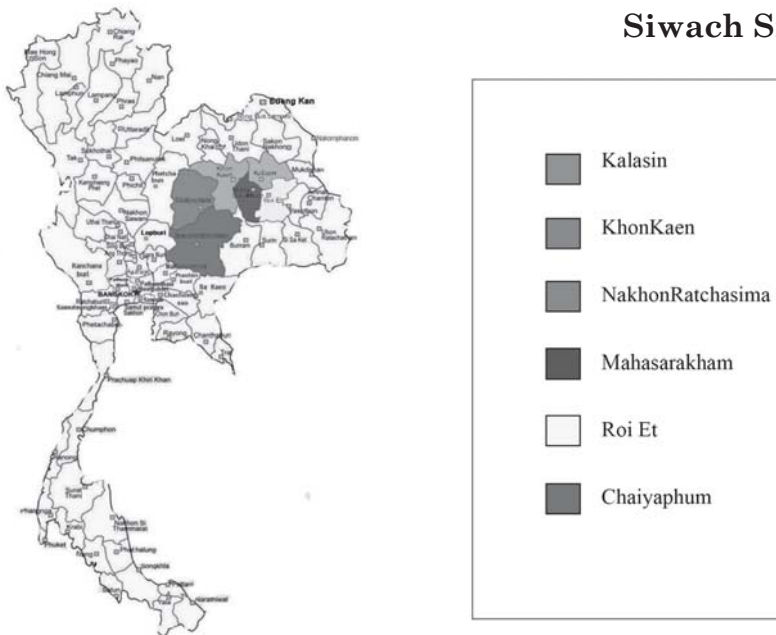


Synthesis of Problems and Obstacles Regarding “Public Forums Nationwide for National Reconciliation”: a Case Study of 6 Provinces in the Northeastern Region, Thailand

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- * This case study was written by Dr. Siwach Sripokangkul and is based on field and archival research. NIDA cases are developed solely as the basis for class discussion, and are not intended to serve as endorsements, sources of primary data, or illustrations of effective or ineffective administrative or managerial practice. Copyright © 2013 by National Institute of Development Administration and Dr. Siwach Sripokangkul. University faculty members, administrators, and other members of academia may freely photocopy this case for instructional purposes. The published version may be accessed from the NIDA Case Research Journal website, <http://journal.nida.ac.th/journal/index>. All uses by non-academicians and any uses other than academic instruction should be pursuant to the receipt of permission from the copyright holders. NIDA may be contacted at <http://www.nida.ac.th> and at 0 2727 3192.

Abstract

This case study is related to a reconciliation situation focused on a crucial project under Yingluck Shinawatra’s government. In June and July 2013, the Thai government assigned the Truth for Reconciliation Committee sub-committee of the Community Development Department under the Ministry of Interior and Suan Dusit Rajabhat University to arrange an initiative for “Public Forums Nationwide for National Reconciliation” (PFNNR). In effect, this project raised a question to Thai society: “If we do not talk today, when will we talk?” The government wished the PFNNR to bridge the gap in the disharmony among the Thai people, thus enabling reconciliation and peace. Following the purposes of this research article, the author participated in these projects in 6 provinces of the northeastern region; namely, KhonKaen, NakhonRatchasima, Kalasin, Chaiyaphum, Roi Et, and Mahasarakham in June and July, 2013. It was discovered that this project was full of problems and obstacles. It is also proposed that this project employed inappropriate methods for the process of reconciliation. A suggestion is offered at the end of the article that a more compatible model for reconciliation should be utilized, either as a victim-centered model or a victim-perpetrator centered model, if needed.

Keywords: Problems and Obstacles, Reconciliation, Public Forum, Thailand

บทสังเคราะห์ว่าด้วยปัญหาและอุปสรรคของโครงการ “เวทีพุดจาหาทางออกประเทศไทยเพื่อการปรองดอง แห่งชาติ”: กรณีศึกษา 6 จังหวัดในภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือ ของประเทศไทย

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บทคัดย่อ

กรณีศึกษานี้ว่าด้วยสถานการณ์การปรองดองในประเทศไทยโดยพิจารณาหนึ่งในโครงการสำคัญของรัฐบาลนางสาวยิ่งลักษณ์ ชินวัตร นายกรัฐมนตรี ในระหว่างเดือนมิถุนายนและกรกฎาคม 2556 รัฐบาลได้มอบหมายให้คณะกรรมการประสานและติดตามผลการดำเนินงานตามข้อเสนอแนะของคณะกรรมการอิสระตรวจสอบและค้นหาความจริงเพื่อการปรองดองแห่งชาติ (คอป.) กรมการพัฒนาชุมชน กระทรวงมหาดไทย และมหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏสวนดุสิต ร่วมกันจัดโครงการ “เวทีพุดจาหาทางออกประเทศไทยเพื่อการปรองดองแห่งชาติ” โครงการฯนี้ตั้งคำถามต่อสังคมว่า “ไม่คุยกันวันนี้แล้วจะไปคุยกันวันไหน” ขณะที่รัฐบาลหวังว่าผลสัมฤทธิ์ของโครงการฯจะนำไปสู่การแก้ไขปัญหาความแตกแยกของคนไทยและสร้างการปรองดองในสังคมไทยต่อไป บทความวิจัยนี้ผู้เขียนได้เข้าไปมีส่วนร่วมในโครงการฯ 6 จังหวัดของภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือ คือ ขอนแก่น นครราชสีมา กาฬสินธุ์ ร้อยเอ็ด มหาสารคาม และชัยภูมิ ซึ่งพบถึงปัญหาและอุปสรรคจำนวนมาก ผู้เขียนได้โต้แย้งพร้อมสังเคราะห์ว่า โครงการฯดังกล่าวเต็มไปด้วยปัญหาและอุปสรรคนานัปการ

* อาจารย์ประจำวิทยาลัยการปกครองท้องถิ่น มหาวิทยาลัยขอนแก่น เป็นผู้เขียนหนังสือ *เผชิญภัยความรุนแรงด้วยปรองดอง? บทเรียนจากต่างแดน*. กรุงเทพฯ: โครงการจัดพิมพ์คบไฟ. ผู้สนใจร่วมแลกเปลี่ยนเนื้อหาของงานดังกล่าวสามารถติดต่อได้ที่อีเมล <siwach1980@hotmail.com> บทความวิจัยนี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของงานวิจัยชื่อ “ความพยายามสร้างการปรองดองในสังคมไทย” ซึ่งได้รับทุนอุดหนุนจากสำนักงานกองทุนสนับสนุนการวิจัย (สกว.) ผู้เขียนต้องขอขอบคุณมา ณ ที่นี้ ผู้เขียนขอขอบคุณคุณเจมส์ โรเบิร์ตส์ และ อาจารย์ ชำนาญ ยานะ ที่ช่วยตรวจทานภาษาอังกฤษ (ขอให้อาลัยจากการจากไปอย่างไม่มีวันกลับของอาจารย์ด้วยนะครับ) ที่สำคัญ ขอขอบพระคุณ ศาสตราจารย์ ดร. ชัยวัฒน์ สถาอานันท์ ศาสตราจารย์ ดร. สมบัติ จันทร์วงศ์ และ อ.ดร. ประจักษ์ ก้องกีรติ ที่ร่วมวิพากษ์ แนะนำและให้แง่คิดที่เป็นประโยชน์มหาศาลต่องานวิจัยดังกล่าว

พร้อมเสนอว่า โครงการฯดังกล่าวไม่ได้เป็นวิธีการที่เหมาะสมใด ๆ ต่อกระบวนการสร้างความปรองดอง อย่างไรก็ตาม ในช่วงท้ายของบทความ ผู้เขียนได้แนะนำแก่นแกนความคิดเรื่องการปรองดองและนำเสนอรูปแบบที่สมเหตุผลไว้ โดยเฉพาะการสานเสวนาโดยนำเหยื่อเป็นศูนย์กลางเป็นรูปแบบหลัก หรือนำทั้งเหยื่อและผู้กระทำความรุนแรงเป็นศูนย์กลางในกรณีที่เป็น หากสังคมไทยยังต้องมีโครงการสานเสวนาในอนาคตต่อไป

คำสำคัญ: ปัญหาและอุปสรรค การปรองดอง เวทีสาธารณะ ประเทศไทย

1. Introduction: Overview of the Case

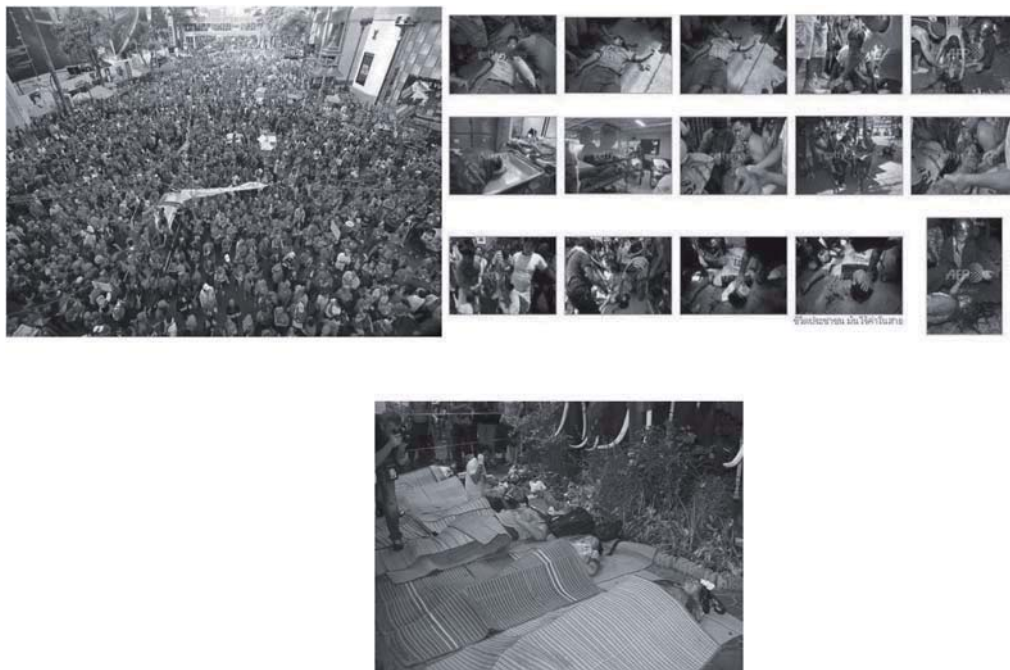
After Yingluck Shinawatra became Thailand's Prime Minister in 2011, her government declared urgent policies to be implemented in the first year, especially "fostering reconciliation and harmony among people in the nation and to restore democracy." (Khaosod, August 20, 2011). In 2012, when the Reconciliation Bill sponsored by the leader of the 2006 coup, General Sonthi Boonyaratklin of the Matubhumi Party (Motherland Party), was read, parliament descended immediately into chaos due to the strength of the opposition from the Democrat Party and the People's Alliance for Democracy (the yellow shirts). There were, however, 6 further reconciliation bills and amnesty bills pending in the parliament.

