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## Morals Matter: Cultural Politics Compared

A look at the discursive practices of the cultural movements in Southern Thailand reveals fascinating parallels. Both movements take their main inspiration from religion. Local intellectuals in Songkla take their main inspiration from Buddhism. Leading religious leaders in Pattani draw on Islam. Most interestingly, the teachings of Phra Bhudhadhasa and orthodox Islamic intellectualism are both reform-minded, rational versions of their religious systems and seek a radical re-interpretation of their religious doctrine, using them as the main tool for the mobilization of followers. The spirituality of reformist religion gives additional weight to the seminars, lectures and campaigns of the movements. Religion legitimizes actions and provides a code for creating 'high culture'. Both movements give emphasis to the educational role of local intellectuals: the core group of Songkla Prachakom is comprised of academics and teachers; religious scholars lead the Islamic movement.

Both movements are integrated into global systems of ideology, representation and reference. Here, the most important difference has to be pointed out. The locally-based Songkla movement is closely integrated into networks of civic groups on a national scale, especially with democratic associations and religious circles in Bangkok. The Islamic religious movement is orientated towards Malaysia and the Middle East.

As in Goffman's tales, urban life is like a play in which roles are distributed and in which people engage in symbolic interaction. Codes emerge and are brought to the centre stage, not least with the media. Individuals in schools, colleges and universities are highly respected figures in the Songkla public sphere. In my interviews, teachers stated that they have a great responsibility for the welfare of society. Some teachers are well known for their seniority, are sought after for their opinions in decision making, and take a guiding role in community affairs. As one teacher explained to me, he sees his social responsibility as not limited to the affairs of the school. Rather, he believes that he is

teaching his pupils to be responsible members of society. He elaborates that teachers are in a special position to guarantee a just and harmonious social order.

Local Islamic scholars have a mission from God to disseminate the message of the Prophet to the population. Because of their religious authority, Islamic scholars are widely recognized as spiritual leaders. Islam is understood to be a comprehensive body of knowledge, which should be applied to all spheres of life. The representatives of an orthodox Islam intellectualism are legitimized to lead through the *ijazaz* from their shaykhs in Saudi Arabia.

Therefore, knowledge, competence and education qualify local intellectuals to take a lead in the spiritual movements. In other words, knowledge is contrasted with ignorance. From this perspective, the 'common people' should seek the wise guidance of the educated. What are the key terms in the movements religious discourses?

Bhuddhadhasas's political writings emphasise the importance of *Dhammik* or moral leadership based on the *dasarajadhamma* or ten Buddhist principles of moral leadership. Jackson has shown that Bhuddhadhasa's reinterpretation of doctrine leans more towards authoritarianism than democracy and towards a strong moral leader, who is able to lead the collective (Jackson 1989). Within this context, Chamlong Srimuang was mentioned as one such a strong moral leader by members of the Songkla core group.

With regard to orthodox Islam intellectualism, moral leadership is provided by the Imam. The concept of the clerical leadership in the *ulema*, also rests on the strong moral leader, who is giving the right interpretation of Islam and also leans more towards authoritarianism. Nik Aziz Nik Mat, the political leader of the Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), serves as model for the Malay Muslims on the Thai side.

Apart from their different religious affiliations, Chamlong Srimuang and Nik Aziz Nik Mat have some leadership qualities in common. Both are strong, even authoritarian leaders who rely on moral concepts. The presentation of both leaders in the public sphere is remarkable. Both leaders demonstrate a frugal lifestyle. This lifestyle involves the suppression of any human desire and includes taboos on alcohol and sexual desire between men and women.

'Correct' and authoritative social conduct is one of the great themes of the movements: serving as a model of correct conduct, the leadership styles of Chamlong and Nik Aziz Nik Mat have a strong anti-consumerist and anti-Western undertone. The style with which both leaders represent themselves in public, in a Buddhist temple, or for the

Friday prayer in Khota Baru, visually support and lend credibility to the political discourses, legitimating their political action. While neither Chamlong nor Nik Aziz are physically present in Southern Thailand, they provide role models for the movements.

This moral conduct in daily life is contrasted with contemporary Thai society which is interpreted as being in a state of crisis, a crisis that is seen foremost as a moral crisis. The subjects of social inequality and rural poverty are conspicuously absent in these discourses. Instead, cultural subjects such as family, love and sexuality, as well as apparently trivial issues in everyday life, such as food and dress, are brought to the centre stage.

I want to argue that the educated middle classes participate in cultural politics in an attempt to shape cultural spaces. Clearly, an explicit attack on the political or economic system is avoided in the movement's discourses. Rather, the leading local figures present themselves as spiritual leaders in moral matters.

### **Tradition, Modernity and Globalization**

Tradition is a crucial category in the discourse of both Songkla's movement and of orthodox Islam.

Songkla Forum aims to develop an affinity of Songkla's citizens with the 'home' (*baan*). A romantic image is attached to the notion of 'belonging'. An exhibition of old photos, advertising for local Kao Yam Songkla foods, a changing relationship with nature, a guided walk and a painting of Songkla by Songkla's children are activities that aim to raise an awareness of the authentic locality: the old photos are shown to remember the good old times, at a time when the old buildings are disappearing. Local foods are appreciated, when global fast-food chains have altered the eating habits of Songkla's people.

Within the activities of the community of practice, a reconstruction of the locality is taking place. 'Locality' is put in a broader perspective of global recognition of local cultural inclinations. The significance and relevance of the locality is enhanced through its incorporation into world spaces.

