

“Forgetting,” “Returning to Ironic Happiness,” and “Threatening and Hunting”: Reconciliation Process of 2014 Post-Coup Government in Thailand

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Abstract

The coup d'état on May 22, 2014, has again broken the bonds within Thai society. Although many Thai people desire to resist the coup, they are forced into silence under martial law, which is in effect all over the kingdom. However, after the coup the military government declared that Thailand is working toward genuine and sustainable reconciliation. In this article, the author questions how the military government's reconciliation works and examines its effects on Thai society. The author argues that the military government's reconciliation is composed of three main processes working simultaneously. These are 1) Forgetting, 2) Returning to Ironic Happiness, and 3) Threatening and Hunting. Reconciliation scholars might be surprised by what is being called “reconciliation” in Thailand. Certainly, reconciliation undertaken in this way has no positive effect on Thailand's present or future and cannot bring true reconciliation to Thailand.

Keywords: reconciliation, forgetting, returning to ironic happiness, threatening and hunting, military government, Thailand

1. Introduction

The coup on May 22, 2014, was a political continuation of a number of events during which elite and middle-class Thais have shown their reticence to include rural Thais in a Thai democracy: the coup in September 2006; the 2008 seizure and closure of international airports, which resulted in an overthrow of the democratically elected government; and the red-shirt massacres in 2010. Rural people, however, comprise most of the voters in Thailand, and elites perceive an alliance between rural voters and Thaksin Shinawatra (Note 1), the prime minister ousted in the 2006 coup, who they see as a pandering populist. Supporters of Thaksin's party, Pheu Thai, are commonly known as red shirts. The elites and middle class, commonly referred to as yellow shirts, organized mobs to stop the election on February 2, 2014, in violation of the law. Furthermore, they were pleased to support the military, courts, and independent judicial entities in their every attempt to dismantle the democratically elected government.

In this article, the author will outline the 2014 coup and the reaction to it. Since the military government worried that post-coup the people might not be under their control, they began publicly advocating reconciliation, and established Reconciliation Centers for Reform in all 77 provinces, despite the fact that reconciliation had already been discussed and was ineffective after the 2010 red-shirt massacres.

The military government's ongoing reconciliation is composed of three processes working simultaneously, which are: 1) Forgetting 2) Returning to Ironic Happiness and 3) Threatening and Hunting. However, these processes are incompatible with the principles and important components of reconciliation. Thus, these three processes will lead Thailand further down a path of political and social polarization, with no hope of real reconciliation.

2. The 2014 Coup D'état

The People's Committee for Absolute Democracy with the King as Head of State (PCAD) was led by Suthep Thaugsuban, a leading member of the Democrat party, which is primarily backed by elites and middle-class Thais in Bangkok and the South. Between 2008 and 2011, Suthep was the head of security affairs and the deputy

prime minister under the government of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, the leader of Democrat party. In 2009-2010, Suthep ordered the suppression of the red-shirt protestors in Bangkok, and hundreds of them died and were injured.

Suthep started the PCAD at the end of October 2013, in reaction to Pheu Thai party's proposed reconciliation bill, which would have ended all political prosecutions relating to the 2010 massacres. Although they would also have been granted amnesty, Abhisit and Suthep saw the bill as merely a vehicle for giving amnesty to Thaksin and thus refused amnesty for their own actions in the 2010 massacres. On the other hand, Pheu Thai members felt that Thaksin had been a victim since the 2006 coup, and wanted to see him redeemed. After that coup, the government defamed him for fraudulent business dealings and confiscated \$1.3 billion US in assets. Furthermore, Pheu Thai saw the prosecution of Thaksin as a kind of double standard. They believed that neither the courts of justice nor the independent judicial entities, which have alliances with the Democrat party, would prosecute Suthep, Abhisit, and the military; accordingly, Pheu Thai fully supported the reconciliation bill to allow Thaksin to return to Thailand and clear his name, while Abhisit and Suthep opposed it, knowing they would likely never face prosecution anyway.