Although the government was unable to pass these bills, it tried to commit to the proposals recommended by Thailand's Truth for Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and King Prajadhipok's Institute (Institute for Democracy Studies). These proposals were entitled the "Dialogues for National Reconciliation." The government called these dialogues "Public Forums Nationwide for National Reconciliation" (PFNNR), and allocated a budget of 168 million baht for the project (about 5.5 million U.S. dollars). This budget was used to facilitate the training of 420 moderators and to meet the costs of an estimated 75,700 people who were expected to participate in 77 provinces nationwide, held in June and July, 2013. The project was expected to find solutions to achieve national reconciliation throughout Thailand.

2. Thai Society and Location of Dialogues for National Reconciliation

In April and May 2010 under the government of Abhisit Vejjajiva, Thailand suffered its severest outbreak of political violence, culminating in the deaths of 101 people. Nearly all of the victims were unarmed, innocent civilians, exercising their right to protest (the red shirts). This event represents the greatest number of deaths suffered at the expense of democracy in modern Thai political history¹ (Matichon, May 17, 2013), creating a wound which has yet to be healed in Thai society. Not long after that event, the Abhisit Vejjajiva government set up Thailand's TRC, with former Attorney General Kanit Na Nakorn as the chairperson, to probe the clashes between state authorities and the protesters of the anti-government United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (the

red shirts) and to find a way to prevent mass group conflict in the future. The government, however, announced the dissolution of parliament after the TRC had worked for only a year. The Pheu Thai Party (For Thai Party), mainly with the support of the red shirts, won the general election of 3 July 2011. Yingluck Shinawatra (the younger sister of former PM Thaksin Shinawatra) became Thailand’s Prime Minister.



The Severest Outbreak of Political Violence in 2010

Source: Chicago Red Shirts for Democracy, 2010

The new government declared urgent policies to be implemented during the first year, aimed especially at fostering reconciliation and harmony among people in the nation and restoring democracy. The government also gave importance to reinstating all the victims of the 2006 coup d'état to the positions from which they had been removed, and authorized the TRC to continue working as well as assigning the TRC sub-committee to assist and facilitate the TRC. Additionally, the Pheu Thai Party, as the majority group in the parliament, assigned both the House Committee on National Reconciliation, with former coup leader (General Sonthi Boonyaratkalin)

as the chair, and King Prajadhipok's Institute (Institute for Democracy Studies) to conduct academic research for national reconciliation.

Conflicts in Thai society happened again when some members of the Pheu Thai Party chose the content from that research for discussion in parliament. The purpose of the research was to enact an amnesty bill (to become known as the Reconciliation Bill) to absolve all political groups of any wrongdoing. The beneficiaries of that bill were former PM Abhisit Vejjajiva and his colleagues, the soldiers who used tanks and weapons of war against the red shirt protestors, many leaders of both the red shirts (the anti-Abhisit Vejjajiva government movement in 2009-2011) and the yellow shirts (the anti-former PM Thaksin Shinawatra, former PM Samak Sundtornvej, and former PM Somchai Wongsawat governments movement that seized Bangkok's international airport in 2008) and all ordinary protestors except the political prisoners under the *lèse-majesté* law. The amnesty bill also proposed to overturn the legal findings of the Assets Examination Committee (AEC), a junta-appointed committee established to investigate allegations of corruption against Thaksin Shinawatra's administration (as a result of which 40,000 million baht or approximately 1,300 million US dollars of Thaksin's assets were seized).

Consequently, the Democrat Party (as an opposition party led by former PM Abhisit Vejjajiva) and the anti-Thaksin and anti-red shirt movements mutually condemned the proposals of the Pheu Thai Party. These groups also described the research as "illicit research" because they understood that the government's perspectives were only to help Thaksin and the red shirts (the latter being variously labeled as "Puak Pao Ban Pao Mueang" or "those who had burned down the country" and as "terrorists" by the Democrat Party and the yellow shirts).

Finally, an official statement of King Prajadhipok's Institute declared that, "If parliament approved its research by majority voices, the Institute needed to recall the research to prevent a 'reconciliation war' from a 'victor's justice,' causing continuous violence in Thai Society" (Bangkokbiznews, April 4, 2012). The Institute also requested the government to initiate public reconciliation dialogues for more than 3 years. This would then allow the government to bring the amnesty bill before the parliament. Kanit Na Nakorn, chair of the TRC, stressed that the reconciliation process would take time, tolerance and public participation (Nation Weekly,

April 16, 2012).

The author should affirm that the official statements of King Prajadhipok's Institute raised the following concepts and issues: “reconciliation dialogues” for the first time in Thai society and interchangeably using “appreciative dialogue” and “constructive dialogue” (Matichon, April 3, 2012). Neither of these was different from the contents of the research. Moreover, King Prajadhipok's Institute made the following proposal to the government, that “it should arrange public reconciliation forums by mutual understanding, avoid all confrontation, search for common interests, and find a solution for the ordinary people (excluding political or group leaders), the groups, and political leaders by having someone who was neutral to listen...these processes will create an atmosphere of public dialogue and lead to common goals for the future” (The King Prajadhipok's Institute, 2012). Later, the conclusion of the TRC report similarly stated that “listening to public opinion, giving support to public forums, dialogues, and public deliberation to allow people's different opinions and ideas to be expressed and listened to by others, would be the channel through which to decrease the mutual distrust and create mutual compromise, leading to mutual understanding for living peacefully among a society while understanding differences in ideas and opinions” (TRC, 2012).

However in June 2012, the parliament proposed the following 4 amnesty/reconciliation bills for consideration: 1. the bill of General Sonthi Boonyaratkalin backed by 35 fellow MPs; 2. a bill of Samart Keawmeechai, Pheu Thai Party MP from Chiang Rai province, backed by 50 fellow MPs; 3. a bill of Niyom Worapanya, Pheu Thai Party list MP, backed by 22 fellow MPs; and 4. a bill of Nattawut Saikua, Pheu Thai Party list MP and a red shirt leader, backed by 74 fellow MPs. The contents of the first three were similar in demanding amnesty for all groups and overturning the legal verdicts of the AEC. The contents of the fourth requested the rescinding of the legal verdicts found by the AEC; however, there would be no amnesty for people found guilty or who had outstanding charges of terrorism, murder, or attempted murder, or any charges in connection with deaths or injuries. While the parliament was discussing the first bill of General Sonthi, the Democrat Party MPs proceeded toward Parliament President Somsak Kiatsuranont and forcibly removed his chair for failing to stop the consideration of the reconciliation bill. The MPs of the Pheu Thai Party hurried to protect the President. These actions led to disorder

and chaos in the parliament. Finally, the President canceled the discussion; however, the Democrat Party MPs still hurled many objects and paper bills and also shouted harshly at the President. At the same time, many groups totaling about 10,000 people gathered outside the parliament, e.g. the yellow shirts, the multi-colored shirts, and the Siam Samakkeegroup (Thai Harmony to Protect the King), to resist this bill because they were worried that it was an attempt to whitewash Thaksin and remove the judiciary which would be equal to destroying the justice system under His Majesty the King.

Consequently, the reconciliation bills were left undiscussed in the parliament for a year. Recently, the Pheu Thai Party agreed on the amnesty bill of Worachai Hema (Pheu Thai Party MP for SamutPrakan province and a red shirt leader, backed by 42 fellow MPs) to be the one debated by the House in August, 2013. The content was aimed to provide an amnesty broadly for political offenders, but excluded all group protest leaders and those in authority. At the same time, Deputy Prime Minister Chalerm Ubumrung proposed an amnesty bill (backed by 163 fellow MPs) to provide amnesty to all groups and withdraw the legal results of the AEC. Therefore, there were then 6 reconciliation and amnesty bills pending in the parliament.

While waiting for the House to convene in August, 2013, the government spent 168 million baht (approximately 5.5 million U.S. dollars) to arrange nationwide public forums for reconciliation in June and July, 2013, and repeated that it was committed by King Prajadhipok's Institute's and the TRC's proposals to pursue a reconciliation dialogue. The government hoped that Thai society would see a ray of hope if there were reconciliation dialogues with the general people widely and constantly, which might lead to potential reconciliation between all groups in the near future.

3. Meanings and Perceptions of Public Reconciliation Forums in the Context of Thai Society

The TRC's complete report gave 3 relatively conceptual meanings. First, a public forum is a conference where people participate in large numbers and which provides an opportunity to the participants to exchange data and share opinions. This conference concentrates on listening to proposals from the participants. The public forum organizer is obligated to answer questions and apply useful data. Second, deliberative dialogue is a discussion involving groups; these are not specific for any sectorial

representatives or groups in conflict. The participants will exchange opinions and experiences and reflect on the different sides for a holistic understanding in order to form an important base upon which to make a decision. Importantly, deliberative dialogue is not needed to conclude conflict issues. Third, public deliberation is not a discussion to support mutual understandings like deliberative dialogue;— public deliberation is mainly a process of shared public decisions and a search for a shared consensus regarding problems with absolutely no win-lose orientation (TRC, 2012).

There are further reports that indicate that public reconciliation forums need to be done because Thai people will more clearly understand the meaning of reconciliation and that it is concrete, and they will understand what the fundamental conflict problems in Thai society have been (Bu-Ngah Tonyong, 2012). These public reconciliation forums are considered to be moving in the proper direction because, “They do not involve the politicians and their hidden agendas and they can discover the past truth and can be the way out for Thai society to reconcile its differences” (Kowit Puang-ngam, 2012). Moreover, the dialogue methods have offered hope in that the participants will use both their hearts and elegance in their communication, comprised of “to listen, to talk, to read and to write,” called an “appreciative dialogue” (YeawTalamom, 2012a). Further, there is an argument that social therapy for reconciliation needs all voices to be heard, with collaboration in the search for a way out resulting in shared wills and reflections (YeawTalamom, 2012b).

An academic suggested the term “appreciative dialogue” for being closely related to traditional preliminary thoughts of Thai society as “holistic and Buddhism-oriented” because these thoughts were not mechanical or divided into colors (yellow and red) like the present. He also clarified that “appreciative dialogue” is not an interest negotiation or a means to convince people to accept proposals. This dialogue has no hidden agenda and the dialogue will not deteriorate into mudslinging. More importantly, the participants must bracket their own prejudices and beliefs and have the spirit of deep listening (Seri Pongpit, 2012). Examples were given of the experiences of many organizations at the conferences, for example everyone can talk and propose his or her own ideas but cannot reprimand others’ thinking in any conference. In the KhonKaen municipality and all conferences at King Prajadhipok’s Institute, none of the decisions was based on voting. Both examples showed “impressively the need to return to

the conference happily and enjoy seeing one another” (Narit Sektheera, 2012). Another example is from Banmor Sub-district Administrative Organization (SAO) in Phetchaburi province, where they had a project called “one evening, one alley.” The project was to increase the dialogue with the people every evening and had no set agenda for the dialogue. This SAO therefore was aware of the demands of many people and realized that people’s harmony and reconciliation are the by-products. Some people had been hostile before this project was initiated. People could listen to another’s problems and adjust their ideas with more understanding. Consequently, the chief executive of the SAO concluded that, “If people do not talk together, they will not know anything. But if they talk, conflicts can be transformed into reconciliation. All worldly societies are the same” (Thairath, July 3, 2012).

These meanings have been crucially based on a reconciliation dialogue, because if people talk and listen to each other, then recognition and understanding will reach others in terms of “appreciative dialogue.” Hopefully, it might lead to successful reconciliation.