Songkla Forum and Songkla Prachakom are using new technologies of media and communication in order to put their campaign high on the agenda. Being a local movement, the core group establishes links with Thai NGOs in Bangkok, within the Thai City-Net and even with international organizations abroad. Songkla Prachakom is borrowing from the discourses of Thai intellectuals, reformist monks and

global NGOs. Terminologies such as community, environment, development and good governance have entered the discourse of the local movement. The community of practice can be compared with a globalized 'green' movement in which the apparent paradox of conservation and renewal is a marker of a new political culture. These global, alternative concepts are channelled into the local. Being a local movement that is situated in a globalizing context, Songkla Prachakom has a self-understanding of being firmly based in a Thai culture.

Within orthodox Islam intellectualism, the reconstruction of the locality is also taking shape. The reconstruction of Islam in a local context is incorporating the locality into world spaces. Islamic institutions establish Islamic networks to the Islamic world, in particular with Malaysia, Indonesia, Egypt and Saudi-Arabia.

It seems to me that an understanding of the concept of Thai culture is crucial for an understanding of the cultural dynamics in Southern Thailand. The following examples are presented to illustrate that the invention of tradition is not a remainder from the past, but an expression of global modernities.

### **Cultural Politics Compared**

The social construction of communal spaces is crucial for the new power of the middle class. In focusing on the new quality of public life, I aimed to show the strategies by which the ethnic segments of the new middle class aim to bring middle class issues into the public realm.

In this light, the public sphere is not open for all and does not correspond to the ideal type of civil society. Rather, the public is a project that increasingly has to match the rationales of the culture market.

In this sense, first of all, the public sphere has to be invented. Moreover, the emerging public arenas are highly contested social spaces. Thus, I am looking to the ways, in which publicness is socially produced.

Publicness counts, because the middle class is more and more able to initiate a dynamic on its own; the players aim to consolidate their grip on the public. The Southern Thai case enriches the problematic of the constitution and transformation of the public sphere: In the public sphere, the middle class is enabled to communicate their legitimate model of behaviour. To put it bluntly, the institutionalization of the life conduct is taking place in the public sphere.

The efforts of disciplining members require specific forms of social organization and, as we will see, original forms of leadership and guid-

ance. The movements are led by an intellectual elite, through whose brokerage people are disciplined as members of a larger, translocal community. The Islamic public sphere is dominated by religious leaders who successfully mediate religious norms. The hierarchical relationship in the public sphere reflects the tight management and regulation of the religious staff. In fact, the Islamic public sphere does not allow participation in the making of public life: laic members are mere audiences of the religious ‘media stars’. Still, there is a communication system between leaders teachers, and followers students. The religious leaders are crucial to the Islamic public spheres; the mobilization of the middle class depends on their charismatic leadership.

As for the civil movement, the campaigns are carefully planned and staged by a small circle of core members. This circle is comprised of highly-educated people, occupying influential positions in the educational field. In the process of opening up the communicative space, this circle and network of local ‘intellectuals’ communicates the issues-ethical, environmental and political, to the audience. The movement is loosely organized, and comprises a cluster of circles, networks and groups, which are loosely tied to each other and mobilised in the urban ‘Event’. In the process of the institutionalization of the movement in associations, such as Songkla Forum, the Council of Political Reform, NGOs and environmental organizations, an organizational structure is introduced, which is headed by well-known and famous local intellectuals who are appointed leaders, representatives and presidents of their groups.

An interesting point concerns the mobilization and the recruitment of new members. First, both movements consolidate their grip on the public sphere. The communities of practice are in no small part responsible for the value adding to the fields of religion and knowledge and through their strong appeal to the urban middle class, are taking over the public sphere.

In his paper on the emergence of a religious public, Salvatore (1998) argues that Islam as a public norm operates through strategies of staging virtue. Virtue is a model of legitimate behaviour:

“Virtue is here conceived not, tautologically, as a moral endowment, a code of behaviour inherent in (however changeable) cultural assets or traditions, but as a set of competencies that cultural (and in our case religious) elites are called to craft, re-fashion and promote in order to impose and consolidate their grip on the public” (Salvatore 1998: 87).

Strategies of staging virtue are dependent on the rules of communication within a modern public sphere: Salvatore shows how communication of religious codes in the public sphere is used to induce so-called civilizing processes, that is, processes that shape the social habitus. In short, he is looking at the ways through which staging virtue becomes a formidable instrument for controlling people and pinpointing loyalties (Salvatore 1998: 117). Following the same line of argument, the middle class as an educational elite is able, not least through the construction of public spheres, to construct and promote models of civility.

The grip on the public, the civilizing processes, includes also disciplining and communicative technologies to impose patterns of control on the communities addressed, 'requiring more or less coherent packages of commitments, obligations and rights' (Salvatore 1998: 88).

Religion is a 'field' in communicative relationship with other 'fields'. In the emerging cultural politics, the 'field' of religion is the spearhead of new public spheres. In the line of Armando Salvatore's work, the Islamic (religious) public sphere is not an ideal normative type of reasoned communication, but is a stage where religiously grounded virtue is engendered through specific discursive and disciplining technologies.

