

MEDIA AND POLITICAL PROTEST IN THAILAND 2010: A CASE STUDY
OF THE COVERAGE OF THE MARCH TO MAY PROTEST IN
THE BANGKOK POST AND NATION

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สื่อกับการประท้วงทางการเมืองในประเทศไทย 2010: กรณีศึกษาการนำเสนอข่าวการประท้วง
ในกรุงเทพฯ ช่วงเดือนมีนาคมถึงพฤษภาคมของบางกอกโพสต์และเดอะเนชั่น

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การสื่อสารเป็นแหล่งข้อมูลที่สำคัญยิ่งต่อผู้กระทำทางการเมืองทั้งหมด และสื่อก็เป็นทางออกที่สำคัญของขบวนการทางสังคมที่ทั้งจำนวนและคุณภาพของการนำเสนอข่าวได้สร้างอิทธิพลเหนือการรับรู้ของสาธารณชน อย่างไรก็ตาม การศึกษาแสดงพบว่าสื่อกระแสหลักมักนำเสนอข่าวอย่างลำเอียงต่อกลุ่มผู้ประท้วงที่ทำทนายสถาบัน

วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้ตรวจสอบว่า แนวโน้มเช่นนี้ได้เกิดขึ้นกับหนังสือพิมพ์ภาษาอังกฤษบางฉบับในประเทศไทย งานศึกษานี้จึงได้ใช้กรณีศึกษาของการนำเสนอข่าวของบางกอกโพสต์และเดอะเนชั่น เกี่ยวกับการประท้วงของกลุ่มคนเสื้อแดงในปี 2553 ผู้วิจัยใช้การวิเคราะห์ทั้งในเชิงคุณภาพและเชิงปริมาณของหนังสือพิมพ์รายวันทั้งสองฉบับ ในช่วงตั้งแต่ 1 มีนาคม ถึง 31 พฤษภาคม 2553 เพื่อวิเคราะห์ว่าทฤษฎีที่ใช้บรรยายการประท้วง/ผู้ประท้วง แหล่งของข่าวสาร เครื่องมือทางไวยากรณ์ และกรอบทางวัฒนธรรมและอุดมการณ์ที่นำมาใช้

การวิจัยพบว่า สื่อสิ่งพิมพ์ทั้งสอง (1) อ้างอิงแหล่งข้อมูลทางการเมืองมากเกินไป และกล่าวถึงผู้ประท้วงน้อยเกินไป (2) เน้นความรุนแรง (และ/หรือ แนวโน้มที่จะใช้ความรุนแรง) อันตรงกันข้ามกับประเด็นที่การประท้วงตั้งใจนำเสนอ (3) ไม่ให้การยอมรับการประท้วง/ผู้ประท้วง และตั้งจัดประเภทไว้ในความเป็นผู้อื่น ในกรอบของความเป็นเรา-ความเป็นเขา (4) นำเสนอการประท้วงไปในแนวทางที่สนับสนุนสถาบัน การศึกษานี้แสดงให้เห็นถึงโครงสร้างทางวาทกรรมของสื่อมวลชนทั้งบางกอกโพสต์และเดอะเนชั่น พื้นภูมิหลังทางวัฒนธรรม ประวัติศาสตร์ และการเมือง กับบทบาทของสื่อในการนำเสนอการให้ความหมายต่างๆ

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Communication is a vital resource for most political actors and media are an important outlet for social movements, where the quantity and quality of news coverage influence how they are perceived by the public. However, studies showed that mainstream media tend to produce biased coverage of protest groups which challenge the status quo.

The present thesis examines whether this tendency is replicated in Thailand's English-language press. This task is attempted with a case study of the *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* coverage of the 2010 'red shirt' protest. The researcher conducted a mixed qualitative and quantitative analysis of the two newspapers' daily issues published in the period March 1st to May 31st, 2010 to determine the rhetoric used to describe the protest(ers), the sources of information, the grammar devices and the cultural and ideological frames of reference used.

Research findings show that the two print media: (1) over-relied on official sources and gave little voice to the protesters; (2) emphasized violence (and/or the threat of it) as opposing to the issues the protest intended to raise; (3) delegitimized the protest(ers) and framed them as being the Other in an Us-Them framework; (4) covered the protest with a pro-establishment orientation. This study casts light on the discursive structure of BP and TN media message, its cultural, historical and political backgrounds and the role media play in mediating its meanings.

Field of Study: Southeast Asian Studies Student's Signature:

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CONTENTS

	page
Abstract (Thai).....	ii
Abstract (English).....	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Contents.....	vii
List of tables.....	ix
List of figures	x
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Rationale, Significance, Usefulness.....	2
1.2 Objectives.....	4
1.3 Theoretical framework.....	4
1.4 Hypothesis.....	9
1.5 Research methodology.....	11
1.6 Limitations.....	20
CHAPTER II MEDIA AND POLITICS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.....	22
2.1 Southeast Asian Media.....	23
2.2 Thai media: history and role.....	26
2.3 English-language press in Thailand.....	38
CHAPTER III MEDIA AND POLITICS.....	41
3.1 Classical models: the socio-political role of media.....	43
3.2 Media and political protest.....	53
CHAPTER IV THAILAND: NATION, STATE AND CULTURE.....	60
4.1 Nation and nationalism.....	62
4.2 Thainess: the hegemonic discourse behind the “imagined community”	63
CHAPTER V MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE BANGKOK PROTEST: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS.....	72
5.1 Research findings.....	77
5.2 Research findings: variations in the four phases.....	81
5.3 Research findings: variations in the two newspapers.....	86

5.4 Research findings: variations in the three article's categories.....	93
5.5. Conclusions.....	97
CHAPTER VI CASE STUDY: MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE 2010 BANGKOK PROTEST: QUALITATIVE AND CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS.....	99
6.1 Pre-protest phase.....	101
6.1.1 Thaksin, protest and fear: the development of 'news angles'	102
6.1.2 "UDD rural hordes head for the capital"	119
6.2 Beginning of the protest: March 14 th rally and aftermath.....	124
6.2.1 The 'Red threat'	124
6.2.2 Dissonant voices within Bangkok Post and The Nation.....	133
6.3 April 13 th clashes at KhokWua intersection.....	138
6.3.1 Thailand's "Darkest Hour"	143
6.4 May 19 th final crackdown.....	156
6.4.1 "Bangkok in shambles"	157
6.4.2 Thainess under attack: the Other Within and the Other Outside.....	167
6.5 Conclusion: the Bangkok Post and The Nation protest frame	180
CHAPTER VII CONCLUSION.....	183
7.1 Findings and discussion.....	184
7.2 Media coverage of protester.....	186
7.3 Media coverage of the establishment.....	189
7.4 Thailand's English-language press, ethos and role.....	192
7.5 Suggestions, limitations and future research.....	194
REFERENCES.....	197
BIOGRAPHY.....	208

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Number of units (articles) selected to form the sample used for the quantitative analysis.....	16
2	Timeline of the protest.....	21
3	Code sheet. Words used to describe the event and the participants.....	72
4	Code sheet. Words describing the establishment (Government and Army).....	73
5	The forty articles selected. The six columns show: unit number, headline, type of article, newspaper, date of publishing, phase.....	73
6	Results from each of the forty articles selected. The four main columns show: sample number, terms, quotes [E=Establishment; P=Protest(ers)]. The last three rows show: total, average, percentage...	76
7	Total number of terms and quotes per phase and total in forty selected articles.....	81
8	Total number of terms and quotes for phase and total in twenty selected BP articles.....	86
9	Total number of terms and quotes for phase and total in twenty selected TN articles.....	87
10	Results in sixteen selected news story articles in BP and TN.....	94
11	Results in eight selected editorial articles in BP and TN.....	95
12	Results in sixteen selected ‘other’ articles (op-eds, columns, analysis) in BP and TN.	96

LIST OF FIGURES

Figures	Page
1	Pie. Total number of neutral, specific and favorable nouns used in relation to protest(ers) in the forty articles selected..... 78
2	Pie. Total umber of favorable, neutral and unfavorable adjectives used for the protest(ers)..... 79
3	Pie. Total number of positive and negative terms used for the establishment..... 79
4	Pie. Total number of quotes from the establishment and the protesters..... 80
5	Chart. Total number of nouns associated with the protesters in the forty selected articles divided in 4 phases..... 82
6	Chart. Total number of adjectives in relation to the protest(ers) in forty selected articles divided in four phases..... 83
7	Chart. Total number of terms in relation to the establishment in forty selected articles divided in four phases..... 84
8	Chart. Quotes from the protesters and the stablishment in the forty selected articles divided in four phases..... 85
9	Chart. Total number of nouns in twenty BP selected articles divided in 4 phases..... 89
10	Chart. Total number of nouns in twenty TN selected articles divid in 4 phases..... 90
11	Chart. Total number of adjectives in twenty BP selected articles divided in 4 phases..... 91
12	Chart. Total number of adjectives in relation to the protest(ers) in twenty TN selected articles divided in 4 phases..... 92
13	Chart. Percentage of neutral, specific and unfavorable nouns used in relation to the protest(ers) in news, editorials and other types of articles 93
14	Photo: Front page of The Nation. March 9th, 2010..... 123

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This project revolves around a case study of two English-language newspapers, the *Bangkok Post* (BP) and *The Nation* (TN), in their reporting of the March to May 2010 United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) ‘Red Shirt’ protest against the Abhisit Vejjajiva government in Bangkok, Thailand.

Thailand is located in a region in transition. Two decades after the Third Wave of Democratization, Southeast Asia remains a region where democratic values are contested or fragile. Recent political upheavals as the 2007 uprising in Myanmar, the 2010 Thai political unrest or the 2011 Bersih 2.0 rally in Malaysia, emphasize the instability within a number of Southeast Asian countries originated by popular pressures for change or other types of intestine struggles.

One year before the ‘Arab Spring’, when more than 13 countries across Middle East and North Africa have been affected by political protest and widespread civil unrest, some of which has lead to regime change (e.g. Tunisia and Egypt) or intervention by foreign forces (e.g. Libya and Bahrain), Thailand happened to be on a comparable situation: a group of people took the streets in order to force to resign a government accused of not being fully democratic and to call fresh and fair elections. Common for both Thailand and the Arabs’ conflicts was also the use of coercive force (including censorship, intimidation, arrest and killings) by their respective governments to suppress protesters, usually accused of hooliganism or terrorism.

Television channels, radios, newspapers and digital media appeared to be of central importance for both the establishment and the anti-establishment forces. Various forms of traditional and new media, including internet communication platforms such as websites, blogs, and social networks, have been an integral part of how ordinary citizens have organized and publicized protests. On the other hand, state-owned media and private-owned mainstream media tended to support the governments and their perspectives, while focusing on how the protests were disrupting the normal flow of life and disrespecting laws and customs, and endangering properties and individuals. Pro-

establishment media tended to legitimize the states' use of coercive force as aimed at maintaining law and order, while they delegitimized the protesters' (actual or alleged) use of violence as terrorism. Consequently, those national or international media which did not conform to the state's perspective on the events became a target of governments' attacks aimed at blocking subversive communication.

1.1. Rationale, Significance, Usefulness

Democratization is an important and positive trend in Southeast Asia. However, the pace of change has been uneven and is still unpredictable; it appeared to be very slow, for example, in Myanmar or Cambodia, whilst in the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand things appeared to move far more rapidly. Anyway, also in the Kingdom, when democratization reached a certain extent, punctually extra-democratic forces stepped in, usually in the form of military coup d'états, in order to arrest and reverse the process. Unelected institutions such as the army have used a range of justifications for their intrusions – 'restore order,' 'protect the unity of the nation,' 'protect the Monarchy,' dismantle 'alien institutions' responsible of some moral or economic crisis, and so forth - but basically the fundamental pretext was always the same: to defend the Nation against some sort of threat, be it Marxism, corruption, Republicanism or other types of supposedly terrible evils.

One of the last such intrusions, the 2006 military coup d'état, had the unwanted result of triggering the formation of the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), also known as the 'red shirt' social movement (Keyes 2012). Accused by some of being just a tool of unscrupulous politicians and local godfathers, while seen by others more as a pressure group genuinely engaged in a battle for democracy and social justice, nevertheless the UDD grew rapidly to become one of the most significant people's movements in the history of the Kingdom in terms of numbers and socio-political impact.

Thailand's political polarization and the growing importance of the politics of protest led to the March to May 2010 UDD protest in Bangkok, one of the most important episodes in Thai history. Never before tens of thousands of protesters had occupied parts of the capital for months in an effort to bring down a government. The

stalemate continued until the government used the Royal Thai Army to crackdown on the protesters. Almost one hundred people lost their lives.

Media appear to have played a part in the event. The establishment used the media to inform the public about its strategies and actions to cope with the protest. The anti-establishment forces used alternative media to spread their message to a wider public (Carthew 2010), while staging 'spectacles' in the form of conventional and unconventional forms of protest in order to attract the mainstream media coverage. Eventually the government censored television channels, radios, publications and websites which it considered biased against the establishment and dangerous for national security. Protesters and their sympathizers, as well as defenders of freedom of speech and journalism associations, criticized the government's decision of enforcing censorship. Pro-establishment media professionals and individuals criticized a number of international media outlets, most notably the CNN, as "inaccurate" or "biased" in favor of the protest.

Despite all this, the role of media in the 2010 Thai crisis has received little academic attention. Consequently, it is pertinent that a study takes place. Seeing that there is a gap in the literature, this study can cast light and provide a better understanding of the patterns followed by mainstream media in covering the UDD protest. This task is attempted with a case study of the media coverage of the anti-establishment protest as given by BP and TN. Therefore, the main reason for undertaking this study was to understand the two Thailand's English-language daily newspapers coverage of the protest.

On top of this, the significance of this study is in documenting the way Thailand's mostly Bangkok-based middle and upper class sees and portrays the UDD social movement and the ordinary protesters. This is because, similarly as other English-language Southeast Asian print media outlets, BP and TN exist in their country's culture and environment and are owned by, run by and consumed mostly by an upper-middle and upper class national audience. At the same time, because of their usage of the English language, they also constitute an obvious first window of access into the national issues for non-national individuals. In covering a controversial and divisive event such as the 2010 UDD protest, when the capital, the government and possibly the veritable structure of the Thai society were symbolically and materially at

stake, BP and TN had to manage those two ‘identities’ – national and international - to balance their reportage in order to inform both the groups of readers in a meaningful way. Consequently, with reference to the regional level, this study contributes information on the ways English-language Southeast Asian media outlets balance their double ‘identities’ as both local media for local (elite) audiences and international-language media for international audiences.

1.2. Objectives

This thesis does not intend to study what happened in Bangkok in 2010, as a number of other studies have been already published (e.g. Montesano, Pavin, Aekapol 2012), but rather wants to study what TN and BP said it happened, how they said it and why.

This research aims to:

- 1) study the landscape of the relationships between media and politics, with a focus on political protest, in Thailand in the early 21st century;
- 2) analyze the media coverage of the 2010 ‘Red Shirt’ United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) protest as given by *The Nation* and *Bangkok Post*.

1.3. Theoretical framework

The framework for this research was eclectic in nature, since no single media theory could fully explain the BP and TN coverage of the 2010 UDD protest. However, the theories primarily used have been Critical Theory, Cultural Studies and the Protest Paradigm. For the analysis of the texts, Critical Discourse Analysis has been employed.

Societies in most lands and times are characterized by unequal relations of power. Such unequal relations are typically visible in terms of gender, ethnicity, class, wealth and so on. Confronted to such reality, since a few decades branches of social theory and particularly of linguistic and media studies tried to answer to the question of whether language and the media play or not a role in sustaining or challenging these and

other unequal relations of power. Since a number of the studies proved that language and the mass media do have a role in such (unequal) system, then the next logical step was the effort to understand what role the media play and why.

Critical Theory studies the capitalist social order and the 'culture industry' in particular. To some extent, the term 'critical' should be read as the effort to 'denaturalize' social arrangements in order to reveal the power structures in which society is organized. This theory is particularly valuable for this research in the way that it openly exposes the values which stand behind media narratives and uses these values to provide alternative readings of the 'text' produced by the media and the social role of the media themselves.

Cultural Studies is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry that explores the (re)production and inculcation of culture, i.e. those systems of meaning that enable a human being or group to acquire particular mind-sets, values, beliefs, and so forth. What is relevant for this research is that when Cultural Studies focus on how the media are used to create the cultural arrangements that structure everyday life, they cast light on the power relationships which lie behind the values or mind-sets that most people take for granted. They do so by enquiring how social elites use their power to gain control over the media and then use the media to propagate their ideology in order to maintain their dominant position in society.

Both Critical Theory and Cultural Studies are important in the extent that they cast light on how the mass media both reflect and actively construct 'reality,' and how this power can be used by certain social groups for their own interest. Both are often openly critical of the status quo and the economic and institutional arrangements of a given society. Thus, they are 'political' Schools, interested in understanding reality in order to criticize and change it. For the current study, the usefulness of these Schools is their operating in interdisciplinary fields and their selection of different disciplines to examine the relations between media, culture and power.

For the continued relevance of the concept of ideology in contemporary societies, this study used Thompson's (1990) framework. Thompson's (1990) definition of ideology (or dominant/hegemonic discourse), and his description of five key ways

through which ideology works - legitimation, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation, and reification - opens the way to the study of the manner in which media are used by (dominant) groups to enhance their power and (re)produce unequal and unfair social relationships.

For the definition of the ideology which at present is dominant in Thai society, we used the theory most notably exposed by Thongchai (1994, 2000). The scholar argued that the Thai state draws its legitimation from the official discourse of Thainess. Thainess (in Thai language: *khwampenthai*) is the belief that the values of Nation, Religion and Monarchy provide an indispensable ontological and epistemological underpinning for the country. This is a 'soft power' discourse which articulates supposed traditional values on the part of those who frame the discourse, i.e. Thailand's political and intellectual elites (Anderson 1977, 1978; Thongchai 1994, 2000; Saichol 2000; Connors 2006; Pavin 2011). In view of the fact that communication is constructed within the cultural arrangements of a given society, this theory has been useful for understanding the frame within which the two media outlets – BP and TN - operated and produced their message.

A number of studies have looked at the relationships between communication and sociopolitical protest. This study tested the widely used Protest Paradigm which holds that mainstream media tend to be biased in reporting sociopolitical protests by covering these events in a way which delegitimizes and vilifies the protesters, their issues, their demands and everything else they stand for (e.g. Chan and Lee 1984; Hertog and McLeod 1995; McLeod and Detenber 1999; Boyle et al. 2004; Arpan et al. 2006; McLeod 2007; McCluskey et al. 2009; Boyle and Schmierbach 2009; Boyle et al. 2012). A number of common features used by the media to represent political protests are the following:

- (1) Over-reliance on official sources and official definitions: tendency to use a higher number of establishment official sources compared to the non-official ones and those critical to the establishment (Sigal 1973; Fishman 1980; Paletz and Entman 1981; Soley 1992; McLeod and Hertog 1998);
- (2) Spectacle: tendency to emphasize the protesters' actions rather than their objectives. Confrontations with police and violence, too, are considered newsworthy. This leads to a neglect of the protest(ers)'s objectives and a

minimization of the moral debate between the protesters and their chosen target (e.g. Cohen 1980; Gitlin 1980; Murdock 1981; McLeod and Hertog 1992);

- (3) News frames: the media select certain ways of framing the news to promote a particular agenda (Gitlin 1980; Ryan *et al.* 2001);
- (4) Delegitimization: the media fail to adequately explain the protesters' claims, objectives, reasons and requests. Thus, the media give the audience the impression that the protest(er) is unreasonable or irrational, and thus that it lacks legitimacy (Chan and Lee 1984);
- (5) Othering: tendency to portray the protesters as the Other in an Us-Them framework where the Us is the non-protesting audience (Chan and Lee 1984).
- (6) Demonization: the media exaggerates the protesters actions, causes, or negativities to sustain their assumptions or make headlines.