The perceptions of the public reconciliation forums in the context of Thai society can be divided into the following 3 groups: 1) the perceptions of King Prajadhipok’s Institute; 2) the perceptions of the opposition party and some social groups; and 3) the perceptions of the government.

First, King Prajadhipok’s Institute proposed that, as the government had already approved the Institute’s research, the government should next arrange dialogues for national reconciliation (Ban Muang, April 1, 2012) to prevent a “reconciliation war” from a “victor’s justice.” The dialogue should focus on the people nationwide. Importantly, the dialogue should be arranged before the passing of a reconciliation bill, an amnesty bill, or even a constitutional amendment. There was a necessity for dialogue because the atmosphere necessary for reconciliation had not been reached. The dialogue should also take at least 3 years.

Secondly, the Democrat Party or the opposition party proposed that carrying the reconciliation bill or amnesty bill to the House was too hasty and the time for debating the bill was too brief. The government should follow King Prajadhipok’s Institute’s proposals for “appreciative dialogue” to find a mutual way out of the country’s problems (Thairath, May 28, 2012). The Democrats repeated the importance of national

reconciliation dialogue many times. A top member of the Democrat Party iterated that if the government wanted to see real and true reconciliation, it should start from dialogue rather than going cold turkey on anything and only aiming at the amnesty bill² (DailyNews, April 23, 2013). Other members said that dialogue was a process to harmonize people and was better than introducing bills to the House (Khaosod, April 4, 2012). This was similar to the thoughts of the members of the Committee of Relatives of the May 1992 Heroes following the troubles in 1992, who said that listening to the voices of many people and the real participation of people was very important towards reconciliation (The Manager Daily, July 6, 2012).

Although the Democrat Party agreed to dialogue lasting for at least 3 years (Matichon, May 4, 2012), they were worried that the government dialogue would be only a “ritual” because the government might conclude the dialogue with everything in favor of Thaksin (The Manager Weekly May 12, 2012). If the government were to resolve the situation in that fashion, it would deceive the Thai people because the government’s real intention had been to whitewash Thaksin and the red shirts. Furthermore, national reconciliation dialogues, arranged by state agencies (such as the Community Development Department; Ministry of Interior), have been possible as the government wanted dialogue with its own groups, especially the red shirts, because of their support for Thaksin’s order (Matichon, April 7, 2012).

Thirdly, the government was previously uncertain concerning the arrangements for the national reconciliation dialogue proposed by King Prajadhipok’s Institute. If the government were to arrange it, the government would collaborate with state agency networks and would assign many universities to choose the moderators for the dialogue process (Thairath, April 5, 2012). On the other hand, if the government could not arrange it because of time wasted, all of the MPs are from an election so that they are already representatives.

Additionally, the House Committee on National Reconciliation is comprised of many sector opinions such as the chairman of the Federation of Thai Industries, the chairman of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, etc., leading Pheu Thai Party MP Yongyuth Wichaidit³ to comment that, “In the past 4-5 years in Thai society, we have listened to many people and so we

know what and where the problems were” (Khaosod, April 12, 2012). He also proposed that if it were necessary (for the government) to make arrangements, it should arrange 1 public forum in each region (a total of 5 forums, including Bangkok) (Bangkokbiz News, April 25, 2012).

Nevertheless, after the chaos in the House in June, 2012 and in order to prevent pressures from the opposition party, the People’s Alliance for Democracy movement, and other opposition groups, the government finally made a decision and approved a compromise arrangement which it called “Public Forums Nationwide for National Reconciliation” (PFNNR). The author will clarify the background of the PFNNR in the next section.

4. Background of the PFNNR



The Logo of the PFNNR (literally “Dialoguing the Way Out for Thailand”)

Source: Author

The TRC sub-committee agreed to arrange the PFNNR by assigning PM’s Office Permanent Secretary Thongthong Chandrangsue as the President and the Community Development Department of the Ministry of the Interior to be the host of the PFNNR; the process was to be completed within 60 days but could be extended twice (each time for a period of 30 days). The PFNNR would start in June and July, 2012. Suan Dusit Rajabhat University would help evaluate data from the participants. The outcome of the PFNNR would be sent to the cabinet pending presentation to the House (Khaosod, May 11, 2012).

The conceptual framework of the PFNNR followed both the research of King Prajadhipok’s Institute and the TRC report to raise the issue of “the fundamentals of conflict” and to let people find a way out by their own thought process (World Today News, May 23, 2012). The government was confident that the PFNNR would be welcomed by all villages, with all people being able to participate creatively in a search for the future of

Thailand and collaborating and proposing approaches or methods to solve the conflict problems, which would be the first step to peacefully resolving the conflict. With this, Thai society could lead itself to a peaceful, meritorious, merciful, and just society (Matichon Weekly, June 15, 2012).

Ultimately, the PFNNR could not be arranged within the period of June and July, 2012 because of budget problems (DailyNews, June 18, 2012), political problems, especially a constitutional amendment that the constitutional court did not permit, and other policy making problems relating to the 2020 investment policy's change in base structures in Thailand. Since these problems resulted in the PFNNR's postponement, the government declared that the PFNNR would be rearranged for January and February, 2013 but it was postponed again. Finally, the government stated that the PFNNR would definitely be arranged in June and July, 2013.

The TRC sub-committee entrusted Suan Dusit Rajabhat University's former rector, Associate Professor Dr. Sukhum Chaleysub, to select the target groups for the PFNNR and summarize all issues resulting from the PFNNR. Dr. Sukhum explained that 108 PFNNR forums would be organized in constituencies in Thailand with the target groups being selected from all occupation groups in each constituency. There were about 200-300 target groups per constituency, depending on the size of the population. Dr. Sukhum also explained that this was because the accuracy of the population of each constituency had been determined and he saw that the constituency has been the source of the main conflict in Thai society (Matichon, December 12, 2012).

The target groups consisted of selected participants from the following social groups: (1) applicants who wanted to participate (selected by drawing lots), 25%; (2) agriculture (farmers, fishermen), 15%; (3) manual labor (employees, workers), 15%; (4) state employees (soldiers, policemen, teachers, government officials), 15%; (5) industrial, service, and commercial sectors (business owners, entrepreneurs), 8%; (6) doctors and nurses, 5%; (7) students both in schools and in universities, 5%; (8) academics and intellectuals, 2%; (9) community leaders (sub-district headmen, village headmen, community representatives), 2%; (10) people organizations (NGOs), 2%; (11) political sectors (MPs, members of a provincial administrative organizations, municipalities, or sub-district administrative organizations), 2%; (12) monks, pious, and religious leaders, 1%; (13) mass

media, 1 %; and (14) others, 2%.⁴

The selection process outlined above means that if the target group of a constituency had 300 people, the number of applicants who wanted to participate (selected by drawing lots), would be 75. All the groups (except the seventh) had to be at least 18 years old. Most importantly, all of them had to be interested in political issues and be ready to help find a peaceful way out for Thai society.

In addition, the moderators of the PFNNR were selected by the provincial community development department. They were mostly academics and it was hoped that they would be neutral but local philosophers or thinkers could be moderators, too. However, the PFNNR organizers believed in ability of the academics because they were “sophisticated and had theoretical capabilities” and the PFNNR wanted to avoid one-sided, partial moderators. All moderators had to attend at least one day of training in Bangkok. Dr. Sukhum said that one day of training was enough to create knowledge and understanding. Besides, it was hoped the moderators would speak only a little and would mostly listen to the participants, collect the participants’ opinions, and take notes.

Not only the government but also the PFNNR organizers had high expectations. Similarly, Associate Professor Asadang Panikabutr, a consultant of the PFNNR and the former rector of Ramkhamhaeng University, insisted metaphorically that, “The locality is yours, the mountains are yours; so, if they belong to you, you should take care of them. The PFNNR has at least 75,700 participants and provides a huge chance for all to talk. The mobilization of opinions in this case is very great because those opinions are from real people. An investment of a budget of 168 million baht (about 5.5 million U.S. dollars) must be worthwhile because the simultaneous mobilization of opinions is very interesting” (Matichon, May 22, 2013).

Taking into account all the above, it can be argued that the PFNNR was an enthusiastic channel for conflict resolution in Thai society. In the following section, the author will set out research questions and methodology, as well as the scope of the study.

5. Research Questions, Methodology and Scope of Study

The questions the author has tried to study in this article are as follows: What is the background of the PFNNR? How did the PFNNR

come into Thai society? What points of significance did the author see? What were the crucial problems and obstacles? If the PFNNR has problems, how could it be criticized academically? How should the author suggest away out for reconciliation forums? Finally, how should the author propose some contributive content and suggest a more compatible model for reconciliation making for Thai society?

To elaborate on all these questions, the author used books, newspapers, review articles, manuals, and bureaucratic documents to gain an understanding of the background and importance of the PFNNR, as well as to find what were the correct data and primary data. The author also participated in the PFNNR as an observer at both large public forums (with about 600, 800, 1,000 people in attendance) in the mornings and sub-public forums in the afternoons. The author recorded many details, interviewed participants from state agencies, moderators, and other participants to consider how the reconciliation concept was working within the PFNNR and to synthesize the advantages/disadvantages and obstacles from each case.

The author participated in the twelfth group of provinces comprising KhonKaen, Kalasin and Roi Et provinces and in the fourteenth group comprising NakhonRatchasima, Chaiyaphum, and Mahasarakham provinces.⁵

The following important question is: why did the author attend these 2 groups of provinces? The author not only realized the importance of the sizes of the provinces that consist of 51 constituencies but also hoped that there would be many participants; in fact, approximately 10,200 people took part.⁶ Politically, the people in these groups were part of a political stronghold for the Pheu Thai Party (the government party)⁷. Many of them took part during the political struggles for both the red shirts and the yellow shirts. There were violent political events in these areas; also, there were many political victims and political prisoners charged with offences under the emergency bill of the Abhisit government, for offenses such as carrying a weapon, attempted arson, terrorism, and so forth. There were, crucially, deaths and many people were put in jail.⁸ The author hoped to understand the meaning of reconciliation from the differing viewpoints of the people in 2 opposing groups in these provinces and, as the author had worked in these areas, it was more convenient to access the data from state agencies and the moderators in these provinces than in other areas.⁹

6. Results and Discussions

The results provided many interesting issues to discuss academically and critically; however, the author will divide them systematically into 3 topics: 1, preparation of the PFNNR; 2, details of the PFNNR; and 3, crucial problems of the PFNNR, as follows:

6.1 Preparation of the PFNNR

The Thai Interior Ministry sent a most urgent document (May 16, 2013) to all provincial governors representing the 77 provinces nationwide and assigned each of them to select the target groups as proposed by Suan Dusit Rajabhat University. This document also ordered all provinces to protect the PFNNR process, provide medical treatment, and set out a plan in case of disorder to preserve a good image and a relaxed atmosphere.¹⁰ Another most urgent document (June 7, 2013) raised 9 important issues and political conflict conditions relating to dialogue, consisting of: (1) understanding different views of democracy (between electoral democracy and liberal democracy); (2) distrust in the rule of Thai law; (3) judicial activism and interference with independent judicial entities; (4) coup d'état and the role of the military in conflict management; (5) economic and social inequality; (6) increasing private political media; (7) claiming the monarch for political benefits by groups; (8) lack of knowledge in peaceful conflict resolution; and (9) excess irreconcilable competition in politics. It also sent sets of questionnaires to survey the participants' ideas.¹¹

There were 22 provincial groups consisting of 3 groups in Bangkok and 19 other groups for the provinces. The pilot PFNNR arranged forums in 4 regions on June 10, 2013¹²; 104 forums nationwide remained to be held between June and July, 2013, and 168 million baht was spent (about 5.5 million U.S. dollars) for these forums. Each moderator got 9,200 baht a day (about 300 dollars) and each participant got 400 baht a day (about 13 dollars); a pickup driver would get an extra 200-400 baht (about 7-13 dollars), if he could mobilize people from their community. However, no one would get money until after the PFNNR had finished (15.00 pm) because the organizers were worried about only a small number of people being in attendance if the money was prepaid.