Religion as a cultural tool in particular has the potential to appeal to the spiritual needs of the middle class and to legitimize public action of the communities of practice. Coming back to our ethnography of public spheres in Southern Thailand, religion plays a crucial role in delivering the blueprints for a new consensus among the middle class: contemporary urban Buddhist and Islamic movements attract significant numbers of that social stratum (Jackson 1989).

Let us take a closer look on religion 'going public'. More research needs to be done on the impact of religious renewal on public life:

"Little attention has been paid to the way a reformed, puritan or pietistic appropriation of religion has itself influenced public religion" (Salvatore 1997: 53).

In our view the interrelationships of privateness and publicness have been obscured by the now fashionable concepts of 'civil society'. The question will be not whether and to what extent a civil society has developed, but rather, which public categories may fulfil the role to account for the tension between individualization and social cohesion.

At first glance, Songkla's people organization is a non-hierarchical space and a non-profit organization, in which all members are givers. Indeed, equality and the call for human rights and participation in decision-making is a key term in the movement's campaign. The core members are organizing themselves in a strategic group, are actively engaged in status building and form an educational 'elite'. Songkla Prachakom and the many groups and networks, friendship circles, environmental groups, conservation networks and discussion groups, that are intimately linked to the movement, build, in their own understanding, a moral core in a corrupt society.

The Songkla learning festival is directed towards the family and the children of Songkla, opening up new spaces, playgrounds, and learning activities to the children. The integration of children and the qualities of responsible parenthood, on education and the accumulation of knowledge principally underline the integrative role of being a responsible and competent parent.

The joyful and entertaining atmosphere of the activities and spectacles contributes to the huge attraction of the association and especially to the mobilization of new members. The communal spaces are also fun-spaces and spectacles, in which people enjoy themselves, have leisure time and come together in a picnic-like atmosphere. The traditional dress contributes to the carnival mood.

The moral regimentation of orthodox Islam contrasts with the joyful atmosphere of Songkla Prachakom's activities. The harsh eradication of fun-spaces seems to be an integral part of the Muslim campaign to clear spaces for Muslims in Patani. As Werbner (1996) has shown convincingly, the battles between mass popular culture with its music and carnivals and the pious lifestyle-apparatus of the orthodox are typical to the internal struggles of Islamic communities, between women and men, young and old men, and to the ownership competition in Muslim public arenas.

### **Public Religion: Religious Public Spheres Compared**

Jackson argues that the most important developments in Thai Buddhism in terms of the political role of Buddhism are taking place outside the convention-bound hierarchy of administrative monks (Jackson 1989). Many members of the professional and middle classes have turned to a number of sympathetic monks to provide a religiopolitical justification for their aspirations. The increasing appeal of reformist monks is due to the changing relationship of the lay

community and urban Buddhist movements. The middle class has been considerably disenchanted with the state-imposed Buddhist Sangha which is perceived to increasingly frustrate the spiritual needs and growing political aspirations of the urban middle class. Reformist monks develop an approach to Buddhist practice that demonstrates the value and relevance of Buddhism to contemporary lay life. Phra Bhudhadhasa Bhikku has been honoured as ‘Thailand’s greatest contemporary spiritual leader’.

The origin and growth of Buddhadasa’s movement has been itself an influential model for the Buddhist-inspired people’s organizations of Bangkok, Songkla, Phetchaburi, Chiang Mai and Korat. Suchira notes that Bhudhadhasa and his younger brother, Dhammasada, set up the *Dhammadana* Foundation to support activities such as *Suan Mokkhab* (The Garden of Liberation), a library, a school, a press and the journal, *Buddhasasana*. *Suan Mokkhab* became a spiritual centre of Buddhist ideology. Bhudhadhasa related to the outside world, was a prolific author of books, a lecturing monk in Thai universities and a spiritual guide with wide popularity and influence among social and intellectual circles in Bangkok. The nation-wide network and influence of Bhudhadhasa has been tapped by the provincial people’s organizations, such as Songkla Prachakom.

Songkla Prachakom develops the Buddhist teachings of Phra Bhudhadhasa Bhikku into a powerful legitimizing force to defend liberal and democratic principles and campaigns. The teaching of famous monks on social problems, environmental awareness and Buddhist life conduct are recorded on tape and video and disseminated through private radio programmes, videotapes and during seminars and campaigns.

Bhudhadhasa maintains that Buddhism must be interpreted so that it is beneficial for modern people. His demythologized interpretation of *Nibbana* as being a spiritual condition attainable in this life appeals to the Buddhist lay consumers. As Jackson (1989) explains, the reformist monks, as epitomized by Bhudhadhasa, are intellectuals who approach Buddhism in terms of their rationalist view of Buddhist doctrine. This rationalist approach to the teaching leads the reformists to place considerable emphasis on morality and *Vipassana*, or insight meditation. Following the teaching of Bhudhadhasa, the middle class is aligning itself with a rational interpretation of Buddhist guidance of salvation, liberating the teaching from the traditional doxy and rituals. In the appropriation of religious forms, Buddhism is secularized, providing a cultural tool in serving the worldly ends of the movement.

Buddhist monks are invited to academic seminars and environmental campaigns, representing an authoritative language, following the tradition of lecture monks, which has been founded by Bhudhadhasa.

Buddhism is a crucial signifier of Thainess and Thai patriotism. The centrality of Buddhism in the discourse underlines the quest for authenticity. Buddhism has a central place in the definition of the locality, which is invented by the community (as home and place of birth). Buddhism is situated in the centre of community life, a pool of local knowledge, and a spiritual guidance in front of the ills of society. The emphasis on morality and rules cultivates differences between Buddhist and non-Buddhists. Buddhism underlines the Thai way of doing things and provides a religious meaning to secular political action.