Consistent with the PCAD mobs' 2013-2014 slogan "Shutdown Bangkok," the protestors blocked Bangkok traffic, surrounded government buildings, and behaved violently towards police officers. Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra decided to dissolve the parliament on December 9, 2013, so that Thailand could have an election on February 2, 2014. Yingluck and the Pheu Thai party calculated that with an election on February 2, their party was likely to win re-election and regain political legitimacy. Knowing this, the Democrat party determined to boycott the election. The PCAD did not stop the mobs after Yingluck had dissolved the government, and demanded additional reforms before the election. In addition, protestors blocked candidates from submitting their applications at provincial offices all over the country. Especially in Bangkok and the South, which are the areas dominated by the Democrat's voters, the polling stations were completely shut down on election day. At some polling places, PCAD protestors stole ballot boxes in which votes had already been cast. Even though there were countless difficulties, 20,530,359 electors voted, about a 47.72 percent turnout (Daily News, February 6, 2014). Nevertheless, the constitutional court ruled that the election was invalid, since the caretaker government did not administer the election simultaneously all over the country. The court mentioned nothing about the election protestors (Thaipublica, March 21, 2014), despite the fact that they had disrupted elections and were estimated to have caused over \$15 billion US in economic losses over the course of their protests (T.J., March 2, 2014).

After the failed election, the protestors continued their antics with protection from the military, which set up a number of temporary bunkers at which soldiers were stationed to watch over and support the protestors throughout Bangkok. Meanwhile the caretaker government intended to organize another election.

But on May 7, 2014, the constitutional court ruled that Yingluck be removed from office and terminated the authority of her cabinet. This sentence was for the supposedly improper transfer of Tawin Pliensri out of his position as Secretary General of National Security into a position unrelated to security matters in 2011. Tawin was a key figure in the 2009-2010 red-shirt suppression and also the inventor of a false chart—called the "chart of the network to overthrow the monarchy"—which aimed to defame red-shirt supporters as planning to bring down the monarchy, the ultimate offense.

Over the next two weeks, fewer and fewer people participated in the protests. It appeared every day in newspapers that the protestors violently abused people; as well, Suthep threatened to kidnap the prime minister, her son, and the cabinet. In addition, the sound of leading protestors calling for the military to launch a coup to break the political impasse got louder and louder. Finally, on May 20, 2014, Prayuth Chan-ocha, commander in chief of the Royal Thai Army, declared martial law and then launched a coup d'état two days later.

Although General Prayuth claimed that he launched the coup on impulse when the leaders gathered together from each side were unable to resolve their differences, it is clear that the coup was not a last minute decision. It had been prepared and organized for a long time. It could even be seen as a gift to Suthep who has close ties with the military and especially with General Prayuth, stemming from the suppression of red-shirt protests in 2009-2010. Not long after the coup, Suthep gave an interview to the Bangkok Post which quoted him as saying: "Before martial law was declared (on May 20), General Prayuth told me that you and your masses of PCAD supporters are too exhausted. It's now the duty of the army to take over the task" (Campbell, 2014).

Following the coup, in order to control society under its regulations, the military has insisted that Thailand needs to reconcile and become united again. This idea is widely repeated throughout all media. Thai society, in the military government's view, is in a period of rebuilding and reconciliation (Manager Daily, December 6, 2014).

Before examining the Thai military government's reconciliation process, it is important to understand the principles of true reconciliation first.

3. Reconciliation

Many reconciliation theorists have emphasized the same foundation for mending broken relationships and rebuilding trust after a period of enmity and victimization. Often the way to reconciliation is full of impediments and obstacles, and several preconditions must be met in order to reach lasting reconciliation. These seven conditions are widely recognized among scholars:

First, regime transition must occur. There are three forms of transition: 1) transition from authoritarian regime to democracy, 2) transition from a democracy of military supremacy to one of civilian supremacy, 3) transition in the ruling paradigm from victimization toward reconciliation; for example, in Canada and Australia governments have sought ways to reconcile with native people regarding actions of past administrations during the colonial period. Regardless, it should be firmly stressed that the transition most compatible with reconciliation is democratization. Furthermore, changing the government without a transition as described above, cannot lead to reconciliation. For example, a coup d'état gives an illegitimate air to the victor's justice – that of the military.