Before the PFNNR started, all 420 moderators were trained at operational workshops in Bangkok to learn how to be efficient and creative

a good atmosphere for the forthcoming forums. The aims of these workshops were to change the behavior of the PFNNR participants through the moderator’s skills (Chonlawit Jeerajit, 2013), and to recommend suitable personalities for those moderators.

The twelfth group of provinces (KhonKaen, Kalasin and Roi Et) and the fourteenth group (NakhonRatchasima, Chaiyaphum, and Mahasarakham) both had 20 moderators (10 moderators in KhonKaen, 5 in Kalasin, and 5 in Roi Et and 10 moderators in NakhonRatchasima, 5 in Chaiyaphum, and 5 in Mahasarakham). All moderators were recruited from university lecturers, vocational school teachers, pension educationists, pension bureaucrats, local philosophers, social sectors, etc.

There were widespread public relations for the PFNNR through national radio, community radio, and posters at city halls district offices, and at universities. The posters showed the PFNNR slogan, “If we do not talk today, when will we talk? Come to talk to search for a way out of conflicts in Thailand. Propose ideas, select approaches, reconcile, and solve problems mutually in 108 forums nationwide!”

In sum, reconciliation was a large issue and many sectors of Thai society had high hopes for the PFNNR. Mr.Vinai Buapradit, the governor of NakhonRatchasima said, “The PFNNR would be a forum open to all sectors to express practical ideas, to exchange ideas for mutual understanding, and to decrease Thai political conflicts, which will lead to a return to reconciliation in Thai society”¹³. The chief of community development in Chaiyaphum province told the author that “the PFNNR could bring about reconciliation”¹⁴ and a KhonKaen university lecturer (who was a moderator) said to the participants in the KhonKaen forum that, “All of you were selected as suitable to be a part of Thai history in reconciliation making. You will help Thai society to come out of the conflict labyrinth. The PFNNR is a real reconciliation forum.” Many sectors, therefore, hoped to achieve reconciliation through the PFNNR.

6.2 Details of the PFNNR

The schedule of a forum of the PFNNR was anticipated to be 09.00-15.00 (09.00-12.00 in the morning and 13.00-15.00 in the afternoon), depending on each university host. In NakhonRatchasima, Mahasarakham, Kalasin, and Roi Et, there were grand opening speeches from the rectors of

the universities in those locations, while in KhonKaen and Chaiyaphum there was no priority given to the grand opening. The governor of Chaiyaphum province participated in the Chaiyaphum forum and Thongthong Chandrangsri, the President of the PFNNR, participated in the Roi Et forum, while other provinces did not have high-level bureaucratic participation because they were keeping an image of neutrality.

After the grand opening had finished in the morning, there was a video introduction to project the past political conflicts and the struggles in the streets between the different coloured shirts during the years 2006-2010. It was said that those conflicts “effected disorder and disharmony on Thai society”; also that the introduction of and necessity for reconciliation had resulted in the setting up of many reconciliation committees, as well as the identification of the 9 important issues and the political conflict conditions to be the subjects of dialogue. At the end of the video, it stated that the objectives of the PFNNR were that: 1) all participating individuals be given a chance to talk; 2) a mutual understanding be arrived at to find a way out; and 3) all useful ideas for reconciliation be heard. However, more video was added in July about: 1) the history of the war leading to the second fall of Ayutthaya (the former capital between 1351-1767); 2) the Rwandan genocide in 1994; and 3) the National Flag Song sung by a choir of students.

All moderators were later introduced. Some of them were on the stage to discuss the Thai political conflict. The moderators of the fourteenth provincial group discussed the 9 important issues, while those of the twelfth provincial group did not but each moderator could talk about whatever he or she wished. The participants could express their ideas for 30 minutes before 12.00.

In the afternoon, the participants were divided into sub-rooms (there were 10 sub-rooms and 100 participants per sub-room in NakhonRatchasima and Mahasarakham, 10 sub-rooms and 80 participants per sub-room in Chaiyaphum, 20 sub-rooms and 40 participants per sub-room in Roi Et, and 20 sub-rooms and 30 participants per sub-room in Kalasin. In KhonKaen province, however, there were no sub-rooms because of a limitation on space. The author will show the main study findings in the next section.

6.3 Crucial Problems of the PFNNR

It is primarily important to know that there were problems of not enough public relations because the forums had been frequently postponed from June and July, 2012 and again from January and February, 2013 to being arranged eventually in June and July, 2013. When they were finally held, there was not enough time for publicity. Likewise, some of the mass media in Thai society did not know who the organizers were.¹⁵ Some participants did not know to which forum they were going, either. Furthermore, the PFNNR organization process was too hasty and short-term to produce a conclusive result to be put before the House in August, 2013. The other problems included: too short a period for expression by the participants in the morning, with only about 30 minutes between 11.30-12.00 which resulted in some participants showing their displeasure; in KhonKaen province there were no sub-rooms in the afternoon; participants were not permitted to talk because the room was too big, and had to send what they wanted to say to the moderators in writing; however, some participants could not write (the poor and the uneducated), and they had to beg people nearby to write for them; some would have liked to talk more, especially as some people had traveled from far away with the intention of talking, and for them talking could be shown to be more expressive by use of their verbal language and emotional voice. In addition, there were location problems; for example, in both Kalasin and Roi Et provinces, the sub-rooms for dialogue were on the 4th-6th floors but the elevators were out of order which was a problem for the elderly who had to walk upstairs. A more detailed problem was a disposition problem as there was some conflict dialogue; when people speak with their independent thinking at a podium in front of the stage, they should face the moderators on the stage and turn their backs on the audience in order to avoid a confrontation. There was no problem in 5 out of 6 provinces but the exception was in Roi Et province. There was a chaotic event when a participant blamed many politicians who regularly buy votes. Later, a local politician who served as the chief executive of the sub-district municipality went to the podium and said irritably, “I have never bought a vote in my area.” At that moment, the atmosphere became bad as many people jeered him and one shouted aloud, “There was no vote buying? It has been everywhere. All politicians like to invest and gain.” There were further problems about the audio and microphone quality and there was no water in the bathroom (this was in

Maharakham province).

The author will explain crucial problems of the PFNNR which, in the author's view, could be divided into 4 problems as follows:

6.3.1 Problems of “Thainess” at a Grand Opening Ritual

The grand opening speech in Thai society always has been given by the host or an elder or the main money supporter, etc. The most important person at the event gets to talk first, whether it is a birthday party, a wedding party, a bureaucratic ceremony, or a sporting occasion, e.g. a boxing or football match. The speaker normally takes a long time to talk (and, when the first speaker has completed his speech, a second or third speaker continues). Thai custom is deeply entrenched and it is not permitted to warn and interrupt the speakers if they are too talkative because of the regard for their reputations. Thai society knows these traits as “Thainess”.

The PFNNR was not an exception to the “Thainess” umbrella. In NakhonRatchasima, Kalasin, Roi Et, and Maharakham provinces, the grand opening speeches were by the rectors of each Rajabhat university, but all 4 rectors had been recently appointed by those university councils, and they were too talkative and seemed to wish to show their visions for their university. In Kalasin province (with not many participants) for example, when the rector completed his talk, it was at 10.00 am. The Kalasin rector called for people's harmony and stated his university policy; having been recently appointed, he took a long time discussing his university vision, the number of faculties, the university curricula for both the undergraduates and the graduates, the number of faculties to be opened in the near future, the number of present students and the raising of its status from Kalasin Rajabhat University to Kalasin University that has been pending in parliament. He talked for about 30 minutes. The Kalasin vice-rector then added that, “If we quarrel, who will listen to the national anthem which we sing? If we can compromise like our ancestors, that is harmony; we will find a way out.” There were similar efforts from the rectors of Roi Et Rajabhat University and Maharakham Rajabhat University who both talked for about 45 minutes. The rector of Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University requested harmony among the participants, suggested that “home, temple and school” would help to decrease conflicts, and begged the participants to practice the five Buddhist

commandments in daily life because they were the real way out of Thai political conflict. The rector also stated the university’s policy to prepare for the ASEAN Economic Community; she talked for about 40 minutes.

Consequently, the forums were left with too little time in the morning because, in addition to the moderators’ speeches, there remained the video opening introduction about the PFNNR. This meant that the people’s dialogue had only a limited time and they could not talk for long. At some forums, there were many waiting in long queues to talk so that the moderators begged people to talk briefly because of the approaching lunch time.

6.3.2 Problems of the Moderators

Some high level bureaucrats told the author that they were so confident in the moderators and were not worried about any of the general problems that occurred although some moderators talked for too long or seemed to be teaching and lecturing. One moderator told the author that, “I am worried about the people being in disharmony and discord after I speak because there are too many political conflicts.” He obviously misunderstood his role and thought that he would really have to be a speaker and not the listener that he should have been.

Moderators from the fourteenth provincial group discussed the 9 important issues that followed the PFNNR objectives, but they seemed to be following the guided framework too strictly. The twelfth provincial group moderators could talk about whatever they wanted, but the problems came from what they said. The author will give 3 problematic examples of the forums in the morning session.

First, a conservative moderator, who is a Chaiyaphum Rajabhat University lecturer and former sheriff, discussed on the stage about the seventh issue (claiming the monarch for political benefits by groups) in 6 forums of the fourteenth provincial group. He used the same content as follows:

“There are now many efforts to build a new Thai state under a presidential system...there have been anti-monarchy movements with a chart of the network to overthrow the monarchy¹⁶; each government must have a means to protect the monarchy, because some people will defame, insult or threaten the King. Some of those people are still in jail¹⁷ and cannot appeal. There were some bad intellectuals¹⁸, who wanted to amend

Article 112¹⁹, notably the Nitirat group. If the government amends the constitutional law, does it touch the status of the King?...We have been governed under paternalism for a long time, and the father (the King) always loves his children (the people). Although the thrones were abolished in France and Russia, those Kings were abusive in contrast to the Thai King who has been compassionate...We lost the Burmese–Siamese War twice because of disharmony among the people and disharmony has occurred between 1767 and 2013. Thai society has now become unstable because there are 3,000-4,000 anti-monarchy websites. Thai society has been doubtful about why the law keepers permit those websites. Almost all the cars in Thailand have a sticker “We love the King.” The question is asked as to whether we love him because we still let some people defame him.” Likewise, another moderator said in the KhonKaen forum that the Thai political problem stemmed from destroying the monarchy.