Public Islam provides a powerful religious instrument in the hands of religious leaders to mobilize and discipline members. When the language of religion gains ground in public discourse, newer religious specialists acquire more power of definition of individual correctness and public morality. The rise of a modern public sphere and the development of a massive apparatus of lifestyles depends on the centrality of highly charismatic religious leaders, who are legitimized by their education in Saudi Arabia or Egypt. Those religious leaders, as epitomized by Ismail Lutfi are media-stars whose mediation of legitimate behaviour in public life is staged again and again in public speeches and in Islamic media. The media-stars are mass producers of Islamic media, such as pamphlets, books, and tapes.<sup>1</sup> The intellectual public sphere is based on the guidance and teaching of the religious authorities, who produce authorized knowledge. The structural transformation of the Muslim public sphere entails an increasing autonomization of public players endowed with religious credentials, who 'make people talk' about what it means to be a good Muslim. Islamic publications address topics of immediate practical and emotional concern for most. The proliferation of the Islamic media indicates that religion operates in a field that is governed by the culture market (Raphael 1989). The staging of Islam as virtue is a game about enriching and stabilizing clienteles, as well as gaining power through maintaining audiences and followers (Salvatore 1998: 113). The religious discourse cultivates 'good Muslim' and 'bad Muslim' discourses, indicating a competition of high and popular religion. The high production of orthodox Islam hopes to domesticate and purify popular beliefs. This is done by intellectuals who increasingly go into the *pondoks* and villages to spread the messages of textual Islam. Moreover, Islamism cultivates dichotomizing Islam/non-Islam and heaven/hell differences. The dynamics of distinction

include stereotypes and rhetorical attacks against the Thai Buddhist. The mediation of the public sphere by the public heroes to the global Arab Islamic public sphere is very desirable for the articulate Malay-Muslim middle class. Furthermore, solidarities to the governing PAS in Northern Malaysia and friendships between charismatic religious leaders on both sides of the Thai-Malaysian border are established.



Women Merit Making (*tambun*), Kelantan, Malaysia.

### Public Transcripts

It is argued that public transcripts of dominant groups still deserve more academic attention. The movements eagerly seek a presence in the public sphere. In Southern Thailand, the public sphere is emerging as a result of the tireless efforts of the urban middle class. This well-educated and articulate social stratum has an interest in disseminating its issues. The strategies of communication are not limited to games of representation to win over a public contest, but to construct and promote models of civility. Strategies of communication aim to control and discipline the members of the community addressed. In the process, the communities of practice aim to consolidate their grip on the public sphere. Thus, contrary to the hidden transcripts of the subaltern, the dominant groups are looking for visibility in the social arena. In the sense that the communities of practice are able to shift pattern of authority, they emerge as strategic groups (Evers/Schiel 1988). Stra-

tegic groups are able to impose their standards of legitimate behaviour on the social arena, and consolidate their position of power. The strategic groups in question produce and impose models of civility on the communities addressed. Religion is used as the spearhead of the discourses. Theoretically speaking, religion provides a powerful symbolic resource, enabling the community of practice to engage in forms of social representation. In the emerging monopolistic cultural markets, religious renewals are distinctive makers of the educated middle classes. Religion exemplifies the relationship of the private and the public in the communities of practice. The reformist, rational 'high' religious productions construct and promote models of life-conduct or models of inwardness. The field of religion is upgraded in the public sphere. Definitions of a 'good Buddhist' or a 'good Muslim' abound. In the process of shifting structures of authority and the transformation of the public sphere, the middle class segments aim to institutionalise their models of civilisation. As a result of the successful mobilisation and discipline of members, strategic groups emerge and transform a loosely structured core group into social institutions who are partaking and shaping contemporary public life in Southern Thailand. Thus, the 'Network for Political Reform' emerges as political force in Songkla, representing the new society and gradually gaining bargaining power in local politics. Their representatives proliferate as heroes of the public sphere who take a leadership role in community affairs and prepare themselves for positions in the local political system. As for orthodox Islam, the *pondoks* are semi-autonomous public spaces which indicate the dominant position of orthodox religious leaders in the Muslim public sphere. The ethnic Chinese reinforce their Chinese cultural identity in the public sphere as well.<sup>2</sup> Each cultural segment has been involved in a general pronouncement and essentialization of identity politics in the 1980s and 1990s.

The public spaces have been classified in Table 6, which aims to show the meaningful contents of communities in a comparative perspective:

**Table 6.** Cultural Public Spaces Compared

Communities of practice	Performance	Language	Religion	Media	Organization
Songkla Prachakom	<i>baan koet</i> campaign	Thai, southern Thai	Bhudhadhasa	Core radio local media	Songkla Forum, NGOs, <i>wat</i> , political reform
Islamic intellectual culture	Islamic sermon	Melayu, Arabic, Jawi	Islamic reassertion	Islamic media, tapes	Mosque, <i>pondok</i> , <i>Madrasah</i>
Chinese communal life	Chinese rituals <i>Kwan Im</i>	Chinese, Thai	Chinese syncretism	Books, videos, television	Business association, temple, alumni

As the communities seek visibility, local intellectuals are staging the urban event. The high visibility of seminars and campaigns, Islamic sermons and public speeches, and Chinese festivals express the cultural power of groups.