This critical treatment of protest(ers) usually has a negative influence on the audience's perceptions of protest(ers) (McLeod 1995; McLeod and Detenber 1999).

A different but compatible model, especially apt to understand the bias of mainstream media in general, has been proposed by Chomsky and Herman (1988). The scholars argued that the systematic bias of mainstream media comes in good part from structural economic causes. Their politico-economic theory, labeled Propaganda Model, holds that there exist five filters that bias news in favor of elite's interests and worldviews. The filters are the following: media ownership by corporations, funding from advertising, the power of "news terminals," the ability of the elite to discredit critical media, and ideology (Chomsky and Herman 1988).

To examine the media message, it has been useful to rely on a number of theoretical frameworks which revolve around the concept of frame (e.g. Gitlin 1980; Entman 1993). Frames are "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which [people] routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual" (Gitlin 1980: 7). To put it in Entman's (1993: 52) words, to frame is to "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text." More specifically, in journalism and media studies framing is commonly understood as the process by which social actors, and

especially news organization and the individuals and groups who control them, define and constructs issues. For example, news frames refer to the way media professionals such as journalists pack up events and issues into a story. Interestingly enough, framing theorists suggest that social actors possess different levels of framing ability, depending on multiple complex factors, including economic and cultural resources. This means that powerful social actors are (more) able to influence journalistic frame. Power-holders can influence the framing process in a number of ways and, as a result, the process of framing tends to favor political and economic elites (Ryan *et al.* 2001). In practice, framing theories tend to complement the above mentioned Protest Paradigm and Propaganda Model in maintaining that, especially when the system faces a challenge, mainstream mass media work more like ‘guard dogs’ (of the system and the elites) than as the traditional ‘watchdog’ (Donohue *et al.* 1985).

Besides the issue of social power, the concept of frame is relevant for a number of other reasons. First, as argued by Gaye Tuchman (1974, 1978), once established, frames become institutionalized by news organizations. Once institutionalized, frames can be understood as a collective pool of symbolic resources the journalists draw from when faced with the task of turning events/reports into news stories. This also mean that, when faced with complex situations that can hardly be expressed through the established normative frames, or simply with situations which go beyond them, journalists normally continue to use the established frames anyway, partly because of the need of producing a text understandable for their readers (as well as for their editors). This may be seen and probably is a useful feature of frames, because they reduce the complexity of reality and human communication into conveniently understandable narratives. Nevertheless, reducing the complexity of reality in order to produce a text which fixes into previously developed frames is also a clear distortion of the authenticity of the ‘hard facts’ which the media are supposed to objectively report.

To examine the texts produced by BP and TN, this research drew also from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse that considers communication as a type of social practice which is both influenced by reality and producer of reality. In particular, CDA focuses on the ways power is reproduced through language. CDA was particularly useful for this thesis because news stories can be understood as narratives, which consist of information and

'facts,' but also of a subtext, i.e. an implicit and unspoken message. The underlying meaning can be suggested by categorizing people, actions, events, and places, or by using metaphors, catchphrases, cues and other symbolic devices, as well as by presenting the different actors in the story under different lights. This can be done by those grammar devices which are the main object of study of CDA (van Dijk 1993). This does not equal saying that such frames are always conscientiously chosen by producers of language, such as journalists or editors. On the contrary, they are rather reflective of shared cultural narratives and ideologies of a given society, as proposed by critical and cultural studies sociologists, and at the same time they can also be a result of the filters that characterize the work of mainstream media, as proposed by the Propaganda Model. In very poor words, we know that what is written in a newspaper article is a text/message transmitted from somebody to somebody else through the medium of language. The message transmitted through language encodes a cultural 'loading' (ideologies, beliefs, values, mind-sets, etc.). This 'loading' is a result of the cultural or sub-cultural environment in which the message is forged. This is what CDA helps to individuate.

What is known and what is unknown about the topic? As discussed above, a great deal is known about how mainstream media tend to report protest. Much is written, known and available about media coverage of protest events in America, Europe and other realities. Yet, no prior English-language study has been published on the precise issue of how Thailand's English-language print media outlets cover political protest events in the Kingdom. Seeing that there is a gap in the literature, this study can contribute a better understanding of the relationships between Thai mainstream media and political protest.

1.4. Hypotheses

Prior studies (cited earlier) have found that negative perceptions of protests and protest groups can be associated with the mainstream media news framing of such events and groups. Academic studies (cited earlier) assessed also a tight connection between culture and communication framing. Therefore, we expected that the BP and TN framed the March to May 2010 protest both through the 'classic' Protest Paradigm and through the prism of Thailand's cultural environment and understandings. In other

words, our hypothesis is that the protest news frame of the two English-language media outlets resulted in part from a ‘typical’ mainstream media derogative framing of protest events, and in part from the fact that Thailand’s media operate within a certain culture and ideology, which constructs the media professionals’ culture and their audience’s culture, and drives what media decide to publish in order to meet their owners, advertisings, and readers’ demands, as well as in order to do not risk the flak of the state, the condemnation of the law and the hostility of prominent social actors.

More specifically, the present research hypothesized that the BP and TN followed the Protest Paradigm in the above mentioned six points:

- 1) Over-reliance on official sources and official definitions;
- 2) Spectacle (emphasis in violence and protesters’ actions rather than their objectives);
- 3) News frames (media selection certain ways of framing the news to promote a particular agenda);
- 4) Delegitimization (weak explanation of the protest(ers)’ claims, objectives, reasons and requests, with the result of giving the audience the impression that the protest(er) was unreasonable or irrational);
- 5) Othering (protesters portrayed as the Other in an Us-Them framework).
- 6) Demonization (exaggeration of the protesters actions, causes, or negativities to sustain their assumptions or make headlines).

For the connection between culture and communication framing, we hypothesized that BP and TN news framing selected and included elements compatible with Thailand’s cultural understandings and especially with the hegemonic ideology of Thainess. Therefore, we expected that the Nation, the Religion and the Monarchy have been selected in the text as positive elements and they have been related to the establishment, while on contrast the anti-establishment forces have been portrayed as diverging form Thainess.

1.6 Research methodology

The study relied on documentary research, drawing on primary and secondary sources, analyzing English-language documents such as books, journals and articles. In particular, the data for the case study which is at the center of this research have been drawn from the daily issues of the BP and TN newspapers published in the period March 1st to May 31st, 2010. The hard copies preserved in the BP archives have been generously put at disposal of this researcher, while TN kindly donated to the researcher the PDF files of the newspaper's issues.

The methodology employed for the research was a mixed qualitative and quantitative case study of the BP and TN media coverage of the 2010 political unrest in Bangkok. It is believed that this methodology was the best suited to analyze the subject because it maintained a balance between precision and insight. This method allowed taking into account both the quantifiable elements of the texts and certain non-quantifiable aspects of the media reporting, to link the analyses to the hypotheses delineated above, and to complement them with further elements of information drawn from other sources.

The first problem was the dimension of the topic. As the protest went on for approximately nine weeks, it was not possible to report in this study an analysis of each single relevant article produced by the two newspapers object of the analysis. Consequently, the researcher was faced with the task of deciding which phase of the protest, which feature of the newspapers (visuals, news articles, analyses, editorials, op-eds, etc.) and which single piece of news might be the most relevant or interesting. In order to avoid the risk of making prior judgments, it was decided initially that all the articles dealing with the UDD protest included in the issues of BP and TN published in the ninety-two-day period March 1st to May 31st, 2010 should be read. It is a total of one hundred and eighty-four issues, each containing a variable number of relevant pieces. The period of analysis chosen was wider than the actual duration of the protest event - March 14th to May 19th - in order to include also pre- and after-protest samples.

The second problem was to select meaningful samples from the vast mass of data available in the one hundred and eighty-four newspaper issues. This task was linked with the overall objectives of the study, because the samples had to be chosen in

order to illustrate and test those goals. For example, some of the ideas underlying the study were to see whether the two newspapers constructed the articles with a similar or dissimilar structure, whether they proposed a similar or dissimilar news frame, whether each news organization produced a uniform news frame or if different perspectives found space, as well as whether or not the news frame was altered following the unfolding of the events. In such cases, in order to produce a comprehensible study, it is the task of a researcher to use his judgment, based on a set of criteria, to decide how much and how long a case should be studied (Creswell 1998; Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Stake 2005). Accordingly, this second problem was resolved by dividing the case study (i.e. the protest event which is the object of this research) in four separate but significant periods of media coverage, and then choosing a number of relevant samples for each of them. The four phases individuated are the following: (1) the period before the protest; (2) the beginning of the protest on March 14th and its aftermath; (3) the first seriously violent clashes at Khok Wua intersection on April 10th; and (4) the second half of May, including the days immediately before and after the May 19th final crackdown (see appendix, table A).

The quantitative research was undertaken with a purposive sampling of items judged worthy of close study.

Purposive sampling is the method opposite of probability sampling, which means sampling by using random selection methods. Purposive sampling is non-probability and its methods include purposive sampling, which is the method employed in this research. Purposive sampling is done by researchers with a purpose in mind. Consequently, the decisions concerning the items to be included in the population sample are taken by the researchers themselves, who base the decisions upon a variety of criteria. Mainly, the sample is selected to include units of interest, while those who do not fit with the purpose are rejected. In the present study, the research design necessitated the researcher to select those units which would be most likely to contribute appropriate data, especially in terms of relevance.

Being non-probability, purposive sampling can be subject to bias and error. Consequently, it may be argued that a better way of sampling is by random selection of targets, as in probability sampling. Anyway, probability sampling is not always possible, advisable and thus utilized. In our case, a sampling method different from the

one employed, such as simple random sampling or systematic (random) sampling, was impossible or highly impractical for a number of reasons, as we will discuss below.

First of all, it must be understood the object of this research, which was to study how two newspapers covered a particular event. This meant to deal with the variety of journalistic features which exist on virtually every newspaper. The most common different types of journalistic features produced by a newspaper are the following: visuals, news stories, editorials, op-eds, columns, analyses, and cartoons.

The variety of journalistic features produced by the two newspapers put the researcher in front of an element of complexity. This element was further complicated by the fact that the presence of these features in the newspapers' issues studied mutated in quantity and quality on a daily basis. This means, in practice, that BP and TN did not present all the journalistic features together in every issue. The position, space and size given to those features were mutable too. For example, at times the front pages presented one or more news stories which occupied most of the page. In other occasions the space occupied by news stories was more limited, while in some issues BP or TN didn't present any news story on the front page, leaving this space to an analysis or only to an oversized image and moving the news stories to other pages.

One more important factor which made virtually impossible the choice of a method of sampling different from the purposive is the following: the two newspapers did not present features dealing with the protest on a daily basis. In poor words this means that it was not possible to find in each single issue of the BP or TN an editorial dealing with the protest to include in the sample, because not each issue contained an editorial dealing with the protest. The same was true for every other feature, including news stories, op-eds, columns and analyses, because not each single issue contained a news story, an op-ed, a column and/or a piece of analysis dealing with the UDD protest. This explains why this research necessitated utilizing the method of purposive sampling.

The sample was made out of forty units, i.e. forty newspaper articles (see table D, chapter 5). Quantitative content analysis was done from this sample of forty articles. The number of units was considered sufficient to produce a representative sample. The

main criteria for the selection of units have been: date of publication, relevance and balance.

The criterion of the date of publication means that each of the forty articles has been published between in the ninety-two-day period March 1st to May 31st, 2010. The second, relevance, means that the articles were chosen in order to be relevant regarding the UDD protest. In other words, articles dealing with different issues than the protest have been discarded. The last, balance, means that the population had to be balanced between: the two newspapers, the four phases, and the different types of articles.

Balance between the two newspapers means that an equal number of articles was selected from each newspaper. Therefore, twenty articles from BP and twenty from TN have been selected.

Balance between the four phases means that an equal number of articles was selected from each phase. Consequently, ten articles were selected from each period. Among the ten articles, five were selected from each newspaper, i.e. five from BP and five from TN. In other words, this researcher selected the forty articles as following:

- 1) five samples from BP in the first phase;
- 2) five samples from TN in the first phase;
- 3) five samples from BP in the second phase;
- 4) five samples from TN in the second phase;
- 5) five samples from BP in the third phase;
- 6) five samples from TN in the third phase;
- 7) five samples from BP in the fourth phase,
- 8) and five samples from TN in the fourth phase.

BP and TN are daily newspapers. Daily newspapers are periodic publications mainly reporting events that have occurred in the 24-hour period before going to press. Therefore, it has been judged appropriate to select the five samples from each newspaper in each phase according to a criterion of temporal proximity to the 'core' of each of the four phases. This means that the researcher purposely selected relevant articles temporally close to the 'main episode' of each phase. The main episodes were individuated as follows.

For the first phase, the pre-protest one, five articles have been selected from the central period (i.e. March 6th and 7th), and five from last days of this phase (i.e. March 11th, 12th and 13th). The criteria for this selection were motivated by the necessity of balancing the representativeness of the ten units between the two main issues addressed by the two newspapers in the pre-protest phase, i.e. the judicial sentence on Thaksin Shinawatra's assets and the approaching protest.

For the second phase, the 'core' has been individuated in the beginning of the protest on March 14th and its aftermath.

For the third phase, the 'core' was individuated on the April 10th clashes and their aftermath.

For the last phase, the most meaningful episode was individuated in the May 19th crackdown and its aftermath.

So far it has been explained how the necessity of relevance and balance in the first and second points (two newspapers and four phases) has been addressed by purposively selecting an equal number of relevant articles from the two publications (twenty samples each) and the four phases (ten samples each). It is now important to clarify the third point: the choice of selecting samples from different types of articles. This necessity arises from the fact that a newspaper is made by different parts which have different characteristics, different aims, different reporting styles, and so forth. As said, newspaper features are commonly understood to include the following particular journalistic items: visuals, news stories, editorials, op-eds, columns, analysis, and cartoons. Apart from visuals and cartoons, which were not included in this quantitative analysis, the selection of units to form the 40-article sample had to strive to be balanced between all those different features.

Balance between the different types of articles means that the samples had to be selected respecting the equilibrium of diverse features which exist in a publication and concurs to form the overall media message which the media outlet offers to the audience. In order to conserve such equilibrium, it has been decided to group the articles in three categories: (1) front-page news stories, (2) editorials, and (3) a last grouping made by op-eds, columns and analyses. From these three categories, for every

five samples selected this researcher followed the following proportion of samples: two front-page news stories, one editorial, and two from the others (analyses, columns or op-eds).

Table 1. Number of units (articles) selected to form the sample used for the quantitative analysis.											
Types of articles	Phase 1		Phase 2		Phase 3		Phase 4		Total		
	BP	TN	BP	TN	BP	TN	BP	TN	BP	TN	BP+TN
News	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	8	8	16
Editorial	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	4	8
Other	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	8	8	16
Total	5		5		5		5		20	20	40
	10		10		10		10		40		40

To understand the reasons of this categorization (news stories, editorials, and others) and proportion (two from the first, one from the second, and two from the third) it will be necessary to briefly delineate the characteristics of the typical newspaper's daily items which have been mentioned above.

Media coverage of life events is usually presented as reporting (from Latin *reportare*, meaning 'to carry back'). Like a mirror of reality, the media are supposed to use language (in the form of texts, images and/or visuals) to 'carry' pieces of 'facts' from where they happen to the audience, i.e. to somebody else's eyes and ears. In such, media coverage is supposed to be an unbiased recording and carrier of 'hard facts.' Despite the fact that such a concept has been long challenged (see chapters 2 and 3), the point here is that what we defined as 'news stories' are the features of a newspaper where the publication intends more closely to present such 'hard facts.' In a news story, journalists (and their publications) are usually supposed to attempt to report the facts factually, objectively, fairly, without bias, in a language as undistorting as possible.

The publication staff's (overt) views tend to be kept on the editorial column. An editorial is an opinion piece written by the senior editorial staff of a periodical. In other words, editorials are distinct from other forms of news reporting because they are used by the newspapers' staff to overtly express their point of view. In daily newspapers, editorials are usually published on a daily basis. As a norm, editorials are unsigned because they are supposed to reflect the opinions of the newspaper or magazine's editorial board, and thus to give a 'color' to the whole publication. It is the editorial board which evaluates which issues are significant for their readership to know the

newspaper's opinion and political stand - if any. As argued by Fowler (1991: 209), a significant symbolic function of editorial pieces is that they seem to separate the 'opinion' component of the publication by confining it in the editorial, "implicitly supporting the claim that the other sections, by contrast, are pure 'fact' or 'report'". A newspaper may also choose to publish an editorial on the front page. This is common in a number of European countries, including Italy and France. Anyway, in most English language press this is rare. In countries which follow the British tradition, including the UK, the USA and Australia, editorials are often published on a special page dedicated to them, which usually also features letters to the editor. Thailand's two English-language daily publications follow the British convention, with an editorial piece presented on a special editorial page, which usually hosts also letters from the public and a cartoon.

In order to balance between news stories and editorials, this research added a third group of samples. Basically, in this group we placed a variety of articles not belonging to the first two types. Consequently, the following three kinds of journalistic articles have been grouped together: op-eds, columns, and analyses. The choice is justified by the different characteristics of this last group of journalistic features compared to the previous two. As said, news stories are supposed to be factual and they tend to avoid or hide an opinion or a stand. On the contrary, editorials are meant to articulate and express the editorial team's opinion on a particular issue. Op-ed, column and analysis articles present a number of different characteristic, placing them somehow in between news stories and editorials. It will be useful to describe more such characteristics more in detail in the following lines.

The page opposite the editorial page is called the op-ed page. In fact, op-ed is simply the abbreviation from 'opposite the editorial page.' This page normally contains one or more opinion pieces by individuals usually not directly affiliated with the periodical. These articles are called op-eds. According to Stonecipher (1979), the op-ed's purpose in US newspapers is to provide the public, experts, and policy makers a space to present and articulate different sides of the public agenda, including new insights and new ideas. Therefore, the function of the op-ed in the American press, and by extension in most journalistic environments, can be understood as a forum open to multiple ideas in an effort to promote a healthy public debate on significant issues. This is also the rationale of the op-ed page which exists in both BP and TN. For this research

it is important to point out that op-eds can be to some extent understood as presenting characteristics in between news stories and editorials. It is so because op-eds do not necessarily report the 'hard facts' – they can as well articulate an opinion, and they often do so. On the other hand, compared to the editorials, their opinions do not necessarily correspond to the ones of the newspaper's senior staff. In fact, at times op-eds present opinions in contrast with those of the publication's editorial team.