These ideas are of interest for criticism because they miss the key point that should be analyzed as Thai society must realize how the tactic of bringing the King to discredit rival groups has worked and whether this method will harm the monarchy itself in the long term. However, it has never been discussed and analyzed in the PFNNR. Furthermore, while considering the sixth issue as a root cause of conflict - (increasing private political media) -it should be considered that the PFNNR does not wish the participants to believe in mass media totally but wishes them to use their own judgment when listening, but the moderators have brought forward these world views solely from the mass media without any reconsideration of the content. Ultimately, those speeches were unfair to the individuals involved and did not contribute to Thai conflict resolution.

Secondly, a moderator talked about the fourth issue (the coup d'état and the role of the military in conflict management) on the stage in the NakhonRatchasima forum and he begged the participants to love harmony and reconciliation. He also talked problematically in the following way:

“The 2006 coup d'état created many unjust independent judicial entities that led to political conflicts and the former government always used some tools, notably martial law and the emergency law, to suppress protestors. However, there were some favorite coups, in particular the 1976 coup²⁰ and the 1991 coup²¹, unlike the 2006 coup, which only created a lot of problems.” He hopefully said that “the PFNNR is a forum to pick

a flower on Earth and move you to the farthest star for listening to the participants’ voices toward peace keeping.”

It is important to note some of the main problems about the previous coups, both the 1976 coup and 1991 coup which he described as “favorite coups” of Thai society. Although some people, especially the ultra-right wing conservatives, admired the 1976 coup because the government had indecisively suppressed the students (with at least 46 students killed), they celebrated the overthrow and hoped the new government would suppress more decisively. The 1991 coup was welcomed by some people, especially the middle-class, who were dissatisfied with the corruption in the former government.

In fact, if the moderator had used the same criteria, some people liked the 2006 coup, too. However, the issue is not whether people admired a coup, but more importantly how it affected society as a whole; for example, a coup results in state security suppressing anyone who disagreed with the coup (the students between 1976-1980, the red shirts after the 2006 coup, etc.), in legitimizing corruption in the government backed by the military and in misunderstanding the privileges of military supremacy. The speech mentioned above was putting forward a new set of historical viewpoints to distort other controversial historical events.

Thirdly, a moderator talked about the first issue (understanding different views of democracy (between electoral and liberal democracies)) in both the Roi Et and KhonKaen forums. He discussed the failure of the “6-second democracy” (the voting procedure) and showed many news headlines such as, “Many MPs were absent”, “MP gangsters”, etc. He also stated that, “MPs have authorized only corruption, speculative stocks, receiving bribes, squeezing money, land speculation, resource exploitation, budget deduction, charging a percentage from the contractor, etc. resulting in the loss 503,185,200 baht (about 16.2 million dollars) a year for hiring independent judicial entities to control those acts.” He repeated that the most important aspect of political conflict was the people who have never realized how the politicians behave. During his talk, he tried to show more scandalous news of politicians: “a rude MP flipping the bird in the House” and “a corruption trial of an MP.” He showed a picture of a dog lowering its head to the soil with a short message reading “hiring to disgrace” shown to explain the bad behavior of politicians that occurred regularly. He

finally predicted that every 4 years of each Thai government's term would result in corruption amounting to 111 billion baht (about 3.7 billion dollars).²²

It should be realized that the main point of the first issue is the understanding of different views of democracy (between electoral democracy and liberal democracy) but none of the moderators talked about the relevant content. To blame politicians is normally inevitable; however, people can control and criticize politicians in a democratic regime, while in an undemocratic one, do many people dare to criticize? Or could we use the same criteria for politicians compared with some institutions that cannot be criticized (the military, the judiciary, and the monarchy)? To sum up, the moderators only talked happily and humorously but made no valid contribution.

Furthermore, some moderators still missed the point of the PFNNR goals. Some taught Buddhism to the participants in NakhonRatchasima province while others talked irrelevantly that “to be good citizens is to love harmony; we lost in the Burmese–Siamese war by sacrificing Krung Sri Ayutthaya as it was seized because of the people being in disharmony.... We should be humble, grateful, and with a good personality”. Please consider the forum pictures in the morning session:



The PFNNR in the Morning²³

Source: Author

During the afternoon session, the moderators had their own different characteristics in the sub-rooms. Some let the participants talk about whatever they wished to, while others stuck to the issue guidelines and the participants had to talk only on those issues. Some did not permit the participants to talk about institutions such as the monarchy, the military, and the judiciary.

Interestingly, there was a moderator who had taught at KhonKaen University in the forum of Kalasin province. All the moderators would permit the observers to participate in the sub-rooms, but he did not. He refused to let the air conditioner be used in the room, so that his voice could be heard. He gave a monologue and lectured so that the participants were not allowed to talk. He took a long time to lecture about the democratic constitution that had been overturned to a dictatorship. For example, he raised the case of Adolf Hitler who came to power from an electoral democracy but ended up abusing power, etc. Please consider some pictures of the forums in the afternoon sessions:



The PFNNR in the Afternoon²⁴

Source: Author

Taking into account all of the above, it might be hard or even impossible to argue that the moderators should have been neutral and mature because they have seen different realities and worlds. However, in the forums they should not have been like agents of the state to indoctrinate their own ideologies to the participants and reproduce their own sets of truth. Both the reproduction of ideologies and truth were as pure, naive and neutral as the educational institution (Althusser, 1971) to legitimize those voices. As a result of these problems, the author therefore argues that these traits and methods from the moderators could seem to be only a “national brainwashing project.”

6.3.3 The Problem of the Group Qualification Proportion of the PFNNR

The next problem is the proportions of the group qualification selected by Suan Dusit Rajabhat University. This qualification included all the occupational groups which might be suitable to other forums such as Thailand Reform Forums, People Problem Hearings Forums, People’s Voice Forums, etc. The main goal of the PFNNR, nevertheless, was generating a hope for reconciliation.

It should be noticed that the most important issue was that the PFNNR, in anticipation of the forums arranged for January and February that were postponed to a later date, proposed a selection of 5% political victims as a target group; but this was later excluded because the government was worried about the victims’ anger and an “irreconcilable atmosphere.”²⁵

Consequently, a political necessity for the participants was the limitation of the PFNNR. Each province energetically recruited participants in full accord with the proportion specified. It was advertised that each participant would be given 400 baht (13 US dollars), which is above the minimum wage of 300 baht (10 US dollars). However, some people were not interested because they, especially in Kalasin province, chose to do their harvest, as it was the harvest season. In addition, the locations for holding the forums were often so far away from people’s homes, in some cases up to 100 kilometers, especially the NakhonRatchasima. Also there were not many participants, between 500 and 800, because of heavy rain in the Roi Et forum. Furthermore, many people, who had registered to participate, were absent. A lot of people failed to fill in their paperwork;

there were similarities between KhonKaen and Mahsarakham provinces where the forums did not begin until nearly 10.00 am. The PFNNR announcer in Kalasin persuaded some participants to, “Hurry up! Today, you will get money”; in NakhonRatchasima it was, “Hurry up! Please fill in all the required information, you will get pocket money.”

Moreover, there was a lack of political urgency, with many participants not recognizing the PFNNR’s importance. For example, they often did not talk about the 9 important issues or try to engage in a dialogue about the conditions which lead to political conflict; and many participants were quiet, possibly because they had nothing to talk about or they might have wanted to talk but they were shy because of the hundreds of people in the morning sessions. They might have been worried about talking about Thai political conflict. The participants who did most of the talking were from clusters of local politicians and bureaucrats.

There were not many participants in the afternoon sessions, notably in the Kalasin forum, which previously had divided the people into 20 sub-rooms (30 participants for each sub-room) but which was reduced to 14 sub-rooms because 150 of the participants disappeared; or in the Roi Et forum which divided the people into 20 sub-rooms (40 participants for each sub-room), but which had an average of only 22 participants in each sub-room; or in the Chaiyaphum forum, where a lot of participants slept under the trees waiting for the time to get their money at 15.00 pm. The author does not imply that these people were wrong and irresponsible but that the problem arose from the group qualification proportions and about how much participants needed to engage themselves seriously in the politics of reconciliation.

More interestingly, for the first target group, consisting of applicants selected by drawing lots and comprising 25% of all participants, all the provincial PFNNR ignored the criterion and recruited many lecturers, staff, and students to participate, in particular the Mahasarakham PFNNR because at that forum 400 out of 1,000 participants were from this educational group. Please consider these pictures below:



The left picture was a poster advertising the Chaiyaphum forum (it says, “apply for the PFNNR, for 18 years up, 350 people”) for the first target group (not by drawing lots) and the right picture consists of many students participating in the Mahasarakham forum (again not chosen by drawing lots).

Source: Author

Accordingly, while the group qualification proportions were problematic and the participants’ voices might not, therefore, have related to the reconciliation problem, it does not mean that there were no significant voices at all. Although the participants had only 30 minutes in the morning session and 2 hours in the afternoon session to talk, many participants discussed the most difficult topics in Thai politics in the reconciliation forums, such as: “We should ways between the rice price-guarantee policy or the rice-pledging price policy”; “The government should not cut the pledging price”; “The government should help low-income farmers”; “There is a lack of water for agriculture”; “Their families have debt”; “The 300 baht minimum wage did not help to increase well-being because many employers did not pay for overtime”; “The government should improve the ‘One sub-district, One-Product’ policy”; “What caused the death of Akeyuth Anchanbutr?”²⁶; “What was the real problem of the monk Wirapol Sukphol?”²⁷, and so on.

Some politicians, both at national and local levels, were participants. Surawit Khonsomboon, Pheu Thai Party MP for Chaiyaphum province, said, “Do not look back; the past is gone, and it is better to look forward to the future.”²⁸ Prasit Chaiwirat, Pheu Thai Party MP for Chaiyaphum province, said, “The only way out is for Thai people to love and forgive each other.” Some local politicians boasted of their abilities in successful policy implementation despite these did not involving the PFNNR issues, and

some requested the government to provide bigger budgets for local administrative organizations.

Some participants blamed everything on MPs, some asked about the MPs' sincerity because of their long absences from the parliament, some begged the politicians to decrease the risk of conflicts. Some suggested the setting-up of a politician training school to implant ethics, some blamed the situation on partial mass media and on biased academicians, and some proposed that there should not be opposition parties as government should be by a coalition of all parties.

Some participants raised issues relating to the monarchy and religion. Notably some proposed that the King should find a solution to political conflicts by using his charisma. Some proposed that Thai people should practice sufficiency economy according to the King's philosophy. Some proposed that we should elect good politicians, who were “fully equipped with knowledge, discipline, merit, and sacrifice and who practiced the five Buddhist commandments.” Many participants focused on the practice of the five Buddhist commandments in daily life. One participant, a Christian leader in Chaiyaphum, spoke of God's love for people, while a monk from NakhonRatchasima willingly proposed that “the State should change the regime from democracy to Dhamma-cracy. Democracy, which led people to be greedy and ignorant, and to guide our fathers, mothers, brothers and friends wrongly, is worthless because such democracy has made people split up; so, it should be immediately changed to Dhamma-cracy.” He also paradoxically said that, “People who are thinking of destroying this country, must get out of this country.” Finally, a monk from KhonKaen suggested that, “If you love your father, do not quarrel with each other. The world will be destroyed when there are more non-believers.”