Second, during the reconciliation period, attention must be paid to human rights in the prosecution of perpetrators, particularly those who were considered most responsible for abuses or crimes during conflict (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2014). Disregarding justice, especially for perpetrators, can create a culture of impunity. As Colleen Murphy (2010) said: "Denial of past injustice seems incompatible with reconciliation."

Third, the truth must be revealed (Hayner, 2002). Truth can be classified into several categories. First, reliable truth, which is factual, and for which there is evidence. Reliable truth can provide detailed explanations of the who, what, where, why, when, with whom, etc. Second, verbal truth, which is anecdotal and in need of proof, such as in the case of South Africa where perpetrators revealed their stories to the Amnesty Committee composed of judges and lawyers; when their stories were verified, the perpetrators received amnesty. The third category of truth, memory truth or narrative and personal truth, is truth that does not need evidence because it is the subjective experience of violently abused victims who expect society to conceive of and understand their past experiences. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa defines this category of truth as "the individual subjective experiences of people who had previously been silenced or voiceless" (Alidu et al., 2009).

Fourth, attention must be paid to a victim-centered approach. According to Simon Robins (2012), who studied the needs of families whose members disappeared in Nepal and East Timor, "the term 'victim-centered' is used to define a transitional justice process or mechanism that arises as a response to the explicit needs of victims, as defined by victims themselves." It is important to recognize the victims' humanity and their inherent value, to encourage them to resolve feelings of inferiority and transgress enmity, and rebuild friendships and social bonds (Doxtader, 2007). As Charles Taylor (1994) argues, "within these perspectives, misrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need."

Many scholars have shown the contribution of a victim-centered approach in reconciliation. For example, Roman David and Susanne Choi (2005), who studied the reconciliation process in the Czech Republic during the transition to democracy period, stated, "based on our findings, we propose a victim-oriented model of social reconstruction for transitional countries." Simon Robins (2011) emphasized, "the victim-centered approach represents an attempt to counter the elite-led nature of much transitional justice process by challenging it with views from below." Furthermore, Martha Minow (1998) convincingly expanded the essentials of a victim-centered approach by connecting it with forgiveness: "Forgiveness is a power held by the victimized, not a right to be claimed, and it is the very act of forgiveness that is most closely tied with the difficult notion of reconciliation."

Fifth, compensation and restitution are required to reinstate victims to their status before victimization. Not just reimbursement for loss and damage, compensation must extend to other dimensions of victims' lives; for example, providing education and health care in the long term (De Greiff, 2009). Care should be taken that restitution is not made as a replacement for truth and justice; if so, instead of showing care and understanding toward the victims, it might be a mechanism of the rulers to silence the victims and undermine the justice of the society (Borzutzky, 2007).

Sixth, institutions that use or regulate the use of violence must be reformed to prevent a recurrence of serious human rights abuses and impunity. These institutions may include the army, the police, courts and justice system,

education system and others. Manuela Nilsson (2010) explains that institutional reform is urgent. Both security sector reform and the physical reconstruction of the country are important components of peace creation, as are changes in the political and economic structure, the creation of a democratic system and the building of conflict resolution mechanisms able to deal with future crises in a more constructive way. Furthermore, institutional reform builds trust between all citizens and their public institutions (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2014).

Seventh, it is necessary to create and maintain a space of collective memory in order to heal societal wounds through mutual recognition, such as by establishing a museum, monument, or memorial day.

Even if all these conditions are met, reconciliation is not guaranteed. Nevertheless, they are important components in the long road to reconciliation. In the next section, the author will consider reconciliation in Thailand after the coup d'état in 2014.