Columns, too, to some extent offer to the reader a different style compared to both plain news stories and editorials. A column is usually written by a single columnist, which is an individual (often a journalist) who writes regularly his column for the publication, usually on a daily or weekly basis. What differentiates a column from other forms of journalistic articles is that a column is a regular feature in a publication, it is personality-driven by the author, and it generally explicitly contains an opinion or point of view. In this sense, columns differ from op-eds in the fact that the writer (columnist) does have an affiliation with the publication and writes on a regular basis, whereas op-ed contributors do not work for the publication and write for it on an occasional basis. On the other hand, columns differ from editorial articles in at least three ways: (1) they are usually written by an individual, not a team; (2) they are signed (at least with a pseudonym); and (3) they represent the writer's take, opinion and stance, which is not necessarily the same as the editorial team's, and thus it may differ from the dominant stand of the publication.

Analysis, too, are different from both plain news stories and editorials, and they can be understood to some extent as in between 'hard facts' stories and opinions. It is so because, compared with 'hard facts' news, they present a less dry and fact-based report, intending to offer a more in-depth sight into the issue or event, not necessarily avoiding a clear stand or an openly stated opinion. On the other hand, they differ from op-eds because they are written by someone belonging to the publication. They are not signed, just like editorial pieces, and thus they are understood as somehow reflecting the editorial team's positions. Nevertheless, they differ from editorials in the extent that they are not a recognized 'opinion' piece as well as because they are more fact-based and report-like. On top of this, they are not (overtly) intended to 'lead' the public opinion as much as the editorials are. In addition, analyses do not have a special and

regular section, nor they are published on a regular basis, and they are not intended to automatically reflect the outlook of the publication's editorial board.

After having briefly delineated the variety of journalistic items usually contained by each single newspaper, it should be clear why this research needed to purposively select the units from three categories of articles.

On top of this, this researcher decided to balance carefully the number of selected units among the three groupings individuated. This has been done by selecting the five units from each newspaper in each of the four phases in the proportion of two news stories, one editorial, and two pieces from the other grouping. The reasons behind the decision are as follows.

News stories are the 'pure' group more represented, with sixteen items out of forty (compared to eight editorials out of forty), because the objective of this study is to assess the BP and TN media coverage of the 2010 UDD protest, which can be primarily found in news stories. It is so both because news stories are numerically the features most used in a newspaper and because they are the articles which more closely report the 'hard facts' (or at least are supposed to). It has been decided to select only news stories appeared on the front page because those pieces obviously had major importance compared to pieces published on other pages.

Editorials have been given particular attention. In fact, with a total of eight items out of forty, it may be argued that they have been given an importance superior of their actual presence in newspaper, where they represent only one daily piece buried into dozens of pages filled with other features. Yet, we explained above that because of their particular characteristic of being the 'voice' of the publication's editorial team, thus somehow speaking out clearly the outlook of the senior staff regarding the events covered by the media outlet, editorials hold a key position in a newspaper, certainly superior of their numerical presence and arguably greater than other pieces.

The third grouping, with sixteen items out of forty, is important for the aim of representing the part of the media message which covered the protest in a deeper and more opinioned fashion than news stories, being not merely a report of 'hard facts', and yet it was different from the editorial in the extent that it was not necessarily a direct

product of the editorial staff. On the contrary, in the case of op-eds it was an out-and-out external voice.

To analyze quantitatively the selected samples, the research utilized code sheet tables originally developed by Halloran et al. (1970: 95-ff.). In their classic study, Halloran et al. listed all words used by the media to describe a demonstration which took place in London in October 27th, 1968 and asked ten independent judges to assign the words to one of the three basic categories: 'favorable,' 'unfavorable,' and 'neutral.' On this basis, the authors devised two code sheets, one for the demonstration and the demonstrators, and a second for the police. This research employed Halloran et al.'s original code sheets, by utilizing the first code sheet for the protesters, and the second for the establishment (government and Army). A series of words relevant to this study have been added to the original sheets (see chapter 5, tables B and C).

The purpose of undertaking content analysis was to yield quantifiable data for this research. Anyway, as explained above, there are aspects of the media message which can be hardly quantified. Therefore, content analysis was not regarded as an end in itself but rather as a contribution among others to a better understanding of the situation.

Hence the analysis was substantiated by qualitative content analysis and critical discourse analysis (see chapter 6), by placing a number of purposively selected news elements – including articles, headlines, extracts from articles, and visuals - in their socio-historical and current socio-political context. Texts, including newspaper articles, are coherent units of language. An author assembles the elements which form an article in order to shape a coherent whole. Each single newspaper text responds to a clear ideological stance, an understandable pattern which works to guide the reader throughout the piece (Hodge and Kress 1993; Reah 2002). Thus, combining the results of the quantitative analysis with a qualitative analysis allowed this researcher to unlock the ideology buried in the text and to individuate the devices used to represent the social actors and events portrayed.

1.7 Limitations

The specificity of this study is both a strength and a limitation. Focusing on two English-language print media outlets means to concentrate the research on a very

particular media field. English-language press in Thailand is obviously a thing concerning a niche of the national population. Yet, as we will argue on section 2.3, this niche may be considered an important one, because it is mostly made by that particular minority of individuals which belongs to a cultural and economic elite which can possibly influence wider strata of populace. Anyway, the limitation consists in having excluded from the analysis all the Thai-language press, as well as all the other types of media, including broadcast media and social media, which might have played an important role in the 2010 media-politics interplay (Carthew 2011).

Table A. Timeline of the protest (HRW 2011, BP, TN)			
Phases		Main events	
Phase 1	March 1 to March 13	March 6	Govt warn of possibility of sabotage taking place on March 14.
		March 8	Govt imposes Internal Security Act from March 11 to 23, PM granted audience with King
		March 12	Protesters start heading to Bangkok, gather around capital
Phase 2	March 14 to April 9	March 14	Protest starts, ask Govt to resign, dissolve parliament and call fresh elections
		March 15	Protesters demonstrate in front of 11th Infantry Regiment in Bang Khen district, where top Army officials and (temporarily) PM dwell
		March 16	Protesters splash blood at Govt House
		March 20	Protesters parade through Bangkok on motorbikes, cars to step up pressure on Govt to call new elections
		March 28	Govt-UDD talks officially start
		March 30	Govt-UDD talks end in deadlock
		April 3	Protesters occupy Ratchaprasong shopping district
		April 7	Protesters storm Parliament
		April 7	Govt declares state of emergency
		April 9	Protesters march to restore the satellite signal for People's Channel, overpower soldiers, seize weapons
		Phase 3	April 10 to May 13
April 22	Grenade blasts kill 1 anti-UDD protester in Silom; each side blames the other		
April 23	UDD co-leader Veera Musikapong offers to end the protests if Govt agrees to dissolve parliament within 30 days		
April 24	PM rejects deadline		
April 28	Clashes on highway (1 soldier killed)		
April 29	Protesters storm Chulalongkorn Hospital searching for soldiers		
May 3	Govt offers elections on November 14		
May 4	UDD agrees to Govt offer, negotiations for road map start		
May 12	Negotiations end in deadlock, Govt scraps November 14 offer		
May 13	'Seh Daeng' shot by sniper; each side blames the other		
Phase 4	May 14 to May 31	May 14	CRES set out new, expanded rules of engagement that liberalize the soldiers' use of live fire
		May 14-19	Daily clashes between soldiers and protesters (dozens killed, including 1 foreign journalist)
		May 19	Army's final crackdown of protesters, UDD leaders surrender and urge protesters to go home, Ratchaprasong cleared, arsonists set fire on dozens of buildings

CHAPTER II

MEDIA AND POLITICS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The media in Thailand is one of the principal sites of political contestation.

- Duncan McCargo. Politics and the press in Thailand: media machinations. Garuda Press: Bangkok, 2002: 1

This chapter is an attempt to assess the interplay between media and politics in Thailand and Southeast Asia. The chapter is divided in three sections.

The first section is an assessment of the media landscape in Southeast Asia. The topic of media in Southeast Asia is being the subject of a growing literature, even though the deep heterogeneity of the region in terms of history, political and media systems, languages, size of the countries, and so on, has as a result a rather unsatisfactory body of knowledge. In addition, the Southeast Asian media landscape is in rapid transformation. With this complex and changing background, we will analyze the media's ambivalent political role as well as the troublesome issue of media ownership.

The second section deals with the history and role of Thai media. We will see how mass media in Thailand have always had a prominent socio-political role. Thailand's media have performed different tasks: they served elites in their power struggles; they have been used by the state in its enforcement of a dominant ideology; they worked for anti-democratic forces which sought to arrest popular pressures for democratization and, finally, at times the media have been an instrument for subversive social actors which tried to push democratization against the resistance of dominant political, economic, social, and cultural blocs. Thai media performed all those different roles, depending on the time and the circumstances. The only common trait of Thailand's media through the history is, we shall argue, their cultural and political role.

The third section presents Thailand's two English-language newspapers.

2.1 Southeast Asian media

In the Southeast Asian context, communication media have been traditionally in the hands of local elites, who used them for their own advantage as instruments of nation-building, as sources of profits and to influence public opinion. In brief: to preserve their domination over the subjected population. Anyway, in the last decades the region was characterized by a (rather uneven and incomplete) wave of democratization, with a number of countries getting rid or struggling to get rid of authoritarian regimes. In this contest, the ‘tradition’ of the media as ‘servant’ of the state has been challenged by democratization, globalization and media reforms. Consequently, the interactions between media, politics, political protest and political change in Southeast Asia are problematic, ambiguous and multi-leveled. (Thitinan 1997; McCargo 1999, 2002, 2003; Rodan 2001, 2010; Kingsbury 2005; Ubonrat 2005; Lewis 2006; Woodier 2008).

So, what is the role of the media in relation to politics in the contemporary Southeast Asian context? Whose interests do the media serve? The answer is problematic, as the region is characterized by historical and socio-political heterogeneity and thus hosts a range of diverse cultural understandings, as well as dissimilar histories and current arrangements of media practice. In a number of Southeast Asian countries the state’s political control of the media remains choking, as in Vietnam and Laos, where it is controlled by authoritarian regimes, but even in the nominally democratic countries the media have to endure a series of limitations, given that they are often subject to strict laws, regulations, self-censorship, corruption practices, religious or cultural taboos and the pressures of market competition (Mehra 1989; McCargo 2002, 2003; Sen and Lee 2008; Woodier 2008).

There are few doubts that Southeast Asian media are significant political agents but, to further complicate the matter, the media have played different roles in different times, even within the same country and within a single individual publication. At times, the media have been supporters of regime change and democratic consolidation, but in other occasions they have been used as tools of the power-holders to preserve authoritarian systems. Therefore, it would be wrong to describe media as ‘progressive’ political actors. First, because there are plenty of examples of media, also privately

owned, that in times of transitions took the opposite stance, thus playing the role of agents of stability. Second, different parts of the same media outlet can play different roles during the same historical event (Curran and Myung-Jin Park 2000; Bennett and Entman 2001; McCargo 2002, 2003; Lewis 2006; Sen and Lee 2008; Woodier 2008). This means that in Southeast Asia the media are political actors, but they cannot be considered as having one and only one political role. For instance, in a chapter on democratic transitions and the media in Southeast Asia, McCargo (2003: 19-49) argues that the role of Southeast Asian media is an ambiguous one. It is true that, especially in time of crisis, media are actively involved in shaping political outcomes. Yet, there is little evidence that it is the media that initiate transitions. In other words, the media concur in such kind of socio-political processes, but generally they do it only after other strong forces initiate the course of action. In particular, mainstream media often do not take a stance until the wave is mounted, and they rapidly decline in effectiveness once the crisis is over. Thitinan (1997), referring to the Thai case, defines the role of media as “tricksters,” capable of playing multiple roles in different historical junctures. Similarly, to McCargo (2002) Thai media are “untrustworthy” political actors.

Media ownership¹ is usually seen to have an important influence upon media content (Chomsky and Herman 1988; Altschull 1995). Anyway, in Southeast Asia media ownership is another troublesome subject. Where the media are owned and controlled by the state, as in Vietnam, where privates are not allowed to own TV channels, radios or newspapers with an informative aim, then their role is clearly a conservative one, as supporters of the status quo and as agents of stability. Anyway, where the media are privately-owned the question of their role is more complicated. The reasons are many; first of all, ownership does not always correspond to the actual control. According to McCargo (2002, 2003), formal ownership is at times different from *de facto* control of the media outlet, whose space can be further ‘subcontracted’ to editors or columnists. Thus, a single publication can have an ownership of a certain ‘color,’ i.e. owned, close to or expression of a certain economic or power bloc, but at the same time it can host a range of different views, which are the result of the multiplicity of stakeholders as well as complex arrangements and relations with

¹ A Media Owner is a person, enterprise or organization that controls, either through personally or through a dominant position, any media enterprise.

different power-holders. It can even be an outcome of “close (often financial) relationships,” and at times out-out corruption, between one or more reporters, columnists or editors and different elements of the elite, including a business group or a political personality. As a result, even a single media outlet can host polyvalent and contrasting perspectives on the same issue (McCargo 2003: 157).

In addition, the media landscape in Southeast Asia is in rapid transformation, as technological developments in media communications favored a process of globalization, with an emerging global and therefore borderless media culture but also the surge of a powerful global network of multimedia conglomerates (Castells 1996; Woodier 2008). From a Southeast Asian perspective, the process of media globalization meant also the ‘intrusion’ of international communication giants into the region, which resulted in an increased flow of ‘foreign’ information and entertainment products. As a result, the elites started to feel increasingly culturally and politically threatened (Atkins 2002; Woodier 2008). Some argued that Asian political elites were ‘losing control’ over the media, and thus over the citizens (Williams and Rich 2000). This led some scholars to identify global media as an important cause of political turmoil in Southeast Asia (Atkins 1999: 420). While it is a fact that international media interact with local media and politics in Southeast Asia in a number of ways (McCargo 1999, 2002, 2003), some argue that the Southeast Asian elites’ fears are largely unfounded and that power-holders in Southeast Asia have been able to respond effectively to the ‘threat’ of global information, retaining a high degree of control over the flow of ‘foreign’ information which intrudes within their national borders (Rodan 1998; Atkins 2002; Woodier 2008). The global “[s]trategies of commoditization and celebrification of the media” also concurred in “reducing the threat to illiberal governments through a diet of gossip and conspicuous consumption” (Woodier 2008: 4).

If Southeast Asian media have not become globalised, yet mass communication grew to be pivotal to Southeast Asian daily life (Lewis 2006; Woodier 2008). As a consequence, pretty much as everywhere else, the new communication system appears to be altering the fabric of social relations and endangering national mainstream narratives by changing the ways in which citizens see those who rule them, and the ways in which rulers relate to those over whom they rule.

2.2. Thai media: history and role

The media are one of the most important fields of the ongoing cultural ‘war of position’ in the Kingdom. This is not a new development, as media have been always important in Thailand. Since their very establishment in the 19th century, media have been conceived as a cultural and political instrument, a partisan tool to influence society and politics (Reynolds 2002; Hamilton 2002; McCargo 2002). To put it in McCargo’s words:

“The origins of Thai press, then, lay in the efforts of competing elite interest groups... to advance their own positions and to undermine the standing of others” (McCargo 2002: 10).

Thai print media could influence politics mostly by giving to those who controlled the press the chance to present their ideas to the broader public, as well as by cheering political allies and discrediting foes and competitors (McCargo 2002: 10). The newspapers, created as a mouthpiece of the Crown, rapidly “turned out to be a difficult media to manage and regulate” (McCargo 2002: 10), as much that even oppositional and subversive social actors used the media to present their anti-regime opinions. In addition, even if the Thai media have their roots in elitist interests, it is also true that this originally exclusive medium had the effect of multiplying the number of informed and politically active citizens, therefore acting to some extent as a progressive element (McCargo 2002: 11).

A brief review of the history of Thailand’s media will be useful to make clear the role of Thailand’s media. The first Thai newspaper was founded by an American missionary, Dr Dan Bradley, in 1844, “as a means to influence the monarch, King Mongkut (Rama IV), and so having a broader political impact on the country” (McCargo 2002: 9).² The Siamese monarchy responded to the innovation by establishing its own publications, by supporting broadsheets and by providing subsidies to foreign publications as a way to influence them (McCargo 2002: 9-10).³ Following the first foreign and royal examples, a few other papers began to be issued. Several

² Called the *Bangkok Recorder*, it soon closed down, to be revived as a monthly in 1864 (Thitinan 1997: 219).

³ The first attempt to issue an official royal paper was King Mongkut’s *Royal Gazette* in 1858, which soon failed but was reissued years later by King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) as *Government Gazette*, a paper which was followed by other royal publications (McCargo 2002: 9-10; Thitinan 1997: 219).

weeklies were short-lived, while the first daily newspaper, the *Siam Daily Advertiser*, came out in 1868 (Thitinan 1997: 219). In this initial phase, media outlets in the Kingdom of Siam were owned by influential social actors: foreign missionaries, members of the Royal Family or by the King himself (Thitinan 1997: 219). As several editors claimed rights under extraterritorial treaties, the newspapers they produced were somehow protected from state's censorship and thus they could express opinions divergent from the Palace (Thitinan 1997: 219).

In the beginning of the Twentieth century the number of newspapers grew considerably.⁴ Some were owned by non-Western commoners, including the first Chinese-language newspapers (Thitinan 1997: 219). As the print media were increasingly becoming a political space, foreigners and Siamese alike used such agora to demand civil freedoms and thus to criticize, directly or indirectly, the liberticidal ruling regime.⁵

By the reign of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, 1910-1925), who personally produced three newspapers (Thitinan 1997: 219), the media had already penetrated the ruling aristocratic class (Hamilton 2002: 286). Due to the commercialization of newspapers, technologic improvements (including the use of photographs to accompany the articles), and other innovations, this period marked “a watershed for the development of the print media” (Thitinan 1997: 219). Rama VI is usually portrayed as a central figure in the cultural propagation of Thailand's official nationalism. The media were a pivotal medium for such effort (Hamilton 2002: 286). Rama VI sought “to make use of the government-subsidised press as a vehicle to present his ideas to the broader public.”⁶ In this way the King hoped to dominate the political discourse in his Kingdom. Anyway the plan turned out difficult to realize, as in the 1910s and 1920s sections of the press adopted a rather critical stance towards the absolute monarchical regime (McCargo 2002: 10). According to McCargo (2002: 10), such rising oppositional press reflected two developments: the declining popularity of Rama VI and “the emergence of

⁴At one point during the late reign of Rama V there existed 52 newspapers and magazines (Sukanya 1977: 27, cited in Thitinan 1997: 219).

