entrenched and protracted. The researcher as the creator of this video, was

inspired by the fear in her hometown and was motivated to complete this project with the aspiration to be of benefit to those who would like to further study this subject.

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