4. Reconciliation after 2014 Coup D'état

Although the military government has always affirmed that after the coup Thailand will move toward reconciliation, and the government established Reconciliation Centers for Reform in June 2014 at provincial, district, and sub-district levels, true reconciliation will be impossible to achieve in this context. This is because the current reconciliation as promoted by the military is incompatible with the principles of reconciliation outlined above. Instead the current reconciliation process consists of Forgetting, Returning to Ironic Happiness, and Threatening and Hunting, as elaborated below.

Forgetting

While the military calls its current reform process “reconciliation,” it is more closely akin to an attempt to rebuild the Thai nation in a particular mold that serves particular interests. This is why “forgetting” is such a big part of the military’s current efforts. As Ernest Renan argued in 1882, “forgetting is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for (the principle of) nationality. Indeed, historical enquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations, even of those whose consequences have been altogether beneficial” (quoted in Eley and Suny, 1996). Similarly, Stanley Cohen (1995) coined the phrase “social amnesia” to describe “a mode of forgetting by which a whole society separates itself from its discreditable past record. This might happen at an organized, official and conscious level – the deliberate cover-up, the rewriting of history – or through the type of cultural slippage that occurs when information disappears.”

Although “forgetting” can sometimes be necessary, as scholars have noted, it can also be dangerous and can threaten the conditions necessary for reconciliation. In the post-coup d'état situation, forgetting operates as forgetting the past role of the military that opposed democracy from 2006 to the present, and forgetting the role and existence of the red-shirt leaders and their movement.

Forgetting the Past Role of the Military

In reality, it must be accepted that the military role in the protests before the coup d'état was to aid the PCAD protestors. Some high-level military officers were counselors and close friends of leading protestors, while some military officers acted as armed guards for them. During these protests, the military acted differently from the police, which was the only state apparatus for protecting peace and order; the military protected the PCAD rather than acting at the behest of the elected government. Unsurprisingly, when the PCAD seized government offices, ministries and the government house, blocked election registration stations and ballot boxes, stopped people from voting and shut Bangkok down, the military continued to support them. This is in contrast to the 2009 and 2010 demonstrations in which over a hundred red-shirts were killed, and many others injured and jailed by the military-backed government. Likewise, in 2008, after having launched a coup d'état in 2006 against Thaksin and overturning the 1997 Constitution, which had been hailed as the “People’s Constitution,” the military participated in organizing a government. The military supported Abhisit, the leader of the opposition, for prime minister, even though he did not have the majority of parliamentary votes. The military threatened a number of representatives from the government party and pressured them to support Abhisit (The Economist, December 18, 2008).

The evidence suggests that the Thai army has, at least since its role in the 2006 coup, obstructed the path to a democracy in which civilians have supremacy over the military. Laughably, after the 2014 coup d'état, the coup-makers claimed that they were building real and genuine democracy for Thailand (Fuller, 2014a). Accepting this claim means that Thais must forget the crucial anti-democracy role that the military has consistently played.

Forgetting the Red Shirts

After the coup, leading former government ministers, the red shirts, and the Shinawatrass were targeted for suppression and silenced. There are many instances in which the military dismantled reminders of them. For instance, military officers removed democracy supporters' village signs in North and Northeast Thailand and also organized an Internal Security Operations Command in every village in those areas to discuss reconciliation and order a stop to all political activities and resistance against the coup. On June 29, 2014, in Chiang Mai, five armed soldiers in a Humvee arrested a dried-squid vendor who wore a red shirt with the image of red-shirt leader Jatuporn Prompan, and forced him to take off the shirt immediately (Prachatai, June 29, 2014). The mass media were forced not to present news about the Shinawatrass (Channel News Asia, 2014). There were seizures of some political magazines that had Yingluck on the cover and also, at the beginning of July 2014, there regularly appeared on the news military officials visiting markets and shops to take away all stickers supporting Pheu Thai and Yingluck. In the middle of September 2014, the Education Ministry revised a social science textbook for students, which had deleted Thaksin from Thai political history (Fuller, 2014b). In addition, the military blocked all websites that presented news critical of the military or the coup, including the official red-shirt website and other well-known sites that advocate democracy (Ilaw, 2014a), and on December 8, 2014, in northern Thailand at Mae Hong Son, five military officers removed a booth selling strawberry wine because the wine bottles had a Thaksin look-alike figure on them (Matichon, December 9, 2014).