⁵ As an example, a Siamese journalist wrote a number of articles against slavery and in favor of women's rights. Eventually, because of such and ‘affront’ he was jailed for 17 years (Thitinan 1997: 219).

⁶ Copeland, M.D. “Contested nationalism and the 1932 overthrown of the absolute monarchy in Siam,” unpublished PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1993: 37, cited in McCargo 2002: 10.

a new class of educated, literate and under-employed Bangkokians” which saw the ruling regime as a curb to their social aspirations.

After the overthrow of the absolute monarchy following the 1932 Siamese Revolution, the Thai press continued to be a partisan instrument, a political tool for both reactionary and progressive forces. As an example, both the People’s Party left-wing and right-wing leaders, Pridi Banomyong and Phibunsongkram, closely associated with a number of print media outlets which were used for their partisan political causes (McCargo 2002: 11). Being well aware of the power of the media, the anti-absolutist People’s Party regime closed a number of newspapers and limited the freedom of others (Sukanya 1977: 127, in Thitinan 1997: 220).

When Phibunsongkram concentrated power in his hands (1938-1944 and 1947-1957) he tried to stir the country on the direction of an authoritarian way to development. It was “a period of nation-building during which the mass media were extensively employed” (Thitinan 1997: 220). With a series of “Cultural Mandates” (*ratthaniyom*), Phibunsongkram’s regime tried to reach his twin goals of ‘civilizing’ the populace and instilling it with ‘Thai national identity’ (Thitinan 1997: 220). *Ca va sans dire*, both the definitions of ‘civilised’ and ‘Thai national identity’ were thought out, constructed, propagandized and enforced by the military, political and intellectual elite which detained the power (Reynolds 2002). As Phibunsongkram’s regime copiously used the media to carry the state ideology,⁷ the mass media revealed themselves to be an extraordinary powerful tool at the service of the regime’s nation-building task:

“The regime utilized print and broadcast media to promulgate these values, and thus the Cultural Mandates and the numerous supplementary orders, decrees and acts that followed penetrated that part of Thai society exposed to such media in a way unprecedented in Thai history” (Reynolds 2002: 7).

This use of the mass media as a tool to enforce the hegemonic culture was going to become a peculiar trait in the relation between Thailand’s ruling elite and the mass media. Hamilton (2002: 303) noted that:

⁷“The main instrument employed by the government in spreading and propagating the new set of social and moral values was the mass media which included radio, stage plays, printed literature, newspapers, and socio-political slogans” (Kobkua’s 1995: 120, cited in Thitinan 1997: 220).

“Successive Thai governments have used mass media to construct a model of the nation which suppresses difference and conflict and homogenizes the component population... to create a set of acceptable self/state relations, as viewed by the elites.”

At the time of Phibun Songkram, the single most important media to carry the state's ideology to the largely illiterate masses was the radio (Thitinan 1997: 220). Radio was totally controlled by the state and, since then, Thailand's nationwide radios have been continuously controlled by state agencies and the army.

With the regime of dictator Sarit Thanarat (1959-1963), leader of the 1957 and 1958 coup d'états, the media continued to have a central importance for the ruling elite. Sarit inaugurated an extraordinary period of restriction of press freedom and full-blown censorship (McCargo 2002: 11-12). Immediately after conquering power, the dictator closed down all oppositional newspapers, while the rest of the Thai press was subjected to heavy restrictions and constant control (McCargo 2002: 11). Censorship revolved around the infamous 'Announcement 17' which obliged print media to obtain a license from the state. As licenses could be easily withdrawn for "statements of a certain character" (such as pro-communist or anti-monarchical opinions) or statements which "discredit the government," the power of the regime over the press became immense (McCargo 2002: 11). Such repressive atmosphere affected the Thai press, which "tamely conformed to the political whims of the military in power," largely withdrew from political issues and retired into a tabloid and sensationalist style.⁸

Sarit's successor, General Thanom Kittikachorn (1963-1973), continued to repress a part of the media while using the other part to gain consensus and legitimacy (Thitinan 1997: 221; McCargo 2002: 11-12). With the electronic media controlled by state agencies and the print media controlled by powerful political actors, "the notion of objectivity... has been almost foreign to the Thai mass media in general" (Boonrak 1982: 345, in McCargo 2002:12-13). The situation started to mutate towards the end of the Thanom regime, in the beginning of the 1970s. As the opposition to the dictator grew to be more consistent there were "signs of the emergence of a more incisive and critical press" (McCargo 2002: 12). The press surfaced from the precedent dark period of heavy censorship to bear the task of leading the public opinion in its resentment against the regime. This happened in stark contrast to the radios, which remained firmly

⁸ Boonrak Boonyaketmala, "Thailand", in J.A. Lent (ed.), *Newspapers in Asia: Contemporary Trends and Problems*, Hong Kong, Heinemann Asia, 1982, p. 344. In McCargo 2002: 12.

in the hands of public agencies. In those years the anti-establishment print media had such a pivotal political role that it has been argued that the “student uprising of October 1973 would not have succeeded without supportive press coverage.”⁹ Regardless if this was true or not, yet in that occasion the media played a progressive role which supported change.

Following the successful October 14th, 1973 Uprising, Thailand’s first real ‘democratic’ experience began. With the interim government of Sanya Thammasak (1973-1975) censorship lifted considerably and thus a great number of new publications were allowed to obtain licenses (McCargo 2002: 13). Although corruption became a factor in restraining the freedom of the press, as media owners and journalists accepted bribes from politicians and businessmen, yet on the other hand this period saw also the birth of a ‘new journalism’ which pursued objectivity and responsibility while having an agenda which supported democracy, national sovereignty and economic independence (McCargo 2002: 13-14).

It is important to stress that during Thailand’s 1973-1976 ‘democratic’ interlude mass media were hardly a ‘watchdog’ in the classic Liberal definition, nor an independent actor. On the contrary, media were political tools of power-holders and other social actors and interest groups. Also, generally speaking, media were not particularly supportive of the student movement or of other progressive forces. The government was not particularly concerned with press freedom either, and in 1974 it introduced the National Broadcasting Executive Board (NBEB), which became “the new censorship device of the state” (Ubonrat 1993: 13). On the other hand, military propaganda was not even filtered by the NBEB, because the army set up a parallel board to supervise its own programmes (Ubonrat 1993: 13).

The electronic media were still in the hands of the conservative, Right-wing and anti-democratic forces which used the ideology of Thainess to oppose the progressivists and in particular to fight those ideas in conflict with the core assumptions of ‘Nation, Religion and Monarchy.’ In this way, the traditional power-holders successfully othered the rising counter-hegemonic discourses, first of all Marxism and Republicanism, as

⁹ Wasant Paileeklee, ‘Interactions between the press and politics in Thailand from 14 October 1973 to 23 February 1991’, London, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, unpublished MA dissertation, Area Studies (South East Asia), 1992, pp. 6-7. In McCargo 2002: 13.

‘un-Thai’ and thus dangerous. The reactionary forces used economic pressures to influence the print media, as they successfully did with the left-wing newspaper *Prachathippatai*, which succumbed to such pressures and fired a number of progressive journalists. Led by the army-controlled Free Radio Broadcasting Network, they eventually undermined democracy by favoring and supporting the October 6th, 1976 Thammasat University (TU) Massacre and subsequent military coup d’état against the first democratically elected government in the history of Thailand.¹⁰

If the media had been pivotal in supporting the 1973 anti-regime demonstrations which finally deposed dictator Thanom, on the other hand, only three years after, the army used the media in order to create the pretext to unleash a violent repression of students and destroy Thailand’s short-lived first democratic period. The anti-democratic forces justified the massacre of dozens of TU students on the ground of a supposed lack of respect against one of the core values of the ideology of Thainess: the Monarchy. According to the military and paramilitary forces, the students had organized a theatre play with a mock hanging of a young man whose features resembled those of the Crown Prince. The photo was published on a Right-wing newspaper and the army-controlled radios sparked outrage and called for paramilitary troops to move into Bangkok in order to crash down the ‘un-Thai’ TU students (Anderson 1977; Ungpakorn 1977).

The bludgeons of reactionary backlashes used the pretext that too much freedom of press generated misuses, permitted the introduction of alien elements, and generated offenses to the Nation, the Religion and the Monarchy, therefore threatening the core of Thainess. In a manner which has been typical in Thai history, the dominant social actors used the ideology of Thainess to destroy the opponent socio-political actors and thus maintain their power. In only three years, Thai history showed how media can help progressive change or can be an instrument of anti-democratic backlashes:

“Whilst the 14 October [1973] events illustrated the potential of the media to help bring about progressive change, the 6 October [1976] showed how the media could become a tool used in an ultra-conservative backlash” (McCargo 2002: 17).

As the military came again to power all newspapers were banned and were eventually allowed to reopen only at certain conditions, for example firing certain

¹⁰ McCargo 2002: 15. For a history of the 1973-1976 period see Anderson 1977. For a detailed account of the bloody crackdown of the student movement in 6 October 1976 see Ungpakorn 1977.

journalists and disciplining others. The Thanin Kraivixien regime (1976-1977), particularly hostile to press freedom, was ousted by another coup in October 1977. With the less extremist regime of General Kriangsak (1977-1980) the Thai press was given somewhat more freedom (McCargo 2002: 15). Prem Tinsulanonda's regime (1981-1988) continued Kriangsak's policy of "maintaining friendly relations [with the press] but taking no steps to abolish legislation which undermined press freedom, and making use of arbitrary powers to punish or threaten errant publications from time to time" (McCargo 2002: 16). Thus, the regime, apart from controlling directly the electronic media, forced the print media to operate self-censorship.

The Chatichai administration (1988-1991), which had an elected politician as prime minister for the first time since 1976, did not have a particularly good relationship with the media and allegedly started a "systematic bribery of reporters, columnists and editors" which, "coupled with a selective policy of intimidation," eroded *de facto* the media's supposedly 'watchdog' function (McCargo 2002: 16-17). Anyway it was in this period that an interesting phenomenon took place when Thai print media managed to unite to demand the abolition of Decree 42, which had represented a "constant threat of censorship and closure" (Thitinan 1997: 222). The press freedom campaign eventually achieved its goal in early 1991:

"The abolition of Decree 42... symbolize[d] the end of heavy-handed state intervention in the print media" (McCargo 2002: 17).

A few weeks after this important victory for press freedom, a new military coup d'état took place. The coup, the first since the 1970s, introduced a completely new situation. The political landscape changed and in one year Thailand was in time of deep crises again. This was a pivotal phase of Thai history, and also an interesting case study for the media-politics interplay which took place. When on May 4, 1992, a popular anti-government politician announced he would fast to death unless prime minister General Suchinda resigned from office, Thailand's media coverage bifurcated between state- and army-owned electronic media in one hand, and the private-owned print media in the other hand. The first did not even report the piece of news, while instead in every newspaper the hunger strike made the headlines. For the following weeks, most of the Thai press - but not all - supported the anti-regime street protests and thus behaved as a pivotal political actor, having a transformative role as an agent of change (McCargo 2002: 18-19). To put it in Ubonrat's (1994: 105) words:

“For the first time in history, the majority of the press united against state suppression of freedom of expression. Professionalism and press autonomy prevailed over any political patronage.”

Radio and TV stations hardly reported the mass rallies which took place in April and May to ask the resignation of Gen. Suchinda Kraprayoon (Khien 1997: 99). On the contrary, most Thai print media allied with the protesters in asking for the prime minister’s resignation, while international media reported the protests and the violent military crackdown. Even if a part of the media had been censored in Thailand, there were Thai citizens abroad who reported what was happening to their relatives in Bangkok by telephones and cell phones. For the first time, observers (e.g. McCargo 1999) described Thailand’s media as instrumental for regime change.

As said, not all Thai print media reported favorably the protest which finally brought down the Suchinda administration. According to British scholar Duncan McCargo (2002: 19-20), the stance of each print media, which varied from case to case, depended on the “personal alliances of key columnists, editors and owners.”¹¹ Another important fact that McCargo grasps and analyzes is how, in the case of the Black May 1992, along the street demonstrations was going on a parallel cultural ‘war of position’:

“At the heart of this struggle, between entrenched state power on the one hand and the collective popular will in a rapidly changing urban society on the other, was a *battle for the control of information*” (McCargo 2002: 18, italics added).

After 1992, the state maintained five TV channels but was “forced to liberalise and grant concessions to cable and satellite operators,” therefore losing a part of his power to control information (Thitinan 1997: 230). The post-Black May Anand government transformed the NBEB into the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), which was “embedded with the fundamental responsibility of policy formulation which was previously lacking” (Ubonrat 1993: 15). Although since the uprising of May 1992 the state lost some of its direct power over information, the centrality of media in Thai politics increased (Thitinan 1997: 217).

After 1992 the media continued to be one of the most important battlefields in the ongoing cultural ‘war of position’ in the Kingdom. This battle can be read among

¹¹ Something similar happened in 1995, when the Chuan government (1992-1995) was brought down by a merciless press campaign on a land reform scandal led by the daily *Thai Rath* (Thitinan 1997: 226; McCargo 2002: 20-25).

the lines of Duncan McCargo's *Politics and the Press in Thailand* (2002), the first English-language comprehensive study of the historical interconnectedness of politics and press, and the influence of the media in forming public opinion in this country. In 1995-1996 Duncan McCargo has been granted exclusive access to the newsrooms of Bangkok's leading newspapers, including *Thai Rath*, *Matichon*, *Phujatkan*, and *Siam Post*. The British scholar grasped and analyzed the impressively tangled web of relations linking politicians and power-holders to newspaper owners, editors, columnists and reporters. By coupling this unique experience with a comprehensive study of the history of Thai press and politics, McCargo was able to assess the state and essence of Thai print media. The author denies clear-cut explanations and describes the Thai press as partisan, largely corrupt, untrustworthy, loyally subject to the monarchy and totally a-critical towards such institution (McCargo 2002: 37-41); but also lively, provocative, and politically influent: at times aiming at altering the political order and "quite adept at bringing down governments" (McCargo 2002: 41).

The 1990s were a sparkling spring for Thai society, which forced political institutions to go through a dramatic democratic reshape, with 'people-centered development,' decentralization and important media, education, health and social provision reforms. The culmination was the "People's Constitution" of October 1997, a veritable landmark in Thai democratic reform. In the intentions of many supporters, the new Constitution was supposed to open a new era of democracy. Anyway, beginning from May 1997 Thailand was shaken by the Asian financial crisis. After forty years of uninterrupted growth, Thai economy shrank of 11% in twelve months. Crisis came as a shock. Suddenly, Thailand faced a peculiar and largely unexpected economic, social e political situation. Thousands of companies were bankrupt, fortunes suddenly evaporated. As a result, political elites got discredited. In this situation of uncertainty, a businessman decided to step personally into politics: Thaksin Shinawatra.

Thaksin was a media tycoon, owner of Shin Corporation, a business conglomerate especially active in telecommunication. Thaksin formed a party, the Thai Rak Thai (TRT), and won the election in 2001. Thaksin was well aware of the political importance of the media, and when in power he tactically acquired other media companies, most notably ITV, a national television channel. Then a family member of the Secretary General of Thaksin's political Party, Suriya Jungrungruangkit, bought

20% stake in The Nation Multimedia, which publishes the English-language newspaper *The Nation*. After that, Thaksin's proxies tried to control *Matichon*, one of the most authoritative Thai newspapers, and the *Bangkok Post*, one of the two English-language papers. In addition, Thaksin's government (2001-2006) continued the tradition of press censorship, although its censorship's *modus operandi* was mostly indirect, exercised through money politics. In other words, Thaksin tried to obtain the favor of the media mostly by feeding them with cash through advertising (Pasuk and Baker 2004). Anyway, when such practice was not successful and media professionals remained critical, the government could rely on more invasive forms of censorship. According to Ubonrat (2006), the Thaksin government went as far as removing journalists, canceling programs, and bringing media operators to court on defamation cases on the bases of the Libel Law on the Criminal Code. Such legal measures were aimed at creating in the media a climate of fear which would eventually silence them through self-censorship.

Anyway, the government's efforts were not totally successful, as towards the end of Thaksin's era the press grew progressively critical toward the government and the figure of the prime minister. The most militant anti-government media outlet was Sondhi Limthongkul's Manager Media Group. The group is a multimedia empire which comprehends the *Manager Daily* (Thai), *Business Day* (English), Manager Radio, Manager On-line, ThaiDay.com, ASTV and Manager Monthly. Sondhi, which became one of the five founders and key leaders of the yellow shirted People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), used his media platforms as a political space to carry on a loud anti-Thaksin campaign. The campaign led by Sondhi's and other mainstream media, together with the anti-Thaksin Yellow Shirts street protests, were instrumental in creating the right climate for the military intervention which ousted the democratically elected government of Thaksin Shinawatra.

The Thaksin government was removed by a military coup d'état on September 19th, 2006. The coup was welcomed by a large section of the Thai media. According to *The Nation's* journalist Pravit Rojanaphruk, balanced reporting in Thailand is missing at least since then:

“90% of the mainstream media took the clear standpoint of not wanting Thaksin... [and they] accepted whatever means it took to get rid of him. That was clear after the coup. Almost all the editorials legitimized the coup or at least accepted the coup as necessary for Thai society in order to deal with Thaksin” (interview to Prachatai, March 15th, 2010).

In 2006 the Thai mainstream media had largely relinquished their supposed service of watchdog of democracy when they favored the military coup d'état, an extra-democratic intervention against a democratically elected government. In addition, Pravit argues that even years after the 2006 military intervention “the mainstream media refuses to ask questions even about the problems created by the process concocted since the coup...” (Pravit Rojanaphruk. Interview to Prachatai, March 15th, 2010).

The military junta which seized the power from the Thaksin's government immediately resorted to naked force to control the media. In the night of the coup, soldiers were dispatched to TV, radio and print media news rooms. Over 300 community radio stations in the countryside were closed down. Critical websites were blocked. As happened during previous coups, censorship was enforced by bare force. “It is axiomatic that freedom dissipates at the barrel of a gun,” wrote Ubonrat (2007: 9).

Anyway, the censorship tactics of the junta mutated soon, moving from coercion to cooptation. Although Thaksin's ITV was soon nationalized, thus passing into state hands, the post-coup power-holders preferred to quiet the press with a more consensual strategy. A number of appointees from the Press Council, the Thai Journalist and Newspaper Association (TJA), the Thai Broadcast Journalist Association (TBJA), Channel 3, Channel 7, private TV stations and newspapers as Thai Rath, the Manager Media Group, Daily News and Matichon were invited to join the 242-member coup appointed National Legislative Assembly (NLA). The media professional associations also had 3 representatives in the 100-member Constitutional Convention which wrote a new charter to replace the 1997 ‘People's Constitution’ (Ubonrat 2008: 12-13.). The cooptation was basically “an effective tool to silence the press,” wrote Ubonrat (2007: 10). Anyway, the Thai academic argued that the junta's tactic may have been also a sort of reward for their role in ousting Thaksin, as well as “a kind of mutual power transaction. The press, thereby, duly assist in the legitimization of the military coup and the interim government” (Ubonrat 2008: 12). The military tactic of cooptation of the media resulted more efficient in smoothing media opposition than Thaksin's cash-cum-censorship recipe:

“This did effectively reduce criticism to a manageable level because the media would know exactly what to do (for the regime) and how far they could go. Both the military and the media were well aware that they must work together for their mutual interests if they were to survive the political manoeuvring they set themselves into” (Ubonrat 2008: 13).

