

***In Search of Justice in Thailand's Deep South: Malay Muslim and Thai Buddhist Women's Narratives.* Edited by John Clifford Holt. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2022. Softcover: 151pp.**

Since the resurgence of political violence in Thailand's Deep South in 2004, which has so far claimed more than 7,300 lives, considerable research has been devoted to the many different facets of this ethno-religious conflict, including the causes and dynamics of the insurgency, inter-ethnic interactions, the roles of religion and nationalism, identity and citizenship, government policies and the impact of the conflict on the region's socio-economic conditions.

In Search of Justice in Thailand's Deep South: Malay Muslim and Thai Buddhist Women's Narratives is a compilation of personal memoirs written by ordinary people who were victims of this violent conflict. The book presents readers with a unique opportunity to hear the voices of resilient Muslim and Buddhist women who have experienced profound personal tragedies. In an environment where fear is widespread and silence has become the norm, these women are empowered through their engagement in activities organized by the Civic Women's Network, a non-governmental organization (NGO), to recover from their traumatic experiences and find their voices to demand peace and justice. Soraya Jamjuree, who compiled and selected the narratives for the volume, notes that "this is a book about victims who sometimes become victors" (p. xiii).

The book begins with a translator's note by Hara Shintaro, followed by a preface by Soraya Jamjuree and then an introduction by John Clifford Holt. In putting the project together, these three individuals shared a common goal: to publish a volume that amplifies the victims' voices. The main part of the book contains 15 narratives written by Muslims and five by Buddhists. Of these stories, 17 are written by women and three by men. They provide a testament to how the lives of mothers, wives, daughters and the victims' families have been impacted by the violent conflict.

In the 34-page introduction, Holt provides readers with a background to the conflict, including its historical and comparative contexts. He compares the insurgency in Thailand's Deep South with the Buddhist-Muslim conflicts in Sri Lanka and Myanmar, and discusses the contemporary context and significance of religion and education in the Patani region. Holt argues that the crux of

the problem stems from the integration of the Deep South into the homogeneity of “Thainess”, which subordinates the Patani region’s identity and economy to the dominant economic interests of Bangkok, thus rendering it a matter of “semi-colonialism” (p. xxiii).

After Siam absorbed Patani during the reign of Rama I, the historical relationship between Siam and Patani, and discussions about recovering Patani’s autonomy, shifted from the ruling class to religious scholars. Haji Sulong was a prominent figure in the campaign for greater autonomy for Patani, but mysteriously disappeared in 1954. Since then, different factions have arisen among movements seeking greater autonomy or independence for the Deep South. Holt attributes the upsurge in violence in the early 2000s to the ham-fisted policies of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and the undisciplined behaviour of the Thai military. Holt emphasizes that the Malay-Muslim community, which identifies primarily with the Malay language, Islam and history of Patani, does not fit into the Thai state’s national identity, which is mainly associated with the Thai language, Buddhism and monarchy.

The main portion of the book features gripping personal narratives written by ordinary villagers who are victims of the conflict. These stories describe their experiences and how they overcame their fears, the treatment they received and the traumas they still face. Some of the stories are dramatic and compelling, with titles such as “Whose security is this?”, “Justice should be fought for” and “Time has come for me to stand up”. Throughout the book, readers are reminded about the massacre at Patani’s Kru Se Mosque on 28 April 2004, the Tak Bai Massacre on 25 October 2004, and other violent incidents that led to the detention, injury and deaths of hundreds of Patani residents. The death of a Buddhist assistant teacher, Chuling Pongkhamoon, in Kuching Lepah village on 9 May 2006, added to the trauma, deepening Malay-Muslims’ distrust of their fellow Thai citizens (p. 111). The violence committed by the Malay-Muslim separatists against Buddhist villagers also fuelled hatred and suspicion.

The personal accounts in the book also reveal the oppressive and illiberal nature of the Thai state, and how the armed forces have repeatedly committed human rights abuses under the special emergency laws of 2004. There are numerous examples of military and police abuse, impunity and judicial incompetence, particularly regarding the imprisonment of suspected Malay-Muslim insurgents who were later found to be innocent. Faith and religious teaching

in both Buddhism and Islam play a constructive role in helping the victims find solace, hope and strength. Some narratives show how the conflict strained relations between Muslim and Buddhist villagers, while others demonstrate how supportive relationships between different religious affiliations can be restored. NGOs like the Civic Women's Network are crucial in providing support and empowering the victims to overcome their fears and speak up.

Overall, this book is unique in its approach, giving voice to an often-marginalized group in society. The personal narratives provide readers with intimate details and insights into the experiences, challenges and transformations of both Muslim and Buddhist women who have endured tremendous suffering due to the conflict. *In Search of Justice in Thailand's Deep South* is a valuable contribution to the literature on the Deep South conflict, Islam and Buddhism in Thailand, and women in general.

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