The somewhat essentializing identifications in the public sphere indicate the importance of the respective public spheres to provide the sites where new identities are constructed and where identities can be demonstrated within the demarcations of we-group formations. Language and religion provide the symbolic resources, underlining the ownership of the public sphere. The use of Thai, Malay, and Chinese languages and dialects (Southern Thai, Chinese dialects, local Bahasa Melayu) not only reflect language competencies, but contribute to the exclusive nature of the club, the Thai club being for Thai speakers and so on. The communities of practice construct and promote their localities, beliefs and media of communication.

The medium of communication in the prospectus, brochures and radio programme of Songkla Prachakom is central Thai. As for the neo-Islamist movement, the Melayu dialect is the main medium of communication. The use of the Arabic language enhances the religious

credibility and prestige of the speaker and contributes in no small part to the profile of High Islam.

Significantly, as has been pointed out before, the communities of practice dispose of their own local media, being producers of media spheres. Core radio uses the central Thai language. Islamic media are available in Thai and Malay (imported from Bangkok or Malaysia). The *Islamic Guidance Post* is printed in Bangkok in the Thai language, as less and less people in the urban areas are able to read Jawi.

The models of civility are promoted through religious institutions, as epitomized by the mosque and the *wat*.

### **Modes of Social Organization and Leadership<sup>3</sup>**

The two instances of cultural movements in Songkla and Pattani develop original modes of social and political organisation and social action that deserve to be dealt with in a special section.

Songkla Prachakom is composed of associations, friendship circles, NGOs, clubs and associations. In contemporary Songkla, a list of voluntary associations has been established and new groups also emerge. A sketch of some of these groups illustrates the character of Songkla's associations:

Songkla Forum is an organization that has been set up by Khun Pannipa and her husband and consists of people from the educational sector. Songkla Forum is a sister organization of Bangkok forum and an illustration of a new generation of NGOs. This NGO envisions to develop social creativity in the urban sectors of Thailand. Members join in seminars, workshops and training courses in order to study the history of places, temples, streets and quarters and to develop, animate and give vitality to urban communities. Songkla Forum aims to discover the roots of moral and spiritual leadership and autochthonous organization. Second, Songkla Forum aims to mobilize urban communities in order to challenge the urban administration. Thus, Songkla Forum combines a promotion of local knowledge, home and tradition with an appeal to participate in action and planning. Projects on social problems, such as children's education, the pollution in Songkla Lake or the conservation of the old city are systematically explored in seminars and workshops. Concrete demands and campaigns are prepared in training courses, which focus on team building and social creativity.

Songkla Forum provides a framework of learning. This purpose of learning is also reflected in the organizational framework as well. The

core leaders of Songkla Forum consists of people from the educational sector in particular. These core leaders are perfectly located to give lectures to the people. They are doing so. Khun Pannipa Sotthibandhu and her husband act as moderators during seminars and workshops. During the Learning Festival, the highlight of Songkla Forum's campaign, key people from the educational sector taught about the social ills in Songkla, and of the possibility of overcoming these problems.

Pia for example has been involved in activities to protect slums from demolition in Bangkok. Pia and Leg explain that slums have developed in Nakhorn, Phuket, Trang and Songkla as a result of pressure in the rural areas to sustain a livelihood. More and more poor peasants in Southern Thailand are leaving the rural areas to find a place in the city. The city of Hatyai does not allow squatters to stay in the city at all. The NGO assists squatters to upgrade their housing, to build a hall for the slum community, to develop a community spirit, to build associations, and to represent the interests of the squatters in negotiation with the local government. Pia and Leg have completed a university education. They became interested in the problems of squatters during their participation in student clubs.

The NGO is member of a nation-wide network of voluntary associations working in urban areas and gets support from mother NGOs in Bangkok. The NGO in Songkla has a relative independence from the more experienced NGOs in Bangkok in terms of strategies and decision-making. The close cooperation with other organizations of Songkla Prachakom and a pragmatic attitude towards the authorities helped to put the problems of squatters on the agenda of the local state. The NGOs aim to slowly construct mutual trust and cooperation in the process of building reliable associations that could defend the interests of the squatters and enable them to negotiate with the authorities. Therefore, the NGO organizes hearings, that bring together representatives of the state, the NGO and the squatters.

The NGO enjoys financial support from international donor agencies, such as UNICEF and Miserior. The NGOs in Songkla consist of young volunteers who engage at the grassroots level, with squatters, small peasants and fishermen. The volunteers are led by more experienced people who are accepted as senior NGO leaders. The NGOs work in close co-operation with each other and increasingly co-ordinate their activities with the mother NGOs in Bangkok and the donor agencies.

The NGOs share some patterns of social organisation and leadership. Generally speaking, the emergence of some charismatic key peo-

ple who become well-known personalities can be observed. In particular, the non-professional role of professionals and the role of professionals in social and political change deserve more attention (Evers 1974). In a situation of modernization, increasing specialisation and professionalisation in Southern Thailand, the non-professional role of professionals is increasing. Professionals such as doctors and representatives from the educational sector are highly regarded in society. In the politics of everyday life, they occupy respectable positions in urban society. Their enthusiastic participation in public life is recognized by the urban clientele who increasingly pressure for more important roles for their leaders. Furthermore, the professionals increasingly take up positions as consultants of dominant groups in the local state.