The military-appointed NLA had the media as a central preoccupation, as it fabricated as much as five media laws: the Computer Crime Act or Cyber Crime Act, the Public Broadcasting Act, the Printing Act, the Broadcasting Act and the Film Act. The first was directed to curb internet freedom with the typical argument of the necessity of fighting cyber crime such as theft, porn and other illegal activities. In reality, the law was meant to silence the opposition to the military and the monarchy.¹² The other media laws had similar political objectives:

“... the laws supported the control of free speech and censorship in new wordings. By all purpose and intent the military and the bureaucracy used the law as their draconian measure to seal off criticism and political expression by the people while letting the media industries focus on their economic interests. It was ironic that the new rules to curtail freedom of expressions have been framed with the assistance and consent of the media industries themselves” (Ubonrat 2008: 14-15).

The catch-words here are “economic interests.” The monarchical-military bloc which staged the 2006 coup already shared with the mainstream media a common enemy: Thaksin Shinawatra. By the two-pronged strategy of coopting the media in politics and allowing their business to flourish, the dominant bloc forged a partnership with the private-owned media which, as we shall see with our case study, guaranteed to the establishment an important ally in the 2010 battle. This happened while the Army continues to own two of the six national free-television stations and the majority of the radio airwaves.

With our brief historical review we tried to show that media have always had pivotal political and cultural importance in the Kingdom. According to Thitinan (1997), Thai news media have played and play at least eight roles in Thailand’s politics: being used by the power-holders as a conduct for the hegemonic discourse; conveying public opinion; providing political and policy information to society; proving raw intelligence for policy makers; checking government in a watchdog capacity; serving as a channel of intragovernmental and intergovernmental communication; and serving as a forum for debating policy alternatives. In our understanding, all these several roles are essentially political, as they affect directly or indirectly the socio-political life of the country. Thailand’s ruling regimes, both elected and unelected, have always recognized the cultural and political role of the media and acted consequently, especially by trying to

¹² “The real intention of this law, however, was to censor political expressions. It meant to seal off any criticism of the monarchy and the military. Another important objective was to suppress the voice of the ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (Ubonrat 2008: 14).

control the media in order to use them for their own cultural and political agenda. State control is an obvious attempt to secure hegemony among citizens. On the other hand, subjected social actors often used the media to present their subversive views to a broader public. In conclusion, Thailand's mass media can be largely defined as fundamental tools in the struggle for cultural hegemony.

2.3. English-language press in Thailand

To date, there is a significant shortage of English-language studies on Thailand's English-language print media. Virtually no single specific study of BP and/or TN has been published (in English). Therefore, not much is known at the academic level about their social or political role. As discussed above, the most authoritative English-language study on the Thai press is Duncan McCargo's *Politics and Press in Thailand* (2002). Yet, this book focuses on the Thai-language press, not on the English-language one, which received incidental attention from the author. In his *Asia's Media Innovators*, Stephen Quinn (2008) reserved a chapter to The Nation Multimedia Group, publisher of *The Nation* newspaper. Anyway, due to the objectives of his study, the Australian researcher centered his attention on the group's organization as a company and on its innovativeness in the field of the newest technologies, rather than assessing the social and political role of the media organization within the Kingdom.

A number of master theses treated arguments related to Thailand's two English-language print media. Natthawan Kawprapan (2003) from Kasetsart University in Bangkok worked at a "*Comparative study of front-page headlines in the Nation and Bangkok Post*," concluding that the two organizations produce rather similar headlines. Sara Jones (2008) from Ohio University, USA studied how TN framed violence linked to the ongoing separatist insurgency in Southern Thailand. Jones concluded that the conflict media frame produced by TN revolves around the terms of Thai/Malay ethnicity or Buddhist/Islamist identity – a narrative which tends to obscure the need for social justice and political reforms. Huong Thi Le Nguyen (2006) produced a master thesis for Chulalongkorn University on "*The image of Thaksin Shinawatra in Bangkok Post and The Nation*." Houng's research is a mixed quantitative and qualitative content analysis of the two newspapers' coverage of the PM Thaksin (2001-2006) in seven

chosen one-week periods throughout his premiership. We shall go back to her study soon, but for the moment it is important to present BP and TN in their general terms.

The *Bangkok Post* (BP) was the first English-language newspaper in Thailand. It was founded in 1946 by Alexander McDonald, a former OSS officer, and a Thai associate, Prasit Lulitanond. Originally foreign-owned, today BP is Thai-managed and mostly Thai-owned. It belongs to The Post Publishing Company, whose major shareholders are GMM Grammy Pcl. (the largest media and entertainment conglomerate in Thailand) with 23.6%, the Chirathivat family (owners of Central Group) with 20.28%, and the *South China Morning Post* of Hong Kong with the 13.49%.¹³ BP is a broadsheet, general-interest newspaper. Its audience comprehends two main subgroups. The first is composed by middle and upper class Thais who have gained access to the English language through education, while the second is made by foreigners based in Thailand or anyway interested in Thai issues. BP tends to be rather ‘mainstream’ and monarchic, and critics describe it as largely uncritical of the government of the time (Coleridge 1994: 442).

The Nation was established in 1971, at the end of the Thanom regime (1963-1973), when the opposition to the dictator was growing and journalism was beginning to surface after years of heavy censorship (see section 2.2). Originally called *The Voice of The Nation*, it was established as a Thai-owned English-language daily newspaper “which sought to practice ‘objective’ journalism to international standards” (McCargo 2002: 12). TN is owned by Nation Multimedia Group, which listed in the Stock Exchange of Thailand in 1988. Besides broadcasting a TV channel and operating several websites, Nation Multimedia Group also publishes the Thai-language weeklies *Nation Junior Magazine* and *Nation Weekend*, and the dailies *Kom Chad Luek* and *Krungthep Turakij*. TN presents itself as a business paper and, similarly to the BP, addresses mainly the Thai upper and upper-middle classes who have gained access to English language education. A minority of its readers is made by non-Thais, especially Bangkok-based businessmen. Suthichai Yoon, one of the founding editors, believes that TN has the “moral right to comment critically on our own country” (Coleridge 1994: 442). Although it is true that TN tends to be more opinioned, outspoken and critic than

13 The Stock Exchange of Thailand, accessed at <http://www.set.or.th/set/companyholder.do?symbol=POST&language=en&country=US> on July 30th, 2012.

BP, yet in practice this ethos translates into a tendency to present nationalist, pro-royalist and pro-elitist views. Nevertheless, among its senior journalists some present different perspectives, most notably senior journalist Pravit Rojanaphruk.

Both the papers “are similar in their coverage of international news and focus mainly on foreigners and the Thai elite” (Quinn 2008: 56). Anyway, BP is considered to have less a ‘Thai’ perspective and more a cosmopolitan or internationalist one, “which can be attributed to the fact that the *Post* employs far more foreigners than Thais” (Jones 2007: 29). Compared to BP, TN tends to produce more a ‘Thai’ perspective, although here for ‘Thai’ we should read an understanding of ‘what it means to be Thai’ influenced by Thailand’s official discourse of Thainess, as we shall discuss in chapter 4. Apart from being more nationalistic, TN in its editorials tends to be less shy in criticizing the government (Huong 2006; Jones 2008: 29). In particular, during the last decade TN took a stand against the figure of Thaksin Shinawatra. As a result, during the Thai Rak Thai governments (2001-2006) several companies associated with the billionaire prime minister ceased advertising with TN in order to punish the newspaper’s line and to pressure it into a less unfavorable coverage. Regardless to such pressures, TN denounced these practices to the public and did not discontinue its editorial line, eventually bandwagoning with the yellow shirted anti-Thaksin demonstrations. During the periods when the government was run by Thaksin or his proxies, BP was more accommodating. Even though Thaksin’s image was framed with both positive and negative elements, Huong (2006) concludes her thesis arguing that since the middle of Thaksin’s first term in office there was an overall deterioration of the prime minister’s image as presented by the two newspapers, with a growing criticism of his figure. Anyway, BP’s framing of Thaksin was different from TN’s. BP’s stance was softer, while TN had a stronger anti-Thaksin line, which was also more consistent throughout his premiership, eventually intensifying in the second part. According to Huong, the softer line of BP was a result of the business interests of its owners, which were linked to Thaksin’s business empire.

According to interview sources, BP and TN have a daily circulation more than ten times smaller than *Thai Rath*, the most sold Thai-language newspaper with a

circulation of approximately 1,200,000.¹⁴ This makes the circulation of BP and TN somewhere in the fifty to one hundred thousand range – most probably around seventy thousand. Although the numbers of the English-language press are inferior to the main Thai-language national newspapers, yet as argued by McCargo (2002: 41-42) Thailand is “largely a society of non-readers” as well as an “elite-dominated society characterized by top-down governance.” As a consequence,

“...relatively small readerships... are extremely influential. Politicians, bureaucrats, military officers, business people and local intellectuals do read newspapers, and these groups are important in forming public opinion” (McCargo 2002: 41-42).

On top of this power of influencing the public opinion, their use of the English language makes BP and TN an obvious window of access into the Thai issues for non-Thai speakers. Consequently, BP and TN editorial teams have to balance their ‘identity’ between multiple worlds. This means that the two media outlets have to find equilibrium between two poles: their being a ‘Thai’ media operating within the ‘Thai culture;’ and their communicating through an international language to reach an audience composed by a foreign group and a local but to some extent cosmopolitan one. They also have to construct their message to be mutually understandable between the two main sectors of their audience, i.e. the Thai readers and foreigner ones, and their respective cultural backgrounds.

According to the 2012 Freedom House survey, Thailand hosts the 60th freest press in the world, or the 3rd freest in Southeast Asia after the Philippines and Indonesia.¹⁵ Section 39 of Thailand’s 2007 Constitution prevents foreign ownership of the media: “The owner of a newspaper or other mass media business shall be a Thai national.” By law, Thailand’s newspapers cannot hire foreign reporters, though exceptions can be made in specialist areas. For example, newspapers are permitted to hire expatriates as copy or sub editors because of their English-language skills.

¹⁴ The Thai Rath circulation figures were 1,200,000 in 2004. Yet its readership numbers were almost eight times higher at 9,254,000 (World Press Trends 2005: 638).

¹⁵ Freedom House. Accessed at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2012> on September 10th, 2012.

CHAPTER III

MEDIA AND POLITICS

Ideology, broadly speaking, is meaning in the service of power.

- J.B. Thompson. Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990: 6

The central importance of media in society and politics has been long recognized. In social and media theory, media have been usually perceived as powerful (Curran *et al.* 1995). Power-holders of all times and societies undertook efforts to keep a strong hold on the communication media (see chapter 2). In contemporary society, too, the importance of the media is beyond dispute. The nature of the role that the media play in one country or another is, anyway, a matter of debate.

This chapter is an attempt to review the most significant theories which deal with the interrelation between media and politics, with a special emphasis on the two-pronged usage of media as a tool for enforcing dominant ideologies and as a tool to resist such attempts. The chapter is divided in two sections.

The first section analyzes classic theories of media. This section we will review the main media theories briefly introduced in chapter 1, with a particular attention to Critical Theory and Cultural studies. Critical Theory is particularly useful for this study in the way that it openly exposes the values which stand behind media narratives and uses these values to provide alternative readings of the 'text' produced by the media and the social role of the media themselves. Doing so, Critical Theory is often openly critical of the status quo and the economic and institutional arrangements of a given society. Similarly, Cultural Studies focus on how the media are used to create the cultural arrangements that structure everyday life. Cultural Studies cast light on the power relationships which lie behind the values or mind-sets that most people take for granted

by enquiring how social elites use their power to gain control over the media and then use the media to propagate their ideology – which becomes the hegemonic culture – in order to maintain their dominant position in society. Both theories are important in the extent that they cast light on how the mass media both reflect and actively construct ‘reality.’

The second part deals with the interplay between media and socio-political dissent and protest. We will describe how prior sociological literature has yielded evidence of a Protest Paradigm: a set of news coverage patterns that typifies mainstream media coverage of protest events. Protest news coverage generally vilifies protesters, understates their reasons and hinders their role as vital actors on the political stage. In particular, the Protest Paradigm suggests that news organizations have a tendency to focus on the protesters’ actions instead than on their requests, reasons and objectives. Then we will answer to the consequential question: why do media tend to be biased in reporting protests? The answer is individuated in Chomsky and Herman’s Propaganda Model, a theory which argues that mainstream media are subjected to five ‘filters’ which are inevitably biased in favor of the economic, political, cultural and institutional elites.

3.1. Classical models: the socio-political role of the media

Since the origin of media theory in the nineteenth century, media theorists attempted to understand the interplay between media, culture, politics and society at large.

The theory which emerged first, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, is commonly defined Mass Society Theory. At a time when industrialization was advancing at a stunning speed in Western Europe and North America, many social thinkers developed a negative view of mass media and criticized them for pushing culture towards lower-class tastes, triggering political unrest, and subverting important cultural norms which were thought to be indispensable pillars of the social structure (Brantlinger 1983). In other words, Mass Society Theory’s central argument is that media subvert and disrupt the status quo. In the first half of the Twentieth century, world events seemed to confirm the worst fears of mass society theorists when extreme

parties conquered power in Europe through a skillful use of the mass media as tools for propaganda. Their leaders seemingly exercised total control over their populaces, started radical social changes and lead the world into World War II (Baran and Davis 2012: 27-28).

Influenced by such historical events, media sociologists went as far as arguing that repeated exposure to powerful media images has the power to condition the human beings to have the wanted response. The assumption was that media have the power to launch their message into the minds of average people and directly influence them (Davis 1976). A typical example was the Nazi anti-Jewish propaganda, which supposedly triggered the anti-Jewish hysteria in 1930s Germany which was instrumental to Nazi power. Such version of mass society theory came to be known as magic bullet theory, expressing “the idea that propaganda can be powerful enough to penetrate most people’s defenses and condition them to act in ways useful to the propagandist” (Baran and Davis 2012: 81-82).

While mass society theory reached its peak, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, in North America an Austrian émigré called Paul Lazarsfeld began to empirically investigate mass society theory’s claims. Through the use of scientific methods, including carefully elaborated surveys and field experiments, Lazarsfeld (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Lazarsfeld 1969) would eventually overturn some of mass society theory’s basic assumptions and conclude that media do not actually have the enormous power previously theorized. Over the years, Lazarsfeld and its team concluded that mass media propaganda was not so powerful as it was feared (and, by others, hoped) because the audience (the people) resisted media influence in a number of ways, and their views and attitudes were shaped by many competing factors, such as family, friends, and religion. For all these reasons, the arguments that had Lazerfeld as the most prominent exponent were labeled as Limited-Effects Theory (Baran and Davis 2012: 135-172).

Paradoxically, limited-effect theory gained consensus in an age, late 1940s and 1950s, when in most countries of the world the governments strictly regulated the mass media and nationalized them in part or totally. At the same time, the whole non-Communist world saw an explosion in the use of commercials through the media. As a result, many academics started to question the limited-effect theory: if Lazarsfeld and others are right in saying that media do not have much power to influence human

beings' opinions and behavior, then why governments want to control the media? And why are corporations spending millions of dollars on billboards, newspapers, radio and TV commercials?

Such considerations led a group of European academics, especially Critical Theorists (e.g. Hall 1992) and those who developed a school of social studies commonly referred as (British) Cultural studies, to reject the limited-effect theory as reductionist and to counter argue that media are instead a strong social tool, especially in the way they enable dominant social elites to create, recreate and maintain their power. To them, power has an ideological dimension, and the mainstream mass media are used to (re)produce it.

Such theories draw heavily from Italian Marxist political activist and theorist Antonio Gramsci (1971). Gramsci studied extensively the problem of power, the forms of coercion and consent in political systems, the relation between State and civil society, and the position of intellectuals in creating hegemony. Gramsci's work is particularly useful in the understanding of how relations of power (domination or subordination) are reproduced with only minimal resort to intimidation or direct coercion. To Gramsci, modern political systems are based on a complex system of relations between production (capital and labor), the state or political society (coercive institutions) and civil society (all other non-coercive institutions). While for the relations between capital and labor Gramsci mostly relied on Marxist theory, the originality of the Italian thinker was in theorizing the existence in societies of a balance between coercive power and cultural hegemony, the last underpinning the former. Gramsci argued that the institutions of civil society function behind the state as a defensive device whenever the system is attacked. In other words, civil society is a domain which comprises the ideological institutions that consolidate the existing hegemonic arrangements. Gramsci's "hegemony" refers to a process of moral and intellectual leadership through which dominant classes persuade dominated or subordinate classes to accept the dominant classes' domination. In other words, cultural hegemony is used by the dominant/hegemonic classes to persuade subjected/dominated classes into accepting their inferior positions. As such, cultural hegemony relies on suasion, while other forms of social domination rely on plain force, coercion or the threat of it.

Dominant/hegemonic blocs are usually able to preserve their dominant position because they are strong in terms of money, culture and weapons, i.e. capital, hegemony and coercive institutions. Although this may be observed in most society, Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony states that a modern, complex society can be better dominated by the class who controls the reproduction of culture, i.e. mass media and popular culture, which form part of the ideological discourse encouraging people to consent to status quo power structures. That's why, Gramsci argued, in modern societies power-holders tend to rely less on coercion (violence or the possibility of it) and more on suasion, successfully maintaining domination over the subjected population through the use of consensual institutional arrangements. In other words, the elites' control of society is culturally embedded in the minds of the people via the ruling class hegemony over the public discourse (Gramsci 1971). As written by Steven Lukes (1974: 28),

“Is it not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial? To assume that the absence of grievances equals genuine consensus is simply to rule out the possibility of false or manipulated consensus by definitional fiat.”

For this reason, the public opinion's approval is sought by the ruling class through a variety of cultural tools. At the same time, as Gramsci (1971) understood, it must be stressed that no society is a monolith and each hegemonic discourse has its challengers. To use Gitlin's (1980: 10) words,

"hegemonic ideology enters into everything people do and think is natural - making a living, loving, playing, believing, knowing, even rebelling. In every sphere of social activity, it meshes with the commonsense through which people make the world seen intelligible; it tries to become that commonsense. Yet, at the same time, people only partially and unevenly accept the hegemonic terms."

This means that in every historical society at every given moment there are both power and counter-power, hegemony and counter-hegemony: every society contains spaces where subjected forces can work to insert their anti-hegemonic elements into public communication and discourse. In this way, hegemonic arrangements are continually contested and renegotiated. In this struggle, media are also a possible lever of social change. When used by subaltern classes, media and popular culture become tools to contest the hegemonic arrangements of society, acting as fully effective forces

for political change. Thus, media are significant political agents, sought-after by all social actors.