However, there were participants who spoke about the structural problems of Thai society. Some proposed a reform of the educational system; some emphasized a lack of mass media reform; some said that Thai society should enforce the law relating to street protests; some talked about the drug problem; some suggested that Thai society should not be subjected to populism policies; some complained that their representatives in the government should have come to listen to the forums instead of relying on data provided by the participants or the PFNNR organizers.

There were very few references to reconciliation in those views. A participant in KhonKaen said that if politicians did not quarrel, there would be reconciliation. A participant proposed unconventionally that it should take all military ranks to amend the constitution to be more democratic, and then reconciliation would occur. The hope for Thai society is in the military institution. A participant in Chaiyaphum proposed that the government should legislate for people to live separately and for the red shirts and the yellow shirts not to interfere with each other. A participant in NakhonRatchasima said that Thai society should have intermediaries to make all conflict groups talk peacefully. A participant in Roi Et said that justice must come, and democracy will emerge. Interestingly, the last speaker voiced support for using the 66/23 policy.²⁹ Please consider these pictures:



The Forums Sparsely Attended³⁰

Source: Author

There has rarely been public deliberation of reconciliation issues which included all occupational groups of society as participants. An advantage was that many people could express their thoughts in different ways, although some criticized the budget and a break-even point.³¹ However, the author disagreed with such comments. The main point, which the author realizes, is the limitation of the PFNNR's relationship with the reconciliation issue. All those occupational groups lacked any political relevance and motivation, unlike the political victims and the political prisoners including many people who have been affected by political violence.

Consequently, there were no moderators or participants talking about the important reconciliation components. For example, they did not talk about truth-seeking for the political violence of 2010. They did not consider what to do with the perpetrators of the political violence involved, e.g. the higher commanders of both the military and the colored shirts. They also did not talk about reconciliation and amnesty, and, if there were an amnesty, how to apply the amnesty and how to understand deeply the routes of forgiveness (Chaiwat, 1999; Thanet, 1999; and Nathiya, 2009). More importantly, there is the question of what to do with the political prisoners and other victims who are still in jail despite the fact that they are ordinary people. How are they to be given suitable reparation in any other way except by giving them money? Should Thai society reform some institutions that have been involved in many violent events such as the military and the judiciary? Should there be a study of the underlying violence embedded in Thai culture that led to political violence in 2010? Should Thai society open spaces to remember past traumatic events through sculptures, monuments, museums, public gardens, libraries, etc. which would act as records of the past political violent events, as well as praying that those events would never happen again?

While these questions have not been addressed, how can we try to understand and interpret the reconciliation intentions of the Thai state; what will we see? Is it possible to think that all the problems in the details of the forums, of the “Thainess”, of the grand opening ritual, of the moderators and of the group qualification proportions, are definitely “total results” coming from an understanding towards reconciliation in Thailand? The further question is, therefore, how can we understand and interpret the Thai state’s meaning of reconciliation and, comparatively, what are the indications and colors of that understanding?

6.3.4 Problems of Understanding towards Reconciliation of the Thai State³²

Although, the PFNNR mobilized many people to participate in 77 provinces nationwide, each of the forums consisted of 1,000, 800 or 600 participants. In the course of the forums, the organizers asked the participants to answer questionnaires on the 9 important issues and political conflict conditions, and to specify what was the main cause of conflict in Thailand in order to find a shared consensus and also asked

them to answer more questionnaires.³³ This may be suitable for a poll to survey public opinion, but it is not suitable for a concept called a “dialogue” in a reconciliation forum because there were too many participants at each forum. Therefore, the understanding of the dialogue concept of the state obviously reduced the values of reconciliation.

Nevertheless, the issues above may not be substantial enough for the state to understand; but more importantly, the state might understand that if it were to see a massive mobilization of the people, (though not the people who participated and lacked political relevance because they were not political victims or the politically affected), in reliable and neutral places, notably educational institutions, as well as some of the contents depicted in the video. There may be a meaning for reconciliation and, after watching this video, Thai people may love each other again.

In the morning forum sessions, after the grand opening speech (if any) was finished, there was the video which opened the project and which showed the past political conflicts in the color struggle between 2006-2010; it was comprised of pictures of wounded protestors, protestors’ fights, a soldier holding a weapon, and people crying to show the political tragedy resulting from different political ideologies. These pictures undoubtedly invoked the expected feelings of the audiences to have compassion and sympathy for the country.

The video said that a reconciliation dialogue is the best way out for Thai society and for the Thai people to love each other from now on. It also said that the expected result of the PFNNR were a reconciliation dialogue that will lead to the real way out so that Thailand will be a country with a love of harmony, with the people reconciled to each other, all classes having rights and equality without exception so that the effect is a better and more sustainable way of life for everyone and the effect on the state is state security, economic security, and the self-confidence to conduct international relations for further development of the country.

It should be realized that understanding the concept of love and harmony for the Thai state has been obviously defective. It is hard to find an ideal society in which people do not have conflicts because it is normally the nature of a political society that it is full of conflicts; but most of the questions are how to keep the peace and not surrender to the use of violence. To request people to love each other has overlooked the political victims,

who have been sent the message and been begged to “forgive and sacrifice themselves, please” in order to look forward to the future (Siwach Sripokangkul, 2013). At the same time, in asking the victims to forget, the people are being asked to remember something. If we consider the video contents further, especially the one with the later added contents of: 1) the history of the war of the second fall of Ayutthaya (the former capital between 1351-1767); 2) the Rwandan genocide in 1994; and 3) the National Flag Song sung by a choir of students, we find that the total length was 31 minutes.³⁴

First, the video began dramatically as a classic tragedy which it was hoped that the Thai people would remember. It used the word “injustice” in the case of the history of the war of the second fall of Ayutthaya (the Siamese lost to the Burmese). It also raised questions for the Thai people, “Why have we studied history, to remember dates, months, and years? Or is it to learn by heart about the important men in history? If that is so, what are the benefits that history is teaching us?” It stressed that historical study was crucial because it acknowledged the past and made the present better. It also said that several repeated problems of Thai society are poverty, bureaucratic corruption, and the Thai people’s disharmony including excess competition to seize power among the politicians who have to administer the country. It concluded that it is time to look back to study and search for the causes of the loss of Siam land that occurred in the war of the second fall of Ayutthaya.

The narrative started with the prince named Ekkathat opportunistically appointing himself to be the King despite the fact that the former King, before his death, had decided to appoint Ekkathat’s younger brother, the prince Uthumphon. Then King Ekkathat started to abuse his power; for example, he gave his wife power equal to himself, he confiscated the property of many people who were to be executed and gave it to his wife, and led some noblemen into corruption. Many others in the royal family and the noblemen were dissatisfied and there were recurrent rebellions that caused the people in the Ayutthaya kingdom to be split up and led to a worse outcome. The Burmese king named Alaungpaya knew about the problems in Ayutthaya, so he declared war against it and set out to make Ayutthaya a colony of Burma; however, he died during the war after being rushed back from the Siamese front by the advance guard, (although Burmese history said that he died because of illness, not because

of the war). The Burmese armies therefore lost and returned to their own country.

In response to Burma, Ayutthaya incited Burma's colonies to rebel and liberate themselves from Burma; the new militaristic king of Burma named Hsinbyushin not only suppressed those disobedient colonies but also occupied all the colonies e.g. Lane Sang, Chiang Mai, Tavoy, Mnipur etc., so that he could recruit an army of 30,000 men. The new king declared war against Ayutthaya and wished to completely destroy Ayutthaya's influence. He also declared that whatever provinces willingly conceded to become Burmese allies had to send armies and provisions to be safe, but whatever provinces opposed, they would be burned down. King Ekkathat prepared for war and increased his armies to 60,000, but the Burmese armies occupied all of Ayutthaya's provinces and created 27 military camps surrounding Ayutthaya. The royal families and noblemen in Ayutthaya knew that they were losing, so they fled. The Burmese armies later burned Ayutthaya's walls and killed people, raped women, and burned all the temples, the palace, the whole city, and everything in it; Ayutthaya was on fire for 7 days and nights, and the many remnants left can be seen nowadays.

First, the most significant issue was that the content of this video required the audience to remember prudently and think discreetly about how we lost the Ayutthaya war. The video also asked whether it was because of either the strength of the Burmese army or Siam's weaknesses, and if we compare the present to the past, how is it different? The answers might be: 1) to set themselves up to be rebels and in alliance with Burma in the past is the same as to set themselves up to be in alliances of either the red or yellow shirts today; 2) the corruption of noblemen in the past can be compared to the corruption of bureaucrats in the present; 3) to compete to be king and reign over the Ayutthaya kingdom is the same as to compete to be the prime minister in the present (there were pictures of PM Yingluck Shinawatra and Abhisit Vejjajiva (the leader of the opposition party)). Finally the video concluded that, "We know the history but now we are having a recurrence."

Secondly, after this narrative finished, the video projected the factual account of Rwanda called "Living Space: Blood on Rwanda" which was broadcast repetitively on free Thai TV to show the events in

the Rwandan genocide between the Hutus and the Tutsis; it restated the Belgian government’s policy of “Divide and Rule”, which was in place until Rwanda’s independence. It showed the process of the accumulation of hatred reproduced continuously by the media up to 1994, when the genocide took place. The video said that there was “nowhere without corpses”, and showed Ntarama church where a massacre resulted in 5,000 deaths within only 2 days, as well as many skulls, blood stains, books, exercise books, pictures etc. This church still remains in the same condition without being cleaned so that people do not forget its past and will remember the truth of the brutal violence.

Thirdly, at the end of video, the video presenter said: “All of us should search for mutual understanding, love and harmony, and mutual change to Thai peacefulness” and there was displayed the National Flag Song sung by a choir of students called Wattana Little Angels, in the hope that the audiences would be impressed and there were pictures of many people crying when listening to this song.

This romantic song begins, “The Thai flag is not just cloth painted in 3 colors (red, white, and blue). Before it became the flag, there was a lot in the background especially suffering in our ancestors’ lives included and combined with their successors’ future. However, seeing the Thai flag now, we are crying and have pity for the land...how long have the Thai people forgotten to love the nation and been accustomed to let the flag wave alone...It is time to look at the flag, listen to the national song and hear it in each other’s heart...To reach the deepest suffering of our ancestors, we are worried about the future of the children...but whenever everyone sees and understands the 3 colors in the same way, peace will be restored.”

Eventually, the video presenter repeated that all people need to love and harmonize with all others, to walk forward together and to prosper in safety. It is really time to understand each other, stop the conflicts, stop injustice, and turn our faces to reconciliation; we all are sharing to change Thailand to be peaceful forever.

Given the accounts of this video’s content, a significant question is: What have we seen overall? The dramatization of this video is power working through the politics of signs and aesthetics that could invoke ideals, recast realities and manufacture meanings. (Timothy W. Luke,

2002: xiv) When a video functions to say something, it can simultaneously deny something else. It can fabricate images, preserve those through endless reproduction and can reproduce by carelessness other truths in history. This method is an economical trick reproduction. The efficiency of the video is therefore the repetition that things are here and not there. Concisely, truth can be monopolized and placed in its box. More importantly, the video has created for the audiences both the objective and the subjective truth. On the one hand, the audience was presented with a selected and screened truth and might be objectively believe in this hegemonic creation. On the other hand, after watching the video, it seems that its intention is still to ask the audience to be subjective and self-observant, to love and reconcile with others and absorb the great memories from the video. The audience should not be alienated and become an obstacle to those collective memories.