Forgetting history and dismantling reminders of historical events in Thai society is ongoing. As Paul Connerton (2008) argued, the most brutal form of forgetting, which usually is done after the outright destruction of all enemies, is called "repressive erasure," which will leave no record of the enemies. This is a model of absolute oblivion, which is characteristic of absolute dictatorship – the creation of a new state and destruction of the old narratives.

Returning to Ironic Happiness

The post-coup d'état reconciliation discourse of the military government, to the grief of the democracy supporters, is "Returning Happiness to Thailand." The meaning of "happiness" here is a painful reminder of the past, as it goes back four years to a time when the government and the military used the slogan "Returning Happiness to Bangkokians," after over a hundred people were killed in the 2010 massacre of the red shirts. The military government may believe that offering happiness is likely to divert the citizens' attention from politics to cheerfulness and delight. Since the coup, there have been a number of peculiar happiness offerings, as described below.

At the end of May 2014, the military organized reconciliation activities in Pathum Thani, a province in central Thailand, which included many games and activities such as karaoke, along with offerings of free haircuts, free food and drinks, and lurid dance performances by some military officers (Manager Daily, May 31, 2014). Further, in June, the government organized a return-to-happiness night of music, food, a pageant of handsome boys and girls dressed in military uniforms, and a show of military horses. This event was replicated in one province after another all over the country (Matichon, June 24, 2014). In August, during reconciliation activities in Nakhon Nayok, another province in central Thailand, there were many girls in two-piece outfits performing coyote dancing to entertain the audience and create a joyful atmosphere which was aimed at "reconciliation" (Manager Daily, August 7, 2014).

The military also composed a song, "Happiness Returns to Thailand," which is played daily on television and radio at 6 p.m., and twice on Fridays, both before and after General Prayuth's weekly television address, "Return Happiness to Thailand," which is broadcast on all public channels. Patriotic songs are required to be played at schools after the usual ceremony paying respect to the Thai flag at 8 a.m., and also at noon (Bangkokbiznews, June 13, 2014). Every student also now has to record their moral activities in a goodness log book, and teachers award points for these deeds. The military's policy requires primary and secondary students to collect these points as part of their educational record.

The government, in addition to promoting patriotic songs and reconciliation events, has also organized a number of giveaways. The government encouraged people to see the film "The Legend of King Naresuan" part V, "Elephant Battle," an ahistorical but widely believed pseudo-history, to encourage patriotism, and gave away free tickets to screenings. The government also arranged the broadcast of the World Cup on public channels, using government funds to pay for the deal. In late July, the government organized a free concert, "Love Songs, Fun Songs, Happiness Returns to People," in order to create reconciliation. Many famous singers participated, including Thongchai McIntyre, one of the most popular singers in Thailand.

After the reconciliation slogan “Returning Happiness to Thailand” had been used for several months, the government changed it to “Fulfill Happiness,” which it has used from December 2014 onwards. Under this new slogan, almost 40,000 soldiers were commanded to clean temples, community buildings, and canals. The government also requested that shopping malls all over the country discount goods and supplies for citizens to buy to fulfill their happiness during the New Year holidays. The government is also planning a “Thai Identity in four Regions” performance, which will present culture and music from each of Thailand’s four regions, and will be held throughout the country in 2015.

With all these free events and campaigns, a lot of citizens feel overwhelmed with the word “Happiness.” Many people have doubts about how this return of happiness relates to reconciliation, and “happiness” has lost its meaning, a fact not lost on the international community. John Oliver, host of Last Week Tonight with John Oliver on HBO, mentioned these returning happiness campaigns to mock the government (*John Oliver*, 2014). However, Doug Bandow (2014), a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, said, “in Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha’s view the primary path to happiness is obeying his dictates...and...Thailand’s people are to be happy at bayonet point.” What is also astonishing is that when the media questions the government as to whether these Returning Happiness activities constitute populism, Prime Minister Prayuth defended what the government is doing as not populism, but Thainess-ism (Thairath, October 7, 2014), a crucial distinction for an elite that has long despised the populist policies of the Shinawatras.