Not least due to the increasing importance of non-professional functions, some professionals become senior figures who are recognized as intellectuals and leaders. Thus, the status of these professionals is really upgraded in the public sphere. Professionals are regarded as a legitimate elite who base their credibility on their high education and their professional ethics. Associations also constitute the base of their status and reputation.

These public professionals draw on their new institutions in social and political life. In the process of building professional associations in Songkla, the role of these key figures also change. Professionals practise a full-time occupation (Evers 1974: 3), they are committed to rules of competence and enjoy substantial autonomy. In the local public sphere, these professionals become leading intellectuals who develop organizational bases of power and are increasingly successful in mobilizing, controlling and commanding segments from the urban middle classes in a junior position who feel attracted to the efforts and campaigns of leading professionals.

These professionals set the standards of morality owing to their educational specialization and pool of knowledge. The authority of these professionals is widely accepted and confirmed by all parties, including the local state, which increasingly depends on the competence of these leading professionals. As these professionals become strategic figures who design strategies and promote their norms and values in the public space, the local state increasingly attempts to incorporate them into state programmes.

The booming public life is not least due to the progress of democracy and decentralization in contemporary Thailand. In this context, the negotiation of the social order becomes more intense. The increasing authority of leading intellectuals sets the standard for an alternative

worldview that argues for the inability of the local state to solve the problems and the competence of the public organizations to do so. This alternative worldview complains that the social and political system is characterized by 'moral decay', 'corruption', 'egoism', and 'ignorance' on the side of the bureaucracy. These problems are coupled with 'drugs', 'AIDs', 'family abuse', and so on. The new public organizations and the core group of leading intellectuals claim no less than the ownership of the public space. Interestingly, the worldview promoted by Songkla Prachakom couples private and public issues in one programme and vision, contributing to the strength of the message and the appeal to the newcomer.

### **Leading Professionals in Songkla, Religious Authorities in Patani**

In the process of making their interests public and their worldview an authoritative language, the core group of leading professionals emerges as a central agent of social and political change. In a similar manner, Islamic authorities set the standards for a social and political programme.

As the non-professional role of professionals from the educational sector is increasing, journalists, doctors, lawyers and academics emerge as strategic figures. The leading professionals control a new resource: education and knowledge. Evers and Schiel indicate that a new resource is likely to produce strategic groups who aim to appropriate resources (Evers/Schiel 1988). Coming from the educational sector, leading professionals control the access to education and to positions within the educational field. In the process of modernization, the field of education is elevated. The educational profession is raised to a higher intellectual level.

The staff of the many educational institutions in Songkla co-ordinate more and more closely. By weaving face-to-face networks, the educational professionals gain relative independence from the state. Moreover, the fact that the mayor of Songkla has been a very respected teacher (*kru*) shows the popularity and ability of learned professions to fill positions of power and responsibility.

Academics from educational institutions enjoy high status and prestige in local society. As persons of education and knowledge, *ajaarns* are said to be particularly well-suited to take up leadership functions. The professionals are asked by the people to take up positions of responsibility for the general welfare of the community. The move-

ment is considered a family, the professionals senior persons and their followers 'children'.<sup>4</sup>

The movement seems to have arrived at a critical stage: it has changed from a loose social circle of followers and friends to a potent, organized social force. In particular, the strength of the core group is greatly enhanced by the new constitution and the opportunities of political participation. The leaders of the core group have a realistic aspiration to being elected to state positions. The proliferation of strategies is a crucial shift in the organization and growth of the movement into a political force.

### **The Newcomer: Patterns of Mobilization and Disciplination**

The mobilization of newcomers in large numbers enhances the representation of the urban middle class. Both public spheres in Songkla and Pattani reveal stabilizing patterns of social mobilization which aims to produce reliable members. From the perspective of the movement, the new member undergoes a period of socialization in which he/she changes from a passive idiot to a responsible, competent and knowledgeable citizen; he/she changes from a private person to a public person. The transformation of identity in the public sphere is a result of social training in which the new member is urged to adopt to a new, enlightened life praxis. The social training in both organizations concerns the re-organization of everyday life. The transformation of social identity happens in multiple, subsequent stages: the new member has to be mobilized for the purpose of the movement. Both instances emphasize the communitarian character of the movement, in which the new member quits ignorance for enlightenment.

This transformation of the person does occur on different stages. The new members of Songkla people and sister organisations are encouraged to participate in workshops and training sessions in order to develop a community spirit. The workshops and training sessions are organised and administered by the core group of leading educators. Participants are encouraged to overcome sentiments of egoism and material greed. In this line, the new members withdraw their individual interests for the sake of the community. The members submit themselves to the pedagogical authority of the core group.

The emergence of an Islamic public sphere involves religious speakers (communicators) and audiences. Purification of Muslim against non-Muslim styles determines social discourse. The interpretation of Islam to the ritual and strict rules of body behaviour is instru-

mental in the power politics and social practices of orthodox, intellectual leadership. The reconstruction of Islam in the religious public sphere provides the means to control and discipline the followers by staging Islam as public norm. Intellectual Islam as 'the transformation and internalization of the 'Sacred' establishes a framework in which the followers quasi-employ the techniques of the self on their way to becoming good and knowledgeable Muslims.