Considering the PFNNR video, there was the hope that Thai people would love each other, but it had to use the tragedy of the loss the nation's capital and land, despite the fact that "nation-ness" had not emerged at that time because "nation-ness" as well as the land was equivalent to the throne. The request for reconciliation and harmony should not have involved the neighboring country, because it should be noted that Burma has a set of different historical truths in its history with Thailand, and it should not have aroused anti-Burmese nationalism. While Thai society has remembered itself as the destroyed, it has ignored the role of the destroyer towards others (Thongchai Winichakul, 2001 and 2003). It has been a similar experience with regard to the drug problems along the Thailand-Burma frontier with Thai society distorting its own drug history to make a scapegoat out of Burma (Siwach Sripokangkul, 2010), and so on.

However, an attempt to match some events both from the past and the present might be hard and problematic so that there were bizarre and paradoxical matches; if we compare with the past, how is different from the following?: 1. Setting them up to be rebels in the past is the same as setting them up to be in alliances with either the red or yellow shirts today. 2. Corruption by the noblemen in the past can be compared to the corruption of bureaucrats in the present. 3. Competition to reign in the Ayutthaya kingdom is the same as competing to be prime minister in the present. These perspectives have reduced the meaning of the groups' struggles as being only rebellious and reduced the majority principle of

a democratic regime into a competition to reign in Ayutthaya, despite the fact that it was governed by an absolute monarch. Moreover, the tragic events in Rwanda were described but there was no link from that conflict to Thai society. If genocide in Rwanda resulted from the divide and rule policy of the colonial regime and was linked to the label of ethnicity, there should have been an explanation that Thai society's problems resulted from labeling those who were qualified/unqualified in the political/democratic arena or resulted from power inequality (Siwach Sripokangkul, 2012). Besides, whether the video had become known or not, reconciliation in Rwanda has been created through forgetting the past and making a new history, and how much has this process affected Rwandan society itself? (Siwach Sripokangkul, 2012).

With all the above PFNNR problems being possibly the “total results” from the Thai state's understanding of reconciliation, the author tries to draw some understanding about the indications and colors of reconciliation in the Thai state's views. The indications of reconciliation have been shown from remembering institutionalized historical truth that was reproduced in the PFNNR's video; these indications could be produced by the ingredients, for example a set of historical truth, the opportunistic use of Burma, arousal of nationalism, and the loss of the war resulting from Thai disharmony, and so on. These ingredients have been produced for re-blending many new images shown to express the idea that all Thai people love each other and are reconciled together with beautiful Thainess.³⁵

While the colors of reconciliation from the romantic National Flag Song iterates that before being a nation-state and having 3 colors (red, white, and blue)³⁶, it had many tragedies and suffering in the past. If Thai people realize and understand the 3 colors from the song, peace will return. In this case the colors of reconciliation should have the following meanings: red means only “nation-ness”, which Thai people have shared mutually for a long time, and does not mean the color of blood from political victims and the political effects of 2010; white means only the religious call for people to be good, not the color of the innocent who confronted their political destinies; and blue means the King who is seen as a spiritual center for Thai people to have love and harmony and should not be remembered only for royal nationalism (Thongchai Winichakul, 2001). Please consider some pictures from the PFNNR video;



Ideal Type of Reconciliation for Thai People

Source: Author

Crucial problems have arisen from the Thai state's views of the understanding of reconciliation that lead to the PFNNR being only activities by mobilization of the masses. Furthermore, public reconciliation forums in which occupational groups have been brought together to participate have been rarely seen in foreign countries because they have not experienced political violence like political prisoners and victims. On the point of begging everyone to choose both reconciliation and forgiveness, the question that needs to be answered is, who can decide on reconciliation and forgiveness? The author believes that it is not the state, not the perpetrators, and not ordinary people who can decide, but only the political prisoners and the victims (Chaiwat, 1999). For this reason, the author will next suggest a more compatible model for reconciliation, suggesting either especially a victim-centered model or a victim-perpetrator centered model, if needed. Public reconciliation forums from foreign countries are considered and proposed for Thai society, if such forums need to be rearranged.

7. Conclusion

Surprisingly, political victim-centered public forums have never been arranged in Thai society; even though the TRC and the King Prajadhipok's Institute had a large budget, such forums were never

arranged and the research was not based on victims.³⁷ There is, however, research which prioritizes the victims’ voices (Siwach Sripokangkul, 2013). However, the procedure cannot be compared to a public forum and thus, any justice for victims of violence has been vague.

Thai society lacks a body of knowledge on how to listen to the voices of the voiceless. In fact, the government chose to arrange the PFNNR before considering the reconciliation proposals and followed the TRC and the King Prajadhipok’s Institute’s suggestion that “to arrange dialogue forums must be done before reconciliation and the amnesty law, as well as the constitutional law, which should be considered later” (Khaosod, April 3, 2012). As a result, many political prisoners and victims have not received justice yet. Some of those have been in jail for 3 years and 6 months. Some intellectuals have analyzed that there should have been an amnesty for those prisoners and victims before the PFNNR because justice delayed is justice denied.



Event to Commemorate the Dead of 2010
Source: Chicago Red Shirts for Democracy, 2013

When considering lessons to be learned from foreign countries relating to public reconciliation forums, if there is no official apology from the predecessor government’s leaders, there must be a grasp of the main issues; for example, if there is a human rights forum, it should talk about the issue of human rights, just as a reconciliation forum should discuss the issue of reconciliation, and so on. More importantly, the victims must be at the center of the forum to reveal the truth for the public, e.g., the global reconciliation workshops of East Timor or Rwanda that discussed people’s experiences in those countries, and in which the victims could reveal their memories and express their ideas, because this is the way to create trust

and to rebuild society's political relationship (Protais Musoni, 2008). These global reconciliation workshops are arranged every year and are hosted in many countries. The main goal is that genocide, politicide, and massacre should never happen again.

In some countries where the governments assigned their TRCs to arrange public reconciliation forums, it was significant that the forums were for only hearing the victims' voices; notably the Equity and Reconciliation Commission in Morocco, arranged public reconciliation forums consisting of the Morocco Forum for Truth and Justice in which victims of grave human rights violations between 1956-1999 could confront their suffering and talk about the justice they wanted. There were more than seven public hearings held around the country and broadcast on television, including in areas that had experienced some of the harshest repression, and both direct and indirect victims of human rights abuses could speak (Bettina Dennerlein, 2012). The victims could not name the perpetrators and the eighth forum was cancelled due to political unrest in the Western Sahara.

Therefore, most Moroccans could discover how human rights violations were perpetrated by the state and could understand the severity of the violence and the dignity of the victims (Human Rights Watch, 2005). Moreover, there were five thematic hearings held between February 15 and March 15, 2005 and broadcast on Moroccan state television's Channel 2 during prime time. These hearings had 2 purposes: to complement the victims' hearings by furnishing contextual information about the violations committed over four decades, and to debate the guarantee of the non-repetition of past violations (Human Rights Watch, 2005). Likewise, National Forums on Reparations were arranged several times, in which Morocco viewed victims' reparations as a measure and process to dissolve deeply held prejudices about serious human rights abuses. Public forums for the victims' narratives were therefore to preserve their dignity and listen to their requests based on their honesty.

In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission willingly urged the victims, except children and sexual abuse victims, to tell the truth for about 30 minutes uninterruptedly and without any rules in the public reconciliation forums; they also could choose whatever of the 11 South African official languages they wished and translators were provided

immediately for broadcast on national TV and radio. Accounts of tragic violence were revealed; the white people became aware of these people being scarred for life. To listen to the victims was to educate the whites and, importantly, to reduce the threats of stereotyping (Nir Eisikovits, 2012).

There are more examples; in Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was established in June 2008, to analyze the Indian Residential Schools legacy by which aboriginal children were forced to leave their families and hometowns to attend government-run residential schools (between 1874-1996). The TRC arranged regular public reconciliation forums and gave the natives the opportunity to reveal the truth about what their ancestors confronted, to tell narratives which they had heard, and express their feelings as victims of the nation's colonial history. These forums allowed European Canadians to understand the profound effects, both directly and indirectly, on the victims (Jula Hughes, 2012). The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in Australia has arranged many victims-centered public reconciliation forums which encourage the victims to talk about their understanding of both their history and culture and to realize how some violent events, in particular about confiscated land and property, affected them (Sean Brennan, 2004).

The TRC in some countries arranged public reconciliation forums by inviting the victims and perpetrators to tell the truth and to talk to each other at the same time because they hoped a dialogue between them could transgress enmity, restore relationships, and enable them to learn motivation and the total life impact on each other; as well as dialogue, it was to be hoped that when the perpetrators told the truth, mourned their victims, and became responsible for their actions, it would re-humanize them. This is what happened, for example, in Sierra Leone and South Africa, although it should be noted that victim-perpetrator forums should be in a dialogue form only, not in a trial form like at the Gacaca (community justice) courts in Rwanda. Although the forums were not successful in Sierra Leone because of a lack of confidence by the participants, some cases in South Africa were successful (Jodi Halpern and Harvey Weinstein, 2004).

In the case of Chile, in June, 2000, the government arranged a roundtable forum by inviting victims of the Pinochet era, the military who violated human rights, civil society groups, and human rights organizations to discuss the past human rights violations. As a result, the

head of the military promised that they would produce the data on the disappeared. That was the first time that the military admitted the violent past and owned up to their responsibility. This dialogue forum was very crucial in leading to justice even though it was arranged 10 years after the transition to a civilian democracy (Siwach Sripokangkul, 2012).

There were more public reconciliation forums, as mentioned below, that used a victims-centered model of dialogue; notably, people in Greensboro, North Carolina, set up own TRC in early 2000 to seek the truth about the Greensboro Massacre (November 3, 1979) in which there were 5 deaths and ten wounded. Much of the violence was captured on film by reporters. The local people's TRC brought together the victims, the victims' relatives, and the blacks in the community in a dialogue. This led to the publication of a full report that had a big effect on the perception of the whites towards that terrible event (Laurel E. Fletcher, 2009). Public forums for the victims in Argentina, such as the Center for Legal and Social Studies and the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (Grandparents of the Plaza de Mayo), produced a lot of documentaries which have had a strong effect on democratization (Siwach Sripokangkul, 2012).

Likewise, in Kenya, the artisan non-profit organization called Kuwani Serious arranged a national reconciliation tour (launched on December 6, 2009) with a 24-hour street photography exhibition, pictures of violence and important messages of reconciliation. This tour not only showed pictures of the tragic events in 2007 (1,133 deaths officially reported) but also provided a platform for individual reflection, honest dialogue, interpersonal healing and community reconciliation space to over 2 million young Kenyans (Wanja Kimani, 2010). In Kenya, there had been violence between 2 ethnic groups, the Kikuyu, the largest ethnic group, and the Luo, the second-largest, for a long time and many young Kenyans have been raised under an atmosphere of fighting and hatred. This tour, the first of its kind in Africa, used both art work and public forums to aim at a reconciliation process. Those artists restated their intention that narratives of trauma, sufferings, and loss be central to reconciliation processes (Wanja Kimani, 2010). Similarly, Roman David and Susanne Choi who studied reconciliation in the transition of the Czech Republic stated, "Based on our findings, we propose a victim-oriented model of social reconstruction for transitional countries" (Roman David and Susanne Choi, 2005).