Threatening and Hunting

Martial law has been in effect since May 20, 2014, and gives absolute power to the military. Human rights violations began two days after the declaration of martial law, on May 22, 2014, when the coup was announced. Threatening and hunting of democracy supporters took many forms, as described below.

The military government summoned a number of politicians and political activists, beginning with 23 Pheu Thai members, Yingluck, and her cabinet, who on May 22 were called to appear before the military the following day. Those summoned were brought in to “adjust” their political “attitude” and were made to sign agreements promising that they would not engage in any political activities, including, but not limited to, protesting or opposing the coup. For those that did not answer the summons, arrest warrants were issued and they were arraigned in the Military Court (a single court in which the judges are military officers). Those who refused the military’s order and requested to stay abroad had their Thai passports cancelled, as did Pavin Chachavalpongpun and Somsak Jeamteerasakul, two esteemed academics who live in Japan and Europe, respectively.

In only the first three months after the coup, the military had summoned 570 people, arrested 235 people who protested against the coup, and prosecuted 77 people, 17 in the Criminal Court and 60 in the Military Court. Six months after the coup d’état, the numbers had risen to 626 people summoned and 340 people arrested. It is difficult to ascertain the number of people jailed because the information is not made public; however, the Military Court gave seven people from Chiang Rai three-month jail sentences for protesting against the coup d’état (Prachatai, August 27, 2014). In addition, 19 people have been prosecuted for lèse-majesté, with at least 15 people jailed so far. This does not include more than a thousand people who were arrested and not mentioned in the news. Most of these are in alliance with the last government and/or are democratic and human rights activists (Ilaw, 2014a). Amnesty International’s report, “Attitude Adjustment – 100 Days Under Martial Law” (2014), called the widely and arbitrarily issued summonses of citizens a clear violation of human rights and an obvious tool of political intimidation. The report quoted victims who claimed that while they were held by the military after responding to a summons, the military had violated their human rights, through beatings, death threats, mock executions, and attempted asphyxiation. The public summonses and private threats and intimidation are clear attempts to suppress differences in political opinion. The government plans to expand activities to suppress political activity in 2015 through a project which invites people from both sides of the political divide at the local level to meet and tone down their behavior and stop political activities.

Additionally, the military government has suppressed citizen’s freedom of expression in a variety of ways. It has blocked access to many websites, such as Human Rights Watch, many domestic sites, and the Facebook pages of many who expressed political views. An online game that mocked the dictatorship, *Tropical 5*, was banned, as was Andrew Macgregor Marshall’s book, *A Kingdom in Crisis: Thailand’s Struggle for Democracy in the Twenty-First Century* (Ilaw, 2014b). Furthermore, the military was quick to ban all gestures that could be interpreted as being anti-coup. For example, showing the three-finger salute popularized as a protest gesture in the *The Hunger Games* movies became illegal according to the military in June 2014. As well, some students who read George Orwell’s *1984* were arrested and dragged off their feet (Thai E-News, 2004; MatichonTV, 2014), prompting some foreign governments to warn their citizens not to bring this book into Thailand (Ilaw,

2014b). Now even a gesture covering the mouth is also counted as being politically offensive. In June 2014, a high-level police officer who is in charge of security affairs said that covering the mouth is regarded as political antagonism. Even more threatening, Somyot Pumpanmuang, a deputy commissioner general, announced to the public that, if citizens find symbolic actions or expressions in any circumstances, including on Facebook or elsewhere on the internet, they should take photos and send them to the Royal Thai Police. If those photos lead to arrests and prosecution, those who sent in the photos will be rewarded with 500 baht (\$18 US) for each photo (Matichon, June 24, 2014). The government also threatened citizens who protested against Prayuth on Line (a chat texting application popular in Thailand) saying that even though there are over 40 million people texting per day, the government can monitor all of them; eventually, the official office of Line in Japan refuted the Thai government's claims.