The dynamics of the Islamic public sphere operate within the transformation of life and society in Southern Thailand. The proliferation of religious players takes place within a framework of deep disturbance of self-esteem of Malay Muslim intellectuals. Consumers of religious discourses make contingent uses of the staged morals. Members are really empowered to change their lives in response to these stimuli. The performance of the intellectualisation of Islam in religious speeches greatly appeal to academics through whose brokerage the youth attend the mass meetings and internalise the discourses of the religious leaders. The religious leadership integrates them into the larger translocal community and, doing so, mediates between global religious forms and the local situation.

Thus, participation in the religious public sphere offers access to 'sacred' knowledge, education, and Islamic networks. The new members of the community undergo profound transformations in the Islamic public sphere. Religious players formulate the definitions of what it means to be a 'good Muslim'. The institutionalisation of the religious public sphere is made public and indeed 'visible' through the regimentation of rules and body styles in everyday life. Through appearances in dress, the new member shows the cultural competencies and the adoption of 'High' productions of cultural (here religious) authority.

The application of moral and habitual codes confines the realization of the Muslim self to Public Islam. The attendance figures for Friday mosque services or the number of women wearing *jihab* head covers, both of which are increasing at a remarkable rate, are indicators of the strict observance of Islamic rules. The transformation of the person under the guidance of Islamic teachers in Southern Thailand is remarkable. The sharp distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim styles is successfully communicated in the religious public sphere and results in the adoption of Arabic models that are emulated. The coercion into conservative body styles symbolizes and makes visible more general patterns of control and discipline. The key to patterns of mobilization and discipline are modern *dakawa* (mission) movements. Ac-

ademics are put in high esteem in the Malay community and are among the most energetic reformers.

The institutionalization of the networks is an important process that deserves more careful attention. The transformation of networks into strategic groups points to the political agenda of respective locally-based social movements and to the political actions carried out by their members. The research indicates an extension of public spheres into the organization of everyday life.

### **Culture Building and the Politics of Expressive Identities**

How accurate is it to speak of a resurgence of cultural politics and what are the causes of the shift to culture and identity in the contemporary world? In present cultural politics, ideology about gender, sexuality and home occupy the cultural codes of the state, the media and religious movements. The 1990s have seen a massive production of images about the Asian family. This points to a situation, in which the frontiers of the private and public are blurred and in which the supposedly private spheres are shifting, being reworked and redefined in the larger culture, religion, and polity. Seen from a framework of the politicization of the private, the reproduction of middle class cultural forms involves the creation of a domestic ideology and its permanent reworkings.

The social centrality of life orders and the dynamics of distinction resulting from the contests cannot be grasped in the context of the local context. The priority of questions of life methodologies and changing subjectivities has to be understood against a background of increasing world market integration and the establishment of new social fields in the making of a bourgeois society. It is argued that the middle class space is a space on its own and the space is shaped and defended through a constant elaboration of the borderline. Women and men are affluent consumers of cultural products or architects of identity. The new consumers are involved in a permanent competition and are eager to position themselves in the political, economic and cultural fields. We may be interested in the adoption of practices of young parents as well as in the processes by which an expanding class comes to define its own way of life and thoughts as civilisation or simply as human nature.

In the present cultural politics, ideologies of the family, gender and home and sexuality, masculinity and femininities occupy the cultural codes in social dramas of the state, the media, and social and religious

movements. Cultural images of the “Asian family” and “Asian values” have been used by Asian political leaders for political ends (Pertiera 1999, Surin 1999). The making of a class boundary involves everyday work in the reproduction of cultural forms. Class is not an essentialist category. The production and consumption of culture is a process in which the spaces of class have to constantly be created. Class is constituted in relation to ethnic or gender categories. Thus, rather than being a fixed social reality, a we-group that is organized in a frame of class and identity is a construction that involves the maintenance of boundaries to the ethnic other.

The educated middle class makes use of cultural tools in an attempt to shape cultural spaces in an ongoing negotiation of identity politics. The social group of academics, professionals, teachers, lawyers, doctors and architects, entrepreneurs and civil servants makes its interest visible in space. The borderline, which was drawn with the poor and very rich is based on tertiary education. The expansion of the educational system has enabled a new generation of people to climb the social ladder. The threat of downward mobility, social instability and personal crisis makes the ideal of a modern lifestyle-apparatus desirable. The organization in socio-religious movements promises security in a state of personal uncertainty.

In Southern Thailand, a rapid social transformation is shattering the foundations of social life. The intervention of the state apparatus has increased the presence of state power in the local areas and the extension of state power is now penetrating nearly every sphere of daily life. While only a few Chinese families control the means of production, poverty in the rural sector is increasing. People ‘know their place in society’ (*ruijak tana kong tua eng*) as the old saying goes.

### Life Orders in Southern Thailand

It is no accident that the construction of differences is organized along competitive life-orders. It is important to recognize that lifestyle acts are also orderings acts. In Southern Thailand, ethnic and religious systems vie for cultural superiority: the revivalist interpretations of religion are making great inroads.

Intellectual Islam and reformist Buddhism are both movements with global locations and milieus, which are channelled into the local. They are modern in the sense that they are based on education. The socio-religious movements and their discourses are attractive identity offers and demand adherence and loyalty at the same time. The religious

systems are the cultural tools, which the communities of practice make use of. The contest for life-orders reflects the power constellations in Southern Thailand and the often frustrated desire to challenge them. Leaders demonstrate their moral superiority and, thereby, legitimize their moral leadership. This leadership in issues of morality and questions of life methodologies compensates for powerlessness in either political or economic domains. Practices of cultural distinction are practices of inclusion and exclusion. The young women and men whom I met are living in close proximity, and are neighbours, but maintain sharp boundaries and separate life worlds. It seems to me that the private sphere is politicized, overdone and exaggerated. Identity markers and ethnic emblems are made visible in the public space in practices of consumption.