Of course, subversive social actors can also opt for a violent and frontal attack against the establishment a la 1789 French Revolution, but Gramsci believes that in modern societies such a free-for-all action may end up winning over only one defense (coercive power), but not the other one (cultural hegemony), and thus may establish a new regime based on coercion but lacking popular consent. In other words, revolutionists should rather work first for the conquest of cultural hegemony:

"A social group can, indeed must, already exercise 'leadership' before winning governmental power (this is indeed one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to 'lead' as well" (Gramsci 1971: 57).

Consequently, Gramsci argued for a culture war in which anti-establishment elements should seek to gain a dominant voice in the mass media, education, art, and other mass institutions. This will be a long “war of position” between the upholders of the status quo and the forces of change, Gramsci argued, but it is the only path available to subaltern classes in complex modern societies.¹ In the context of a “war of position”, i.e. a long struggle for cultural hegemony, the intellectuals have a pivotal role:

"Critical self-consciousness means, historically and politically, the creation of an élite of intellectuals. A human mass does not 'distinguish' itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organising itself: and there is no organisation without intellectuals, that is without organisers and leaders" (Gramsci 1971: 334).

Cultural theorists, as well as critical theorists, agree with Gramsci’s fundamental assumptions, including his view of the mass media as “a public arena in which cultural battles are fought and a dominant, or hegemonic, culture is forged and promoted” (Baran and Davis 2012: 34). As an example, Stuart Hall (1982), one of the leading members of what became known as the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, argued that the media are a subtle yet highly effective tool for promoting worldviews

¹ The term “war of position” comes from a parallel between political struggle and military war. Gramsci wrote his *Letters from Prison* after World War I, which staged a transition from war of manoeuvre/movement, characterized by rapid movements of troops and frontal attack, to a war of position or trench warfare, involving relatively static troops who dig and fortify somewhat fixed lines of trenches and defend the position for long periods of time (Gramsci 1971: 238). For modern nations, Gramsci argued, the war of manoeuvre increasingly gives way to a war of position, which "is not, in reality, constituted simply by the actual trenches, but by the whole organizational and industrial system of the territory which lies to the rear of the army in the field" (Gramsci 1971: 234).

(ideologies, or discourses) created by the social elites and favorable to their own interests, but, at the same time, he recognized that subversive forces use the media to promote anti-hegemonic elements.

Moving from a Gramscian framework, Critical Theory and Cultural Studies see social reality as constantly being shaped and reshaped by the dialectic interaction (the ongoing struggle or debate) between structure (the social world's ideologies, rules, norms, and beliefs) and agency (how social actors behave and interact in that world). According to such theories, the researcher can understand the product of the interaction between the two. The importance of such theories is that they stress the existence in society of a dominant/hegemonic discourse, or ideology, and at the same time they recognize the complex and constantly mutant interrelation between power, culture and human communication.

It may be now useful to clarify the definitions of ideology, discourse and power.

An 'ideology' is a world-view, a representation of the world, a view on how society should be organized. Although Marxist and Critical tradition imply that everyone has a world-view, the word 'ideology' is usually associated with power, social relations and exploitation. To Marx, ideology was linked to the material and social activities of capitalist production. Although the word was not invented by Marx, its contemporary usage became closely associated with the German philosopher. Marx and Engels (1970: 64) famously stated that:

"The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force" (Marx and Engels 1970: 64).

For Marx and Engels, the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas, and that's what is called ideology. Thus an ideology is not just a belief, but it is more correctly defined as the set of beliefs that frame the world in a way that helps the ruling class to sustain and maintain its own power. In this way, if and when the subjected classes accept this dominant worldview, then they will accept the legitimacy of the ruling class's dominance over them. This is, to Marx and Engels, a 'false consciousness.' As Althusser (1971) points out, the ruling class does not rule directly but through the complex fields of ideology propagated by the civil society:

The reproduction to the submission to the ruling class ideology requires the cultural institutions - the church and the mass media, the political apparatuses and the overall management of the state, which in advanced capitalism increasingly take all those non-productive apparatuses into its terrain (Althusser 1971: 96).

‘Discourse’ is a term which modern social theory often uses interchangeably with ‘ideology.’ This is because the term ‘discourse’ has a wide range of meanings and uses. In its simplest sense, discourse is conversation. Compared to ‘ideology,’ anyway, ‘discourse’ refers more specifically to written and spoken language. More exactly, discourse is the form of communication that constructs meaning. Although things, objects, actions and social practices do exist outside of language, yet they are given meaning by language, and they are thus discursively formed. In this way, discourse constructs ‘reality’ by giving a certain meaning to material things. In other words, discourse structures which meanings is intelligible and which is not. It should be clear then, as argued by Foucault (1964) in his study on the discourse of madness, that discourse is intertwined to power and knowledge. This is because meaning is created through discourse, while discourse is created and perpetuated by those who have the power and means of communication. Consequently, power is produced and reproduced through discourse. Therefore, we can study “how power relations are exercised and negotiated in discourse” (Fairclough and Wodak 1997: 272).

Norman Fairclough in his influential “*Language and Power*” (1989) developed the approach called Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA studies how power (social and political domination) is reproduced through language (in text and talk). Since then, the study of ‘discourse’ came to be understood mostly as the social process of making and reproducing sense(s). Fairclough (1989: 17) argues that discourse is “social practice determined by social structures,” that “discourse is constituted by socially constituted orders of discourse,” and that “orders of discourse are ideologically shaped by power relations in social institutions and in society as a whole.” In poor words, Fairclough argues that discourse is determined by society; and in particular by the power relations of a given society.

The last term to be defined is ‘power.’ In Critical Theory, social power is seen as the control exercised by a social actor (one individual, group, organization or institution) over the minds and/or the actions of other social actors. If a social actor controls the minds of the subjected social actors, that is to say their knowledge, attitudes

and/or ideologies, then the dominant social actor can influence the actions of the dominated. As Lukes (1974: 23) says,

“A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining what he wants. Indeed, it is not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have – that is, to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires?”

Naturally, the dominant social actors tend to influence the dominated social actors in ways that advantage the first, not the second. In this framework, privileged access to the media is a power resource, because media contribute to form specific forms of discourse, and those who control communication media can shape the public discourse and consequently have more power to control the minds and the actions of the broad population. Hence this framework stresses the importance of the media, whose characteristic of being mediums for human communication, as well as because of their persuasive power, are pivotal instruments for the (re)production of mind-sets, beliefs and ideologies. If the media have such an ideological role, then this means that media produce, reproduce, maintain or sustain unequal relations of power among social actors (Althusser 1971; Lukes 1974; Graber 1984; van Dijk 1988; Harris 1989; Louw 2010).

More practically, critical theorists as well as cultural theorists argue that, as a norm, social-, economic- and political- elites dominate the above described cultural struggles because they start with important advantages. Values, beliefs, mind-sets, and ideologies favored by elites are subtly woven into and promoted through a wide range of mass media narratives – books, radio, TV news, movies, every sort of popular program and even apparently innocuous entertainment cultural products such as children’s cartoons. On the contrary, oppositions to dominant ideologies tend to be marginalized as the status quo is presented as the only commonsensical, logical, rational and beneficial way of structuring society. In such a cultural war field, dissent and alternative worldviews tend to be silenced, ridiculized, demonized, and at times legally and/or violently suppressed.

In recent years, probably following the twin beliefs in the ‘end of history’ (Fukuyama 1992) and the definitive triumph of (neo-)liberism over critical and (neo-)Marxist thought, the concepts of ideology and hegemonic discourse have come under pressure in several fields, including media studies. Anyway in this study we shall follow

Thompson (1990) in arguing for the continued use of the definition of ideology, although in a revised form. In order to overcome the shortcomings of political economy and content analysis, Thompson (1990) went beyond the classical definition of ideology proposing a tripartite methodological approach which rebalances the analysis of media texts by giving better attention to the hermeneutic aspect. In other words, in the analysis of dominant or hegemonic ideologies in media texts Thompson (1990) does not only look to media organizations and institutions and, second, to the content or structure of the text(s), but he also adds a third – and crucial – level of analysis: the meaning that the texts have for the audience (Devereux 2007: 149-178).

Thompson's (1990) methodological approach is a powerful one, as it enabled the British scholar to identify with unprecedented clarity how ideological domination (hegemony) is achieved. According to Thompson (1990), ideology functions through five main aspects: legitimation, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation, and reification.

The first is Legitimation, because unequal relationships of power are created and reproduced by being presented as legitimate and in 'everybody's' or in the majority's interest. The second aspect is Dissimulation, because unequal relationships of power, which are relations of domination (such as gender or class inequality), are denied, hidden, masked, obscured, ignored or taken for granted and portrayed as 'natural.' The third aspect is Unification, because the hegemonic or dominant ideology constantly tries to unify all or most members of a society into a collective body, usually in opposition to a real or imagined 'enemy,' be it internal or external to the collective entity. Unification usually requires othering discourses to set up distinctions between 'us' and 'them.' A common 'enemy' is the 'foreigner', the immigrant or more broadly those social actors which can be described as different from the imagined 'us'. A more recent variant is the 'threat of terrorism.' Common unifying terms are 'community', 'family', 'society', 'we' and other terms linkable to a particular trait of the 'us' – often a mainstream religion or a supposedly positive 'tradition.' The fourth aspect is Fragmentation, because hegemony is achieved and maintained by the dominant social actors through a 'divide and rule' strategy which aims at dividing and fragmenting the opposition. A classical example is the colonial *divide et impera* (divide and rule) strategy, with the colonial power that triggers divisions and enmity among its subjects along ethnic, religious or

class lines, and then portrays itself as necessary for maintaining peace, law, order and to achieve progress for the 'common good.' The fifth and last aspect is Reification, because social structures of the time are represented as being 'natural', 'inevitable' or 'traditional' and thus unchangeable. In this way social structures, which are relations of domination, are represented unhistorically, divorced from history, as if they did not develop from specific socio-economic and political contexts. Gender inequalities or extreme poverty in some areas of Africa, for example, are usually described as 'natural' without any reference to unfair legislations or to the exploitative contexts of colonialism, post-colonialism and unequal international relations.

Thompson's (1990) definition of ideology (or dominant/hegemonic discourse), and his description of the five key ways through which ideology works, highlights the importance of the media in society and especially opens the way to the study of the manner in which media are used by (dominant) groups to enhance their power and (re)produce unequal and unfair social relationships.

It should be clear by now that Critical Theory and Cultural studies can be very powerful tools for the study of the interplay between media, culture, and politics; and especially the politics of dissent or protest.

3.2. Media and Political Protest

No regime lasts forever, and political changes are often triggered or accompanied by protest and social movements (Boudreau 2004). Being communication a vital mechanism for power and counter-power, a central aspect of the struggle of protest movements is the effort to make themselves heard or seen through the media. For such movements, the media is "friend and foe" (Peterson 2001), meaning that communication media can be both an ally in their struggle or an enemy. Media can be a friend, because activists need media interest to make their demands and message heard, to gain legitimation and to broaden the support for their cause. In this, media represent for the activists a point of entry to the 'outside world', a potential and necessary partner in the struggle, to be won by "reflexive tactics to both gain entry to the media spaces and to influence the messages mediated within these spaces" (Peterson 2001: 21). This

is so true that when media interest wanes, activists tend to take active measures to recapture the media space, usually by launching actions which are media events. Anyway, as said above, the mass media can be also foes of the protesters, firstly by being a sort of wall which severs the protest from the broad society with a 'news blackout.' In this case, the media frame the protest into obscurity in an aware or unaware tactic of repudiation or invisibility. As a rule, invisible actors lose the 'media game' and thus they are more likely to lose the cultural and socio-political battle. This is one of the utmost powers of media: the gate-keeping power. Alternatively, the media can act as a protesters' foe by giving the protest a negative media covering, for example by ridiculing or demonizing the protest event, and thus influencing negatively the public's perception of the protest and legitimizing anti-protest narratives and actions (Peterson 2001).

Given that the media can be both 'friend and foe', the question is: how do media tend to cover political protests? Is there any recognizable pattern? Past research on media coverage of socio-political protests provides a series of answers and thus a backdrop for our analysis.

A pioneering yet authoritative study on the issue has been done by a team lead by James Halloran, a British communication scholar known for his contribution for the establishment of the field of media studies in the United Kingdom, where he founded the International Association of Media and Communication Researchers (IAMCR). Halloran et al.'s classic study *Demonstrations and Communication: A Case Study* (1970) is a survey of the media coverage given by the two British televisions (*BBC* and *ITN*) and by most of the British national newspapers to a mass demonstration held in London on 27 October 1968. The demonstration was against the Vietnam War and was attended by about 60,000 citizens. Although mostly peaceful, during the march through the English capital a small minority of participants confronted with police and engaged in violent acts.

Halloran *et al.*'s survey was intended to assess how the media approached the situation both on the day of the protest event and immediately before, what coverage the media produced and what the public made of it. The study includes also the reactions of certain sections of the public towards several related issues, and the media portrayal of violence.

Although the survey demonstrates that there were obvious differences between media outlets in their coverage, anyway it also shows the following finding:

“a more portant and fundamental similarity... [i]n all but one case the story was interpreted in terms of the same basic issue... readers were not presented with various interpretations focusing on different aspects of the same event, but with basically the same interpretation which focused on the same limited aspect - the issue of violence” (Halloran *et al.* 1970: 300-301).

To the authors, such biased anti-protest reporting poses a problem for democracy and eventually may underpin political violence:

“the events of October 27 received tremendous publicity, but this was not useful as a form of political communication, or as a contribution to any continuing debate. How long peaceful demonstrators seeking a new mode of expression will be content to demonstrate peacefully, when whatever they do is likely to get negative treatment?” (Halloran *et al.* 1970: 317).

Paradoxically, Halloran *et al.* (1970: 302) have argued that the mainstream media’s derogative treatment of demonstrations is related with mainstream journalism’s philosophy of ‘objectivity’ and ‘impartiality.’ Due to such philosophy, media tend to avoid in-depth analyses by focusing instead on what reporters see, i.e. on the protest event itself. As a consequence, a number of features of the protest are considered more newsworthy than others. These elements are, as other researchers would confirm later (e.g. Gitlin 1980; Murdock 1981), the ones related to the ‘spectacle.’ The fact is that the spectacle is the most visible element, especially if we think of protesters’ odd actions and violence. Accordingly, spectacle tends to receive higher attention than the protest issues and the protesters’ official opponents, be it a law, a government, or a social problem.

Successive case studies confirmed and developed Halloran *et al.*’s original argument: mainstream protest reporting tends to focus on the spectacle and the occasional violence, and as a result it does not pay sufficient attention to the reasons of protest. This is the same as saying that mainstream media tend to be biased in reporting sociopolitical protests. In this sense, one very influential work is Chan and Lee’s “*The journalistic paradigm on civil protests: A case study of Hong Kong*” (1984), where the authors proposed the so-called Protest Paradigm. Similarly to Halloran *et al.*’s, Joseph Chan and Chin-Chuan Lee’s study on protest and media in Hong Kong found that mainstream mass media tend to focus on limited features of social protests. The authors produced a list of common features used by the media to represent political protests.

First, media tend to focus on violence and confrontation with police, which causes a fail to report the protesters' official opponents (be it a government, an institution, a law or some other aspects of the status quo), which are replaced with police, hostile bystanders, and non-protesting audiences. A second feature is the reliance on official sources to frame the event. As the protests are often against a government or an institution or a certain aspect of the status quo, such feature tends to be biased against the protest and in favor of the government, the official institutions and the status quo. A third aspect is the media tendency to portray protestors as the Other, i.e. as the Them in an Us/Them framework where the Us is the non-protesting audience and the Them, as said, is the protesters. A fourth aspect is the focus on the protesters' activities rather than their objectives. In poor words, although the protesters do not parade in order to take a stroll, but they actually march or perform other actions in order to protest against something or to ask something, yet, in spite of such a fact, the media tend to report less the reasons of the protest while at the same time emphasizing the sight of the protest, the look of the protesters and their actions while parading through the streets. The result is that the news are presented in a way that gives the impression that protests erupt irrationally, out of nowhere, as nonsensical rituals or as acts of hooliganism of marginal, troubled and thus potentially dangerous individuals or groups which do not respect the public/national interest and do not represent the community/nation (Chan and Lee 1984). The sum of such common ways in which mainstream media portray protest event has been labeled by the two academics as Protest Paradigm.

Chan and Lee (1984) and other sociological literature (e.g. Hertog and McLeod 1995; McLeod and Detenber 1999; Boyle *et al.* 2004; Arpan *et al.* 2006; McLeod 2007; McCluskey *at al.* 2009) have yielded extensive evidence of such Protest Paradigm, meaning a set of news coverage patterns that typifies mainstream media coverage of protest. This coverage generally vilifies protesters, understates their reasons and hinders their role as vital actors on the political stage. This critical treatment of protest(ers) usually generates a negative influence on the audience's perceptions of protest(ers) (McLeod 1995; McLeod and Detenber 1999).

In order to further articulate the Protest Paradigm, it will be useful to report the results of a study by Boyle *et al.* (2004) on the influence of level of deviance and protest type on media coverage of social protest. This work is important because the authors

address the question of why print media can frame a certain protest in more positive (or negative) light than another one. The findings confirm previous studies (e.g. McLeod and Hertog 1998) in indicating that press coverage of reform and radical protests are framed more critically than protests that support the status quo. Boyle *et al.* found that the frames were different for a number of reasons. In particular, protests that sought moderate reform and radical change, i.e. protest groups seeking to change the status quo, “were more likely to be framed episodically, and were less likely to use protesters as sources than coverage of protests that support the status quo” (Boyle *et al.* 2004: 56). The results of the study show that, in stories about protests seeking change, protesters were used as sources in only half of the articles, whereas in stories about groups supporting the status quo three-quarters of the articles used protesters as sources (Boyle *et al.* 2004). According to the findings of one more study (Boyle *et al.* 2012: 142), protests “are more likely to be treated critically by news media when their approach to reaching their goals is seen as more extreme.” That is, the more violent a protest is, the more it is likely to be portrayed in negative terms - and vice versa.

If a wide amount of literature agrees that mainstream media tend to be biased in reporting protest events and sociopolitical dissent, and especially against protest groups seeking to change the status quo, the next logical question is why it is that. To answer the question it is possible to employ the concept of frame (e.g. Gitlin 1980; Entman 1993). As stated in the first chapter of this work, in media studies, framing is the process by which social actors, and especially news organization and the individuals and groups who control them, define and constructs issues. Frames organize discourse, including media stories, by subjective patterns of selection, emphasis and exclusion. By framing political issues, social actors define what is to be included in the story and what is to be excluded, what is relevant and what is not relevant to the issue. In Entman’s (1993: 52) words, frames “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text.” In other words, news frames organize discourse by subjective patterns of selection, emphasis and exclusion. More specifically, news frames refer to the way journalists wrap up events and issues into a story. The importance of this concept rests on the fact that, by framing political issues, social actors define what is to be included in the story and what is to be excluded, what is relevant and what is not relevant to the issue. Social actors possess different levels of framing ability, depending on multiple complex factors, including economic and

cultural resources. Obviously, journalistic frames are influenced by the frames of influential social actors, including economic, political and cultural elites. As a result, framing theories assume that the process of framing tends to favor political and economic elites (Ryan et al. 2001). Due to the fact that journalistic values and practices play a part in influencing public opinion (Iyengar, 1991; Price & Tewksbury, 1997), framing theories tend to be complementary to the above mentioned Protest Paradigm and Propaganda Model in concluding that, in the real world, mainstream mass media tend to be more like ‘guard dogs’ (of the system and the elites) than the traditional ‘watchdog’ (Donohue et al. 1985).