From the above examples, the author concludes that the arrangement for public reconciliation forums should consist of the victims as an intrinsic part of the dialogue along with the perpetrators, if needed. Victims would have the opportunity and choice to fulfill their own lives by telling their true stories and stating their hopes, and the public forums will be a legitimate arena in expressing peace and forgiveness. To arrange public forums for victims is therapeutic for politics (Arlene Stein, 2011); victims can narrate without the necessity of specialists to diagnose the trauma, but it depends on the political society to listen to the opening of wounds through the narratives and hope that others will join in the healing and empathy. Surely, such forums are a part of the therapeutic mechanism and are tools to request justice and force change in political-social contexts (Brandon Hamber and Richard Wilson, 2002). However, care should be taken that these public forums do not distort the meaning of reconciliation so that people become irritated and questions are raised in their minds.

The study of the PFNNR in this paper has allowed the author to conclude that the starting point for reconciliation in Thailand should not only include groups from different occupations to decide society's future but should also include the victims. Similarly, reconciliation dialogue should not start as a method open to all without the victims. The public reconciliation forums need to aim to be victim-centered and victim-perpetrator centered, if needed; the result of having forums in these formats will contribute to Thai society overall, to Thailand's democratization and, finally, to the perception of Thai society that violent conflict should not happen again.

Although, it is hard to suggest that a public reconciliation forum is a panacea for Thai society, the author suggests that there should be arranged roundtable forums consisting of: the victims of all ideological colors, who tell the truth and can choose the topics for dialogue; the perpetrators, the former cabinet members, politicians and security forces, who were involved in the past violence to tell the truth and to listen with an open heart, although, vitally, only the victims can decide whether to forgive as this is a primary route to forgiveness; and other groups to learn about and understand the events. Forums in this format should be held nationwide in unlimited numbers. Participants could shift from one forum to other forums to exchange data and sensibilities with all participants. More importantly, broadcasting programmes on Thai national TV and radio and broadcast reruns should be used for raising reconciliation issues to

the national agenda. Above all, hopefully, Thai society can feel empathy with the destinies of the victims. Their voices can be heard, and on reflection we should realize that we are all part of violence making and the continuity of violence. This is a starting point in the case for public reconciliation forums which are probably the best in the long term.

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Endnotes

- ¹ The number of deaths of the student uprising in 1973 was estimated at 77 people and, in the student massacres 3 years later, the toll was 46 people; in Bloody May 1992 at least 45 died, while 293 disappeared.
- ² Dictum of MP Ong-Art Klampaiboon and the top members of the Democrat Party.
- ³ He was a Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of the Interior and the chair of the TRC sub-committee at the same time.
- ⁴ The most urgent document of the Interior Ministry at I.M. (Interior Ministry) 0310.4/1.2067, the topic: "The Project of Public Forums Nationwide for National Reconciliation" documented on May 16, 2013.
- ⁵ The author participated in Chaiyaphum province on June 15, 2013 at Chaiyaphum Rajabhat University where there were an estimated 800 participants; in Kalasin province on June 16, 2013 at Kalasin Rajabhat University, where there were an estimated 600 participants; in NakhonRatchasima province on June 20, 2013 at NakhonRatchasima Rajabhat University, where there were an estimated 1,000 participants; in Roi Et province on June 23, 2013 at Roi Et Rajabhat University, where there were an estimated 800 people; in Mahasarakham province on July 7, 2013 at Mahasarakham Rajabhat University, where there were an estimated 1,000 participants; and in KhonKaen province on July 10, 2013 at North Eastern University, where there were an estimated 1,000 participants.
- ⁶ The PFNNR had 2 days in Chaiyaphum province, where there were 1,400 estimated participants; 2 days in Kalasin province, where there were 1,200 estimated participants; 3 days in Nakhon Ratchasima province, where there were 3,000 estimated participants; 2 days in Roi Et province, where there were 1,600 estimated participants; 1 day in Mahasarakham province, where there were 1,000 estimated participants; and 2 days in KhonKaen province, where there were 2,000 estimated participants.
- ⁷ All the constituencies had Pheu Thai MPs except for 1 out of 5 constituencies in Chaiyaphum province and 7 out of 15 constituencies in NakhonRatchasima province.

- ⁸ Consider a case of political violence in KhonKaen province in the People’s Information Center (The April-May 2010 Crackdowns): PIC, *Khwam Jing Pheu Khwam Yuttitham [Truth for Justice]*; (Bangkok: PIC, 2012: 398-400). For political prisoners, data updated on 30 May, 2012 shows KhonKaen provincial court had 29 prisoners, Phol district court (in KhonKaen province) had 3 prisoners, KhonKaen municipal court had 18 prisoners, Mahasarakham provincial court had 29 prisoners, the juvenile and family court of Mahasarakham province had 9 prisoners, NakhonRatchasima provincial court had 1 prisoner, the juvenile and family court of NakhonRatchasima province had 1 prisoner, Si Kew district court (in NakhonRatchasima province) had 4 prisoners, Si Kew (Pak Chong) district court (in NakhonRatchasima province) had 1 prisoner, BuaYai district court (in NakhonRatchasima province) had 4 prisoners, Chaiyaphum provincial court had 4 prisoners, the juvenile and family court of Chaiyaphum province had 24 prisoners, PhuKheaw district court (in Chaiyaphum province) had 1 prisoner, Roi Et provincial court had 8 prisoners, and the juvenile and family court of Roi Et province had 6 prisoners (cited in *Khwam Jing Pheu Khwam Yuttitham [Truth for Justice]*: 906-1253).
- ⁹ This reason was for the purposes of supporting field research, but it was not a crucial issue.
- ¹⁰ The most urgent document of the Interior Ministry at I.M. (Interior Ministry) 0310.4/3.2067, the topic: “The Project of Public Forums Nationwide for National Reconciliation” documented on May 16, 2013.
- ¹¹ The most urgent document of Interior Ministry at I.M. (Interior Ministry) 0409.2/3.0854, the topic: “The Project of Public Forums Nationwide for National Reconciliation” documented on June 7, 2013. It should be known that these 9 issues came from the TRC report, the House Committee on National Reconciliation report, and King Prajadhipok’s Institute’s research.
- ¹² 1. Mae Hong Son province in the north; 2. NakhonRatchasima province in the northeast; 3. Pattalung province in the south; and 4. Suphanburi province in the central region.
- ¹³ Cited in NakhonRatchasimaNews (2012).
- ¹⁴ Interview (June 15, 2013).
- ¹⁵ For example, Matichon News said “The TRC, the House Committee on National Reconciliation, and King Prajadhipok’s Institute (Institute for Democracy Studies) collaboratively arranged the PFNNR” (Matichon, July 8, 2013). In fact, none of the 3 above was involved in the PFNNR.
- ¹⁶ This chart was created in April 2010 under Abhisit Vejjajiva’s government to insult the red shirts.
- ¹⁷ He means many political prisoners are in jail because of lèse-majesté. In Thailand, the lèse-majesté law has been abused and arbitrarily applied for political reasons to silence human rights defenders.
- ¹⁸ Those intellectuals are the Nitirat group and groups that petition for the abolition of Article 112 – the Thai law of lèse-majesté; those expressed concern over the growth in the number of accusations levelled and prosecutions carried out under Article 112, the lèse-majesté law, as Thai society has become increasingly polarized along political and ideological lines. They have asked and hope for amendments to this evil and barbaric law that prevents freedom of speech and expression in Thailand and was increasingly used under the questionable administration of Abhisit Vejjajiva (cited in GJBkk, 2012).
- ¹⁹ Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Code.
- ²⁰ On October 19, 1976, the coup resulted in student massacres by the ultra-right wing conservatives.
- ²¹ On February 23, 1991, Army Commander Suchinda Kraprayoon overthrew the elected government of PM Chatichai Choonhavan.
- ²² A participant in the KhonKaen forum interestingly opposed the arguments of this moderator and said in front of the stage that, “The narratives of bad politicians is too stereotypical and oversimplified. The most important problem of political conflicts is caused from the 2007

- Constitution. The way out of Thai conflict is not to blame politicians but to amend the 2007 Constitution. There should not be permission for the military to suppress the protestors; the independent judicial entities should be the real and true referees, not the players.”
- ²³ From the provinces of Kalasin, Roi Et, Mahasarakham, and KhonKaen, respectively.
- ²⁴ From the provinces of Chaiyaphum, NakhonRatchasima, Kalasin, Roi Et, KhonKaen and Mahasarakham. Please consider that there were no sub-rooms in KhonKaen province so that the participants could not talk but had to write something for the moderators.
- ²⁵ The most urgent document of Chaiyaphum Province 0409.2/1.0854, the topic: “The Project of Public Forums Nationwide for National Reconciliation” documented on December 21, 2012.
- ²⁶ He was a business tycoon and was murdered in June 2013.
- ²⁷ He was known as Thailand’s jet-setting fugitive monk, and his story had riveted the country with daily headlines of lavish excess, promiscuity and alleged crimes ranging from statutory rape to manslaughter.
- ²⁸ These views are similar to those of many members of the Pheu Thai Party including former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.
- ²⁹ The 66/23 policy (in 1980) was implemented by the Prem Tinsulanonda government to grant amnesty for students, sympathizers, and communists who fled to the jungle to join the armed struggle following the October 9, 1976 bloodshed at Thammasat University. Consider this main point at Chaiwat Satha-Anand (2006: 130-140).
- ³⁰ From the provinces of Kalasin, NakhonRatchasima, Roi Et, Mahasarakham, and KhonKaen, respectively.
- ³¹ Consider the news: “Abhisit Vejjajiva (the leader of the opposition party) is not in favor because it was a waste of people’s taxes as the government has arranged the PFNNR non-academically.” (Democrat Party, 2013).
- ³² In using “state” here, the author means not only the government but also agents of the state, such as bureaucrats and university lecturers and includes any expressions resulting from state ideology being reproduced or locating themselves as state-like; please consider Thongchai Winichakul (2007). Furthermore, state and government are not unique; for example, though the PFNNR is supported by the state, university lecturers, bureaucrats, video presenter, video creators, and video narrator etc. who were part of the forums, were part of the state mechanism too.
- ³³ The most urgent document of the Interior Ministry at I.M. (Interior Ministry) 0409.2/1.0854, the topic: “The Project of Public Forums Nationwide for National Reconciliation” documented on June 7, 2013.
- ³⁴ This video can be watched at YouTube (2013), “Dialoguing the Way Out for Thailand,” from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=isGJ9GXLrAk&feature=player_embedded#at=67 (Retrieved June 15, 2013).
- ³⁵ Consider the many images in this video.
- ³⁶ The Thai flag is composed of three colors –red, white and blue – which stand for nation, religion, and the King, respectively.
- ³⁷ The King Prajadhipok’s Institute’s research interviewed 47 people; 26 politicians and ex-politicians, 5 high level bureaucrats, 3 intellectuals, 11 color leaders, 3 civil society leaders, and 1 journalist.