### **Family Constructions and Gender Orders**

The negotiation of the borderline is explored further. Practices of consumption and lifestyles, in addition to giving meaning to lives, also have a function of ordering social life. As Maila Stivens shows, anxieties about family constructs and gender relations seem to be a central feature of the principal cultural contests of Southeast Asia (Stivens 1998). From the base of the collapse of private/public dichotomies in the feminist literature, Stivens et al. conclude that an exploration of gender relations provides important ways to theorise the interplay between consumer culture, economy, polity and religious practice in the region. The nesting of the political action of everyday life in larger, ultimately global, structures of power is a challenging task. Contests around remade private spaces are predominant issues with frequent debate on proper and good families and proper and good lifestyles.

Family constructs and gender relations are negotiated on different levels of society. The Asian family discourse is a pivotal nexus between the global and the local. In the Asian family discourse, the wife/mother is considered the 'bulwark' against the social costs of modernity. State propaganda, media and religious movements have focused on the personal, highlighting the threats posed to the family and to women's 'traditional' roles. Thus, the family becomes a favoured site for expressing more general tensions and ambivalence about the costs of development. Stivens points out that the concern for women and gender relations is related to the entry of women into the labour markets. Women show a strong confidence in their abilities and are organizing themselves in women's networks and female spaces, giving voice and visi-

bility to women in the public sphere. Sexuality is a key site in discourses of distinction. The discourse on sexuality is a main theme in the campaign for Islamic lifestyles. Muslims from Southern Thailand and neighbouring Malaysia regularly meet in discussion circles on law, morality, and questions of life organization. Veiling is a favoured site for expressing a critique of the sexual promiscuity of the Thai, the breaking up of families, infidelity and minor wives and symbolises the strong segregation of gender as a key element of Islamic culture. Dress is a strong marker of ethnic identity and difference as well as a marker of prestige. People associate messages with dress. In Southern Thailand, dress-styles are expressions of ethnic and religious affiliations. The codes of dress include visual modifications to the body, which set off affective processes that result in recognition by the viewer (Eicher 1995). Dress, in this sense, is a strong emblem of group identity or group solidarity. Islamic cloth underlines the ethnic and religious affiliation as well as the cultural competence of the wearer. Veiling in Thai institutions is a subject of ongoing debate. The Hijab crisis in 1987/88, in which female students were banned from studying for wearing their *hijab* in class, highlighted the negotiation of Muslim identity in a Thai nation-state in a dramatic way (Chaiwat 1994). The *hijab* crisis resulted in anti-Muslim practices and racialized accusation of Muslims as practicing un-Thai behaviour.

In the heightened conflict, Muslim students found six prayer mats, one ordinary mat, and one *telekong* (dress worn by Muslim women during their prayers) near the college doghouse. This insult showed the escalation of a conflict around Muslim dress as a powerful symbol of Muslim cultural identity. The *hijab* crisis showed the deficits of tolerance in Thai society and the pressure of assimilation. Yet, it also showed the subjective strategies of female students who want to express their religious education and growing self-confidence. In the College of Islamic Studies in Pattani, the *hijab* is almost obligatory and new students are urged to wear the *hijab*.

Religious systems and ideas provide the public platform for a shared morality. A puritan and highly regulated sexuality and segregation of gender adds to the general features of a highly modernist movement, which establishes a religious and social order and which jealously guards the rules. The family has become a favoured site of cultural competition. In the middle class world, the family is a treasure and a key to the symbolic forms of middle classness. The family needs to be nourished, developed and is a constant investment. Parents have understood that education has been the backbone of their social career.

The large investment of the parents in the education of their children is both functional and demonstrative. The large investment in schooling and the multiple schemes of private tutorials mirror the ambition and care, investment and time that the parents are willing to put into their children's development. The selection of schooling and tutorials in religion, language, traditional music and dance mirrors the reconceptualisation of parenthood and childhood within the nuclear family and is an eager attempt by the families to come as near as possible to an ideal family type, which is constantly reproduced in the media, in advertising, in glossy magazines and in television serials. This ideal family is elaborated in spatial texts, in housing, especially the mass-fabricated townhouse, and the townhouse in the townhouse cluster, which spatially demarcates the frontiers of the middle class. The dwellings in the new estates and the worries as regards to the schooling of children reflect not only the work that goes into the reproduction of cultural forms, or the couple's ability to pay to afford a certain lifestyle, but also reflect the eager need to protect the family, especially the children, from the ills of a decadent society, from social pollution, and from the negative influences of a 'bad' environment. The children are watched closely by their parents, the students are watched by their teachers and in general, gossip and rumors exercise social control on the lifestyles of the people. This over-protection of the family's heaven in important ways restricts the movement of people. People retreat behind the boundaries of their own family, and their own house, and the children grow up in safe places, kindergartens, schools, shopping malls, parks and gardens and temples. The retreat from an environment perceived as harmful is a characteristic typical to the new generation in urban environments. From a Goffmanesque perspective, society becomes a stage for the performance of actors, from where the segments and groups engage in everyday or spectacular performances of cultural codes and in which the codes are dramatized (Goffman 1959, 1974).