One particularly authoritative study which gives answers to the question of why media tend to be biased in reporting protest and dissent is Chomsky and Herman’s *Manufacturing consent: the political economy of the mass media* (1988). Focusing on the political economy of the media, the authors argue that the elites’ money and power are able to filter the news, marginalize dissent, and propagandize the elites’ core messages (which correspond to the ideological or hegemonic discourse). More exactly, Chomsky and Herman individuate five filters: Ownership, Advertising, Sourcing, Flak and Ideology (hegemonic discourse and fear).²

The first filter, Ownership, is due to the fact that mainstream media outlets are large profit-oriented corporations or multimedia conglomerates. As such, information is biased with respect to their interests. The second filter, Advertising, is due to the fact that advertising is the primary income source for media. Consequently, the real product to be sold is not the news. On the contrary, the people buying the newspaper are the real ‘product,’ which the media corporation ‘sells’ to the businesses that buy advertising space. Thus, the real buyer, i.e. the advertisers, should not be displeased. The third filter, Sourcing, is due to the fact that media rely for news on corporate and government bodies as central “news terminals,” trusted quantitative and qualitative sources of stories considered newsworthy. In poor words, even the most affluent global news agencies such as BBC or CNN do not obviously have reporters in every single place on earth, ergo they tend to concentrate their presence by the central news terminals which produce daily newsworthy news, be it a Government House, a Parliament, a Stock

² In the first edition, the authors identified the fifth filter with Anti-Communism, which in the post-1989 editions was substituted with Ideology.

Exchange or the headquarter of a certain political party or corporation. Editors and journalists who challenge or offend such central news terminals risk the denial of access in favor of their competitors. Thus, the media tend to become reluctant to run articles that harm the interests of the news terminals. The fourth filter, the Flak, is due to the fact that cultural, economic and/or political elites have the ability to discredit the media or individuals who doubt or disagree with the prevailing assumptions. In this way the elites discipline media and enforce their message. The fifth filter, Ideology (hegemonic discourse and fear), is understandable with the fact that what appears in the media - and especially what does not appear - is filtered not necessarily by laws or in a prescribed way, but more often as a result of a sort of tacit consensus which usually acts to “reinforce conventional opinions and established authority” (Curran and Seaton 1997: 277). In other words, “mass media’s ideological message is hidden behind a shroud of ‘common sense’” (Peterson 2001: 148). Because of these five filters, news media are far from being objective and politically neutral, as they often claim, but they rather end up being mediums for the transmission of values to serve the commercial objectives of the owners and sponsors, as well as the political objectives of the elite.

To problematize the subject, we have to consider the new issues emerged after the classic studies reviewed above. According to Catalan sociologist Manuel Castells (2007), in the last decades the importance of media grew so much that nowadays the media are the main social space where power is decided. The main reason behind this development has been individuated in the development of new technologies. The massive technologic advancements and the process usually labeled as ‘globalization’ had more than an effect on life, economics, politics and communication. For what concerns the media, globalization coincided with the acceleration of a process of media globalization and concentration, which resulted in the emerging of an oligopolistic business multimedia system characterized by global media business conglomerates (Castells [1996] 1998, 2000, 2006, 2007, 2009). Due to such epochal developments, it is also possible to argue that, at the level of the mainstream media, Chomsky and Herman’s Propaganda Model is even more relevant now than when it was originally conceived. The triumph of the market on a global scale and the development of global multimedia conglomerations may well be presented as evidences to suggest that a model designed to explain the North American media behavior and flaws is today globally relevant (Pedro 2011).

It would be wrong to assume, anyway, that the above described developments in the media equal to a full-scale victory of the power-holders. On the contrary, there is another development parallel and somehow opposite to the process of concentration of the media in fewer hands. This development is the increasing digitization of communication, which makes communication interactive, less centralized, inclusive of every message sent in society, integrating all sources of communication into the same hypertext. Last but not least, digitization of communication made possible an ongoing explosion of “self-mass communication”: the horizontal communication which goes through the internet and wireless networks (Castells [1996] 1998, 2000, 2006, 2007, 2009).

In spite of the process of concentration in the global communication system, digital communication adds increasing risks and a dose of uncertainty for the power-holders and brings a note of hope for subversive social actors, who are able to intervene more decisively in the new communication space, and therefore to challenge more effectively the power-holders. Accordingly, Castells ([1996] 1998, 2000, 2006, 2007, 2009) sees a direct link between media developments and the crisis of political legitimacy in a global perspective. To some extent, Castells’ theorization seems to have anticipated the so-called 2011 Facebook- and Twitter- Revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa.

Concluding, the abundant literature on the relation between political protest/dissent and the media reached similar conclusions. The consequences of media's filtering and fixation on violence is that media tend to reduce the chance of any meaningful dialogue or debate between the protesters and their official opponents, i.e. the targets of their protests. Media also tend to overlook and/or normalize state/government/police violence against protesters by depicting state/government/police violence as self-defense or as ‘necessary’ to reestablish order – in both cases, as a legitimate form of violence which contrasts with the illegitimate violence of protesters. Finally, media indirectly encourage protesters’ violence, because the more conflictual or violent event tends to obtain the most media coverage.

CHAPTER IV

THAILAND: NATION, STATE AND CULTURE

...the basis of every system of authority, and correspondingly of every kind of willingness to obey, is a belief, a belief by virtue of which persons exercising authority are lent prestige.

– Max Weber. The Theory of Social and Economic Organization. Talcott Parsons (ed.), New York: Free Press, 1964: 382

In order to better understand the problematic, ambiguous and multi-level interactions between media and political protest in Thailand and in order to support our theoretical framework with empirical data, in the next chapter we will analyze a specific case study: the BP and TN media coverage of the March to May 2010 Thai political crisis. Yet this work cannot be carried out without first locating the two media organizations within their cultural environment. This is because, as assessed in the previous chapter, communication is a form of social practice and a means of social construction which both shapes and is shaped by society. More specifically, the media production of contents is influenced by a range of factors, including the culture and the power relations of the time and place, while at the same time it influences human reality in a number of ways. Consequently, to understand the media-politics interplay of the 2010 Thai political crisis, and more specifically the BP and TN news frame of the protest, we will need first to place the event in its historical, socio-political and cultural context.

In contemporary societies, the media form part of the ideological discourse encouraging people to consent to status quo power structures or to contest them. This means that media can act as supporters of the status quo (agents of stability), neutral ‘checking and balancing’ monitors (agents of restraints), or as fully effective forces for political change (agents of change).

Power-holders use communication to entrench their power. Thailand is no exception to this rule, and consequently we shall understand how Thai power-holders historically used the media. In particular, we will focus our attention on the discourse used to legitimize the Thai state. The Thai state draws its legitimation from the official discourse of Thainess. Thainess (in Thai language: *khwampenthai*) is the belief that the values of Nation, Religion and Monarchy provide an indispensable ontological and epistemological underpinning for the country. This is a ‘soft power’ discourse which articulates supposed traditional values on the part of those who frame the discourse, i.e. Thailand’s political and intellectual elites. It is thus an artifact of the ruling classes aimed at securing and preserving their own interests by influencing citizens’ perception of history, moral, social conflicts and daily life. Thainess is therefore a pivotal instrument of rule, a state’s defensive shield that comes before coercion and it is more effective than violence itself (Anderson 1977, 1978; Thongchai 1994, 2000; Saichol 2000; Connors 2006; Pavin 2011).

But what is the significance and what are the practical implications of the discourse of Thainess? How do (more) powerful groups control public discourse? If this is done also or especially through the media, then what is the role of Thai media in incensing or challenging this discourse? How does such discourse control mind and action of (less) powerful groups, and what are the social consequences of such control? Who, indeed, controls media discourse itself? Which groups have (more or less) access to the media, and what are the consequences of such access for the discourse of Thainess? How do subaltern groups discursively resist or challenge such power, if they do it at all?

Conceptualized within Critical Theory and Cultural studies, and drawing heavily from critical discourse analysis, this work attempts to answer the questions above by examining the discursive structure of Thainess, the role the mass media play in mediating its meanings, and whether or not – and, in case, how - the media used Thainess to represent a particular event: the 2010 March to May Red Shirts protest in Bangkok.

Being Thainess not only an ideology but more specifically a ‘nationalist’ ideology, to answer our questions it is necessary first to take a step back and clarify also our definition of ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’.

4.1 Nation and Nationalism

With *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson has most notably examined the origin and spread of nationalism and ideas of “nation-ness.” Anderson (1983: 9) describes the nation as an “imagined political community”, arguing that nationalism was spontaneously created through the convergence of historical and economic forces at the end of the eighteenth century, and then transplanted across the globe because individuals became able to imagine themselves as cells of a world community defined by nationalities.

The power of national identity, seen by Liberal historians such as Hugh Seton-Watson as an anomaly without scientific definition and by Marxist historians like Tom Nairn as “Marxism’s great historical failure”, was instead identified by Anderson as a significant cultural construction worthy of study, a specific force in human society. In other words, Anderson treated nationalism as a part of the human experience, like religion, not as a social pathology or ideology, as instead did several Marxist and Liberal political theorists.

At the base of the genesis of nationalism, Anderson (1983: 9-36) argues, there was the rise of “print capitalism”, i.e. innovations such as newspapers and novels which addressed new “national” communities in “national” languages. In other words, Anderson moves from a Marxist economic determinist framework, arguing that the invention of nations was triggered by a local bourgeoisie which accumulated enough capital to launch print-capitalism, which needed and therefore created a “national” market for printed materials. It was print-capitalism, book-publishing, and the development of (vernacular) national languages that provided the tools individuals needed to imagine they were part of a community of similar human beings much larger than their family or village, even though they might never meet with the other fellow countrymen.

Although nation-ness had such historical and economic origin, nationalists argue that nation became a permanent feature, a sort of a-historical political reality. This is the same as saying that nationalism, even though was economically determined, once it

came into existence it suddenly became such a pivotal characteristic of human experience that citizens' solidarities with a specific economic class or other sorts of sectors of humanity are only secondary. Basically, this is the same as saying that the nation is the final stage of modernity.

Indian scholar Partha Chatterjee (1986) explains nationalism by moving from Marxist economic bases. He convincingly demonstrates how in liberal-rationalist thought nationalism is a paradox, because, as a matter of fact, while it is portrayed as an attempt to actualize in political terms the universal urge for liberty and progress, it can also give rise to mindless chauvinism and xenophobia and serve as a justification of organized violence and brutal tyranny. Liberal-rationalist's attempts of creating a dichotomy between a 'normal' type of nationalism and a 'special' one are merely attempts of saving "the purity of their paradigm by designating as deviant all cases which do not fit the classical form" (Chatterjee 1986: 3). Chatterjee accepts many Andersonian's points, pointing out to how Anderson describes "see[s] in third-world nationalisms a profoundly 'modular' character... invariably shaped according to contours outlined by given historical models" (Chatterjee 1986: 21).

This is Chatterjee's main point, that 'oriental nationalism' is a derivative discourse. Therefore, as already assessed by John Plamenatz, Chatterjee recognizes the contradiction of nationalism outside its European cradle, for "nationalism sets out to assert its freedom from colonial domination" but "remains prisoner of the prevalent European intellectual fashions" (Chatterjee 1986: 10).

4.2 Thainess: the hegemonic discourse behind the "imagined community"

Moving from similar bases, in analyzing the development of nationhood in Thailand, Thongchai Winichakul (1994: x) considers "a nation... as a cultural construct of a particular historical context." Therefore, also for the case of the Kingdom of Siam, Thongchai argues that "nationhood has been arbitrarily and artificially created... through various moments of confrontation and displacement of discourses" (Thongchai

1994: x). This means that, despite what many Thais and non-Thais believe, Thai national culture is a relatively modern creation. Although it has roots in pre-modern Siam with its various Animist elements, Hindu-Buddhist cosmological notions and Theravada Buddhist religious tradition, Thai national culture was “Formulated only in the later part of the Nineteenth Century, in the wake of efforts to create a modern nation state” (Keyes 1989: 4). This formulation, construction and shaping of an official national culture was undertaken while Siam was “impacted by external political and economic forces... [and] as the Thai economy was increasingly tied to the world economic system” (Keyes 1989: 4). Constructing a ‘tradition,’ a ‘national culture’ and a ‘national identity’ is a common trait of nation-building all over the world. Numerous traditions which common people believe as very ancient in their origins were in fact invented comparatively recently, as has been assessed most notably by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983). In the Siam, too, since the second half of the nineteenth century the Bangkok-based elite convinced itself that their Kingdom needed a ‘traditional’ and ‘national culture’ and therefore they embarked in constructing it.

Thainess was chosen by the elite to be the central concept in official Thai nationalism. Thainess is generally declined in the holy-like trinity of Nation, Religion and Monarchy, i.e. the Thai nation, Thai Buddhism and the Chakri Dynasty. The three aspects of Thainess are interrelated and they are meant to sustain each other. The concept of Thainess upholds the Thai nation as unique, and celebrates the great kings who nurtured the purity of Theravada Buddhism, successfully resisted Western imperialism and selectively accepted into the country only good foreign elements, thus preserving supposedly traditional values somewhat intact. Although such assumptions are academically problematic in a multitude of levels, this discourse came to be widely accepted in the Kingdom at both the top and the bottom level, among ruling elites, academic circles and within the general public.

In other words, the very concepts of "Thailand" (much like, say, "India" or "Burma") and “Thainess” (much like other official nationalist discourses) were socially constructed from the top down in the late 19th and 20th century in order to strengthen the continuous rule of a hegemonic bloc over the wider population. In addition, compared to other post-colonial examples, the ideas of "Thailand" and "Thainess" haven't really been challenged by foreign scholarship, or at least they hadn't for a long time. In fact, in

the past even foreign scholars came to accept and thus supported the local elite's concepts of "harmony", Thainess, exceptionalism, national unity and peaceful co-existence as the natural state of Siamese/Thai society. As Thongchai (1994:) puts it:

"...the fact that there was no struggle between colonial and anticolonial scholarship in Thai studies has sometimes led to uncritical intellectual cooperation by pro-indigenous Western scholars who have tended to accept the established views of the Siamese elite as the legitimate discourse about Thailand. If the intellectual enterprise is constituted by power relations as Said suggests, in this context being indigenous becomes a privilege."

Thongchai likens the official and hegemonic discourse of Thainess to the Orientalist discourse: as Orientalism is defined as "the Other of Western civilization", so the Thai intellectuals who created the discourse of Thainess used "scientific method and academic format... within the paradigmatic discourse of We-self" (Thongchai 1994: 7-8). This creates a hegemony of "viewpoints, sentiments, and values as well as constraints, taboos, alibis, and plausibility" over subaltern interpretations of Thainess (ibid: 8-9). In other words, it creates a hegemonic discourse which as such it is hard to counter.

Thongchai's definition of Thainess works well in a Gramscian theoretical framework (Gramsci 1971). In such framework, Thainess, as Thailand's hegemonic discourse, constitutes the pivotal ideological resource of Bangkok's ruling elite. The hegemonic classes constructed a historical narrative which reduced the role of common people and legitimized oppression and social inequalities, mainly by justifying them on the basis of a religious karmic order or denying at all their very existence. Official Thainess sees as natural a sort of religiously hierarchical structure where, to put it plainly, "big men" rule and "small men" obey in a supposedly peaceful and harmonic order. This mainstream narrative was and is contradicted by a reality of ancient oppression and ongoing conflict (Ferrara 2011), as well as by the ten coup d'états since 1971 – the highest rate in the planet – the decade-long insurgency in the Deep South, the several bloody events which occurred from 1973 to 2010 and, finally, the rude statistics which rank Thailand ninth in the world for number of homicides per year, fourteenth for murders per capita and sadly first for murders committed by firearms (Sopranzetti 2012: 119).

It should be clear by now that the official concept of Thainess is an elitist cultural artifact, not a natural or divine feature that has always existed and will always

do. The elites – the Palace, the military and the bureaucracy - have produced and propagated such ideology to advance their own objectives, which for most modern Thai history have been transforming desirable (by the elites) behaviors into ‘national character/identity’ and “creating productive citizens who identify with the state and its modernizing projects” (Connors 2006: 524). Thai elites have subordinated less powerful classes to their own worldview and therefore their rule through state agencies, education, religious institutions, mainstream intellectuals, the advertizing industry, and mass media (Reynolds 2002; Hamilton 2002; Connors 2005). As explained by Ferrara (2010), there is nothing “Thai” in all this, yet this remains the mainstream, dominant, hegemonic message.¹

Anyway, despite the slightly Orwellian power of the hegemonic discourse of Thainess, which Ferrara denounces most notably in *Thailand Unhinged* (2011), it is also true that civil society is not a monolith, it contains spaces where hegemonic arrangements can be contested and renegotiated. Consequently, subaltern classes which seek to tear down or modify the status quo can play on the same field – culture – and strife to conquest cultural hegemony (Gramsci 1971).

Thainess is “supposed to have existed for a long time, and all Thai are supposed to be well aware of its virtue” (Thongchai 1994: X). Despite such assumption, a clear definition of Thainess is highly problematic. In fact, Thongchai argues that what is ‘Thai’ and what is ‘Thainess’ has never clearly been defined. On the other hand, what is not Thai, i.e. what is ‘un-Thai,’ is often identified. Thus, Thongchai (1994) argues that in reality the discourse of Thainess cannot stand by itself. As it happens for other

¹ “It is perhaps natural that Thailand's real power holders and their vile propagandists in the local press would want to cloak their “dictatorship of the big men” in the benign, legitimizing language of culture and democratic development. Culture, after all, is now the first refuge of dictators. But it is important to recognize that “Thai-style democracy” does not amount to anything more glamorous or exotic than your average European-style dictatorship. Notwithstanding the lip service frequently paid to the customs, practices, values, norms, and beliefs that cumulated over centuries of Thai political development, there is nothing “Thai” about lining up dissidents against the wall of a Buddhist temple and mowing them down with machine guns. There is nothing “Thai” about the shameless hypocrisy required to praise a military dictator who stole billions and murdered hundreds, with the blessing of the country's highest authorities, and in the same breath adduce “corruption” and “human rights violations” as justification for staging military coups against elected leaders guilty of a fraction of those offenses. There is nothing “Thai” about turning religion into an instrument of political legitimacy. There is nothing “Thai” about cults of personality. There is nothing “Thai” about the enlistment of mass media and schools in the dissemination of propaganda. And there is nothing “Thai” about repressing the poor to benefit the rich. These are not the hallmarks of culture, Thai or otherwise. These are rather the attributes of authoritarianism - the main features of which were pioneered, for the most part, by generations of Western dictators.” (Ferrara 2010: 19).

nationalist discourses, also the concept of Thainess needs a “negative definition”, a real or imagined enemy, i.e. a contrasting reference:

“The existence of otherness, un-Thainess, is as necessary as the positive definition of Thainess. Perhaps we can say that the former is indispensable to the latter” (Thongchai 1994: 6).