The government has also made threats against the media. The military government officially declared that mass media must not criticize its work, and if media outlets do publish criticisms, they will be shut down immediately. General Prayuth also warned journalists against investigating his wealth and that of his brother, a high-ranking military officer, saying those who asked questions on the subject should be careful for their safety (Matichon, October 29, 2014). In 2015, the government has plans for a media relations project that will force provincial and local radio stations to revise their opinions and cease criticism of the government.

Students and universities have also been a target of the military's threatening and hunting techniques. The army has arrested lecturers and students who have organized academic activities. University-level teachers have no more academic freedom (Khun Somchai, 2014), and 38 times there have been activity interdictions against planned academic forums. The military sent a dispatch to the chancellors of various universities to summon some students, especially at Mahasarakham University in Northeast Thailand. The Ministry of Education also sent an official letter to every university advising them to control their students' protests against the military government and to "adjust" their political "attitude" (Ilaw, 2014a). Additionally, a student at Khon Kaen University, the most famous university in Northeast Thailand, was arrested, owing to his performance on the fortieth anniversary of the October 14, 1973, student uprising against the dictator Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn; the student was accused of *lèse-majesté*, which usually results in a five-to-twenty year jail sentence. Furthermore, the army arrested five Khon Kaen University students who protested a visit by the Prime Minister; the army also threatened to expel them from the university, and intruded into their houses. The military forbid students at Thammasat University to organize a ceremony in remembrance of the thirty-eighth anniversary of the October 6, 1976, student massacre at Thammasat. Uniformed soldiers can enter universities easily, and even worse, soldiers also enter universities undercover, dressed in civilian clothes, to conduct surveillance. Worst of all, it appears that some soldiers who were out of uniform threatened to rape one university student who protested in favor of democracy in Bangkok. She gave an interview saying that she was quite scared because the threat of rape had come after she had been followed, as if they were trying to provoke her to get really angry (Prachatai, December 13, 2014).

These examples demonstrate that threatening and hunting are a clear part of the military government's tactics for reform and "reconciliation." Richard Bennett, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Director, believes that freedom suppression in Thai society causes a "spiral into silence," saying, "denying the space for debate and jailing peaceful critics through the repressive *lèse-majesté* law will do nothing for the 'national reconciliation' that the authorities have promised" (Amnesty International, 2014b). It cannot be denied that the three processes of the military's reconciliation are intimidating, and have complicated true reconciliation. Reconciliation should come from remembering history rather than forgetting it; letting citizens keep their memories is their right. Genuine happiness must come from liberty, democracy and self-determination, not from activities imposed by the military. Threatening and hunting clearly polarizes the nation. It leaves no space for different opinions, and allows for the neglect of victims' human rights.

5. Conclusion

The military government shows no signs of giving up its tactics of forgetting, returning to ironic happiness, and threatening and hunting. In 2015, they plan to and have begun a mass media relations project to keep local and provincial radio media from broadcasting or promoting views critical of the government; a project, at the local level, to bring Thais from both sides of the political divide together to promise to stop all political activity; and a "One heart Thai" project in each province which will bring citizens together to watch patriotic videos that celebrate the nation and the king (Manager Daily, October 25, 2014). At these events, which will be repeated several times in each province to ensure that many citizens are reached, the military reiterates messages to stop political activity, and presents a glorified history of how Thailand lost some of its territory to neighboring states to fortify people's love for and loyalty to their country.

As an example of the extent of the military's desire to threaten and remove all Shinawatras influence in Thai society, recently, the military-stacked National Legislative Assembly (NLA), most of whom have expressed themselves as the Shinawatras' enemies and have joined the PCAD, voted to impeach Yingluck. They ruled that she must stay out of politics for five years. The impeachment and the NLA's public accusation of corruption stem from her rice-pledging scheme. In addition, Thailand's Office of the National-Anti Corruption Commission has charged Yingluck for criminal corruption for the scheme. While those charges have not been resolved in court, the NLA has wasted no time in branding her administration as corrupt. It is a military roadmap to exclude her not only from politics but also from many rural people's hearts. Within a week of her impeachment, a former foreign minister, Surapong Tovichakchaikul, and Singhtong Buachum, her lawyer and former Pheu Thai MP, were summoned for "attitude adjustment" by the military after they criticized the NLA. General Prayuth said threateningly that "if someone criticizes the government, they are acting illegally. We will call them to talk and if they continue criticizing, I will use my authority to cancel their travels and prohibit them from going abroad, and I will audit their accounts and expenditures. For this, we have a range of punishments to fit their offences" (Manager Daily, January 29, 2015). Simultaneously, many people who love Yingluck, the red-shirt movement, and democracy have been compelled to attend the military's One Heart Thai events, throughout the provinces.

In addition, a week after the impeachment, a Thai court sentenced the leader of the red-shirt movement, Jatuporn Prompan, to two years in prison for defaming former Prime Minister Abhisit. Less than one additional week passed before the junta summoned Nattawut Saikua, another core red-shirt leader in Bangkok, along with Pichai Nariphaphan, former Energy Minister, and Chaturon Chaisang, former Education Minister, both Pheu Thai party members, and Cherdchai Tontisirin, a red-shirt leader in Khon Kaen, for attitude adjustment. Thailand analyst David Streckfuss said of the latest attempt to quash any opposition to the military regime, "it seems to be part of a larger plan by the Bangkok establishment to silence and force aside their vocal critics [...]. They are attempting to weaken the infrastructure of pro-democracy forces ahead of when an election is eventually held" (Associated Press, January 28, 2015).

As the continued arrests and intimidation of political enemies shows, the military's "reconciliation" is leading Thai society away from true reconciliation. The military believes that reconciliation means only unity and not voicing different political views, and furthermore that whoever does not accept reconciliation in this way is not really Thai.

Under such a bureaucratic polity (Riggs, 1966), Thai society cannot proceed to reconciliation because the military and bureaucracy are supreme, whereas citizen participation in government and politics is not given any importance. Thailand's history shows that the interventions of the military in politics have never led to lasting democracy. The 2007 Constitution adopted after the coup d'état of 2006, and which was overturned in 2014, was considered autocratic for its constitutional constraints, because power was skewed to the judiciary and away from the elected parliament (Marshall & Gurr, 2014). In addition, the index of autocracy in Thailand has risen since 2006, rather than decreased. The military budget has also risen every year. From 2001-2010, the budget was one of the highest in Asia. In 2014, the Global Firepower Index reported Thailand as the twenty-fourth most powerful military in the world (Macias et al., 2014). The budget increased from 183,820,000,000 baht (\$5.9 billion US) or 7.3 percent of total government expenditure to 193,499,805,500 baht (\$6.2 billion US) or 7.5 percent in 2015 (Prachachat, September 22, 2014). Since the coup d'état in 2006, Thailand has been a weak state which, as Joel Migdal (1988) explains, "is one in which unelected power brokers (private business, paramilitary, army, etc.) manipulate, subvert, or utilize state bureaucratic structures to enhance their power base." The continuing power and influence of the military thus threatens reconciliation, because without democratization, reconciliation is not viable.

There can be no reconciliation in Thai society, if all the power still belongs to the military and bureaucratic sectors, which allows the subversion of a democracy of civilian supremacy. Undoubtedly, unless there is a real transfer of power from military-backed elites to the citizens, even if there is a future election, it still will not represent a transition to democracy (Welzel & Inglehart, 2008). Since the military is not pursuing democracy but instead focuses on wiping out political opposition through the processes of forgetting, returning to ironic happiness, and threatening and hunting, Thailand will not soon see true reconciliation.

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Note

Note 1. It is customary in Thailand to refer to well-known figures by their first name. For Thai political figures, the author will follow this convention and refer to them by first name only after the first mention.

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