For such task, the ideologues of Thainess picked up a range of ‘traditional’ enemies (i.e. the Burmese, Khmer and Vietnamese neighbors), internal ethnic minorities (most notably the Chinese), and the ill-defined categories of *farang* and *khaek*.² Moreover, as the socio-political circumstances change with the time, so the “other” kept being redefined through history, and thus the face of the ‘enemy’ kept mutating. The ‘us-them’ dichotomy which characterizes Thainess is rather typical for an ideology. Ideologies provide fulcra into which different people can be incorporated (Hall 1977: 331) by favoring an imagined “group coherence” and “belongingness” (Hall 1977: 340). In this contest, ‘otherness’ is a bonding mechanism. Therefore, to put it in the simplest way, Thongchai (1994) is correct when he argues that un-Thainess is necessary to Thainess. Historically, in Thailand this has often led to a simplistic binary division between Thainess and un-Thainess; which in conclusion is a division between what is desirable and what is not, what is supposed to be good and what is labeled as bad:

“Analytically, the pattern of shaping Thai politics on the basis of binary opposition between ethical force and evil “otherness” has been unaltered throughout Thailand’s modern history” (Pavin 2011: 17).

As an example, Rama VI, a monarch particularly preoccupied by the Republican ideas circulating especially among the Chinese minority, identified the Monarchy as the most important element of Thainess, thus discursively excommunicating from the (imagined) ‘Thai’ community all those social actors which held Republican sympathies (Thongchai 1994: 4). This should make clear, one more time, that the functions of Thainess are to (re)produce the elites’ ideology, to bond the people into it, and to eradicate cultural and political opposition. Therefore, Thainess is a powerful weapon which works to maintain the power and interests of the power-holders.

As seen in the previous chapter, in 1976 Thainess was used once again by the traditional bloc as the cultural justification for the 6 October TU massacre and following

² “Farang” is roughly used as the English for “Westerner,” while “khaek” defines South Asians, Arabs, Middle Easterners and Muslims alike.

coup d'état. Media were instrumental in othering the students as 'un-Thai' and mounting the climate of fear which triggered the repression. Once again, after the bloody military crackdown on the May 1992 Bangkok popular protest, an incident known as the 1992 Black May, Thai politics was simplistically divided into two camps: good *deva* (angels) versus bad *mara* (devils). Also in this case, media were instrumental in such simplification. A decade later, in occasion of the 2005 national elections, the same simplistic binary opposition was proposed again, with mainstream media leading the anti-Thaksin campaign. As stated by Pavin (2011: 17), in 2005-2006 "the *deva* versus *mara* theme has proven again to be useful to the traditional elite."

The recurrent *deva/mara* simplification of Thai politics is made possible by the malleability of both Thainess and its necessary opposite of un-Thainess or Otherness. Thainess is a powerful discourse in the hands of those who control it. Consequently, in an obviously changing economic, social and political landscape, the shapers of the hegemonic discourse detain a weapon that can be used against their economic, social and political opponents. Together with their wealth and their weapons, this cultural tool has ensured the continued dominance of the traditional Thai elites throughout decades of impressive changes. As stated by Pavin (2011: 17),

"The traditional leaders have maintained their role as upholders of moral authority in Thai politics; this has given them the right to define the "otherness"/enemies based on their own judgments, which are often politically motivated. These leaders have long sat at the apex of the Thai political hierarchy, dominating all aspects of political life and stage-managing civilian governments over the years. They have been behind the strengthening of the holy nation-Buddhism-monarchy trinity because they recognized how the effort could benefit their political interests. In this process, old elites have unremittingly re-glorified the role of the king as the inviolable epitome of the Thai nation. The king is the foundation of the nation."

This is a recurrent historical motif in Thailand, as much as some argued that the 'vicious circle' of Thai politics is the sequence which starts with a coup and then goes through a constitution, elections, a phase of crisis and finally back to a new coup (Chai-anan 1982: 11). According to this well known motif, in 2006, once again, the army staged a coup d'état under the ideological mantel of the supposed defense of the Nation, the Religion and the Monarchy. With the coup, the military and the traditional elite did nothing else than enjoying the fruits of their own cultural construct: they removed a democratically elected prime minister which they considered dangerous for the continuation of their power, legitimizing their action by using the hegemonic discourse

of Thainess which they themselves had created through the previous decades. As argued most notably by Reynolds (2002: 24-25),

“The Thai military has been assiduous, aggressive even, in promoting Thai national culture and national identity and in the process has enshrouded itself with the trappings of authenticity and legitimacy.”

The 2006 coup d’etat is hardly imaginable without the cultural work of the previous years, when prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra was portrayed as the quintessential *mara*, the personification of ‘un-Thainess,’ the chief betrayer of the holy-like trinity of Nation, Religion and Monarchy. First, Thaksin was portrayed as the one who supposedly ‘sold the Nation’ (*chai chat*) by allowing foreigners from Singapore to buy his telecommunication company, which had a dominant position in the Kingdom. Secondly, Thaksin, according to the accusers, was a corrupt politician, and such an unethical behavior was disrespectful towards the Religion. Third, last but not least, Thaksin was portrayed as a threat to the Monarchy, as he allegedly attempted, at least according to his harsher critics, to destabilize or even get rid of the monarchical institution (Pavin 2011).

Although the three core components of Thainess can be considered equally holy-like, yet it can be argued that since the Sarit regime one particular component has been elevated as a symbol of the whole ideology of Thainess: the Monarchy. Pavin (2011: 15) suggested the following reason:

“The royal institution has in fact become a fitting tool for the traditional elite: it is used to alienate opponents by accusing them of seeking to undermine the monarchy and replace it with a system they deem “un-Thai” and incongruent with the Thai way of life.”

A presupposition like the above image of a ‘Thai way of life’ serves to build the basis for what sounds like a logical argument – there is such thing as a ‘Thai way of life’ and thus something or somebody we can imagine that something or somebody can threaten it. But, in fact, since such presupposition has never been clearly defined, then also the accuse is rather general and unsubstantial. Yet, the argument sounds logical enough to attack political opponents. According to Pavin (2011: 20), one main objective of making “otherness” is the concealment of political reality:

“Although the process of making “otherness” can be ambiguous and immensely manipulative, the objective of this exercise is clear. Thaksin might not be an idol of democracy because of his despotic behavior in the past. But he has certainly challenged the traditional political order, reconfiguring the political domain with an aim to reduce the

degree of power domination in the hands of the old elite. By widening the political space, Thaksin diminished the power of the traditional leaders. Therefore, they have viewed him as a threat to their power position. Making Thaksin the enemy of the state is a devious, yet practical, solution that might protect the elite's political interests."

Thaksin was not a flawless politician, but this was not the point. The point was that he threatened the power of the old political elite, which McCargo (2010) refers to as "Network Monarchy", and thus such dominant bloc used the powerful discourse of Thainess, which they control, to construct Thaksin as the national enemy. Once Thaksin was elevated as the enemy of Thainess – i.e. as the enemy of the Nation, the Religion and the Monarchy – then the September 19, 2006 military coup that ousted him out was discursively legitimized. Portraying themselves as the knights of Thainess, the generals staged a coup ordering to the soldiers to wear yellow monarchist banners, then they organized a military junta which called itself "Council for Democratic Reform under the Constitutional Monarchy", dissolved Parliament and Constitutional Court, arrested Cabinet members, wiped out the 1997 People's Constitution, banned protests and political activities, and silenced the media. Despite the obvious illegality of the military intervention, to criticize the coup was to criticize the junta, and this was discursively complicate, as one may have been accused of 'un-Thainess' or even to be criticizing the Monarchy, which in Thailand can be equaled to a blasphemy and it is punished with one of the stricter *lèse-majesté* laws in the planet (Streckfuss 2011).

Unfortunately, the coup did not solve any of the supposed problems of the country, as political polarization deepened, corruption did not cease, the deep South insurgency continued and the economic inequalities persisted. Moreover, "[t]he aggressive defense of traditional elite power interests has had a devastating impact on the overall Thai democratic system" (Pavin 2011: 20). Although ousted, Thaksin did not disappear from the Thai political scene, and neither did the sixteen million Thais who voted for him in 2006. On the other side of the political spectrum, too, Thaksin was all but forgotten. Yellow Shirts' PAD (People Alliance for Democracy), a Falangist political movement (Taylor 2012), based a good part of the rhetoric behind its political activism on the fight against the supposedly evilest Thai politician – Thaksin – and recurrently saw him as a sort of master of puppets behind the other side's political moves.

Forgetting for a moment the figure of Thaksin Shinawatra, it is useful to stress one more time the central point of “un-Thainess” or “otherness.” Although since the mid-2000s Thaksin was elevated as the supreme un-Thai villain, the discursive production of un-Thainess is needed by Thainess itself. Thailand’s hegemonic blocs, the shapers and controllers of the ideology of Thainess, have always produced “others,” as Thainess cannot sustain itself without its negative counterpart. A dire result of such ‘enemy-making’ motif is that, as argued by Pavin (2011: 22):

“Under the discursive definition of “otherness,” it appears that anyone can be made a national enemy of Thailand to serve political purposes. Therefore, enemy making is a dangerous affair. It has the potential to deepen differences in society and to drive Thailand into conflict with its neighbors. Worse, it questions the essence of Thainess and what constitutes the Thai nation.”

Nationalist discourses are supposed to be cherished for their function of fostering national unity for the common good. Anyway, as seen above, Thainess cannot abstain from generating divisiveness - be it within the nation or against some external enemy. Moreover, those social actors accused of being outside Thainess tend to fight the cultural battle by using the same discourse and counter-accusing the accusers of the same charge:

“Recently, those branded as un-Thai have stood up to defend their political positions while counter-arguing that the elite, in fact, were the “other” of the Thai nation. Already, Thaksin and the redshirted forces have accused the traditional elite of being enemies of the state. They have argued that while these elite were strict defenders of the holy trinity of formal institutions, they have been ferociously hostile to democracy.” (Pavin 2011: 22)

This casts a shadow over Thailand’s mainstream discourse and makes one wonder if it is not Thainess itself, rather than its supposed enemies, one of Thailand’s main obstacles on the path towards democratization.

CHAPTER V

MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE 2010 BANGKOK PROTEST: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

This section presents the results of the quantitative analysis. As discussed in section 1.6, the hypotheses of this study have been tested by using a set of forty purposively selected newspaper articles (see table D). As explained in section 1.6, the code sheets to analyze the sample unites were previously elaborated by Halloran et al. (1970). The code sheets are presented below in table B and C.

Table B. Code sheet. Words used to describe the event and the participants. ¹	
NOUNS	DESCRIPTION
1. Neutral	March(er), rally.
2. Neutral	Demonstration/demonstrator.
3. Neutral	Protest(er), parade, procession, meeting, participant, people, crowd, group, <i>gathering, movement, men.</i>
4. Specific descriptions	Militant, activist/ <i>activism, red, red shirt, red shirt protester, UDD, supporter.</i>
5. Unfavorable	Confrontation, attack, riot, battle, offensive, revolution, mob, horde, rabble, hooligan, thug, extremist, <i>hard-liner, enemy, peril, fight(er), war(rior), threat, fear, selfishness, greed, insensibility, anger, hate/hatred, violence, rampage, rebellion, bloodshed, mayhem, anarchy, tragedy, terrorism/terrorist, etc.</i>
ADJECTIVES	
1. Favorable	Good, great, impressive, peaceful, cool, sincere, well-disciplined, good humored,

¹ This code sheet has been elaborated by Halloran et al. (1970: 95). The words we added figure in italics.

	<i>friendly, calm, non-violent.</i>
2. Neutral	Numbers specified. Big, long, <i>anti-government, pro-Thaksin.</i>
3. Unfavorable	Confused, disorderly, incompetent, dangerous, futile, immature, fanatical, deadly, <i>ill-intentioned, angry, cocky, mean, arrogant, selfish, defiant, worrisome, violent, destructive, tragic, brutal, disgusting, horrible, bad/worse/worst, etc.</i>

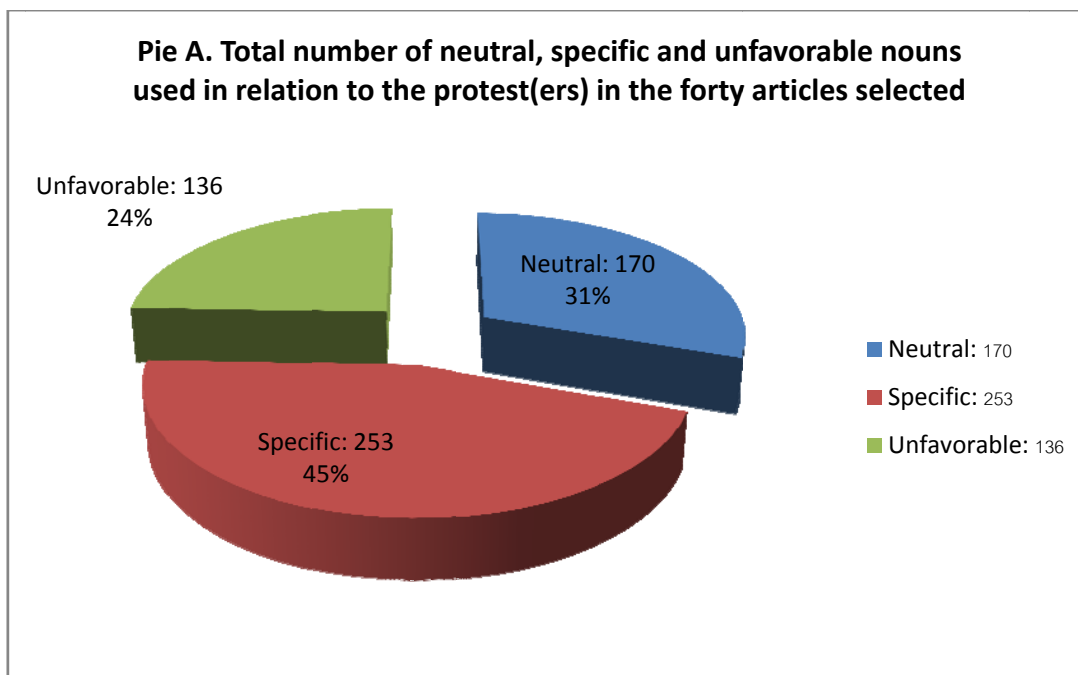
Table C. Code sheet. Words describing the establishment (Government and Army). ²	
CODES	DESCRIPTION
1. Favorable	Restrained, disciplined, cool, patient, confident, <i>forced.</i>
2. Favorable	Wonderful, finest, exemplary, great skills, <i>friendly, tolerance/tolerant, professional, serious, mature, right, justified/justifiable.</i>
3. Unfavorable	Loose control, brutal, <i>violent, angry, unprofessional, wrong, bad/worse/worst, unjustified/unjustifiable.</i>

Table D. The forty articles selected. The six columns show: unit number, headline, type of article, newspaper, date of publishing, phase.					
Unit Number	Headline	Type of article	Newspaper	Date	Phase
1	Red threat spurs huge security op	News	BP	March 6	1
2	PM warns of sabotage attacks at reds rally	News	BP	March 7	1
3	Don't be fooled, PM warns	News	TN	March 6	1
4	Chaos as govt braces for rallies this week	News	TN	March 7	1

² In Halloran et al. (1970: 96), instead of Army and Government, the authors used this code sheet for the Police.

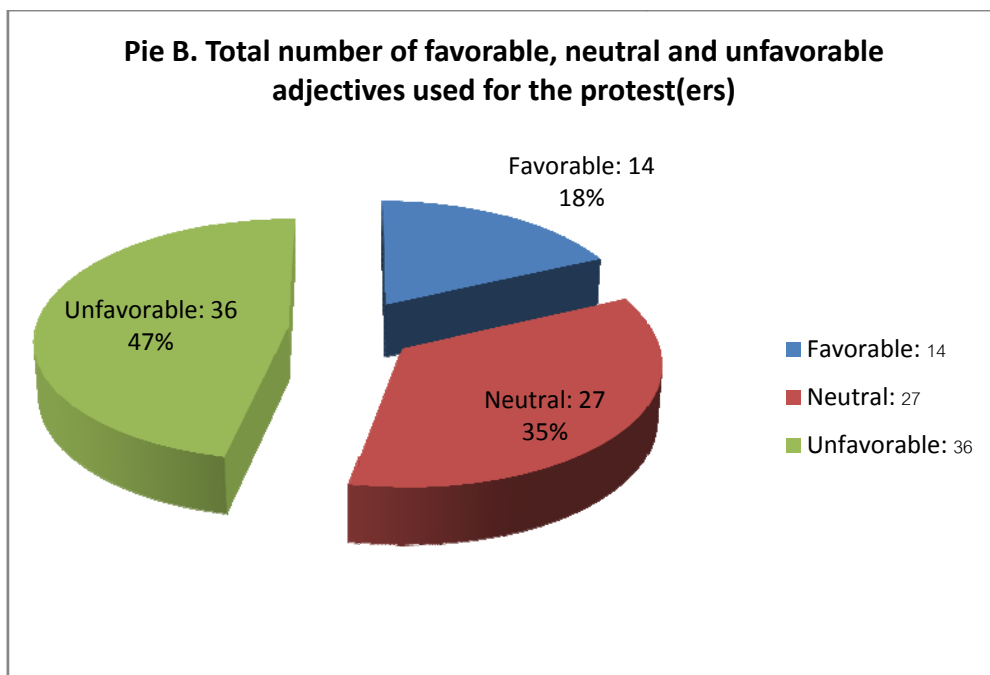
5	We wait with bated breath	Editorial	BP	March 11	1
6	A nation cursed to live in constant state of anxiety	Editorial	TN	March 7	1
7	Govt beef up security	Other	BP	March 11	1
8	The Reds' siege of Bangkok and its consequences	Other	BP	March 12	1
9	Will Thaksin be saved?	Other	TN	March 12	1
10	Thaksin's last hope	Other	TN	March 13	1
11	UDD sets noon deadline	News	BP	March 15	2
12	Rally ebbs fear rise	News	BP	March 17	2
13	True blood?	News	TN	March 16	2
14	'Stay in, Bangkokians'	News	TN	March 20	2
15	Too much talk about talking	Editorial	BP	March 21	2
16	For the benefit of bloody fools only	Editorial	TN	March 19	2
17	Non-violent protest with bloody twist, seen fizzling out	Other	BP	March 18	2
18	What's next, after UDD's non-violent blood-letting?	Other	BP	March 19	2
19	Army speakers win the day	Other	TN	March 16	2
20	Bloody politics: Government venues have been smeared with blood, but it may be Thaksin who has to do a major clean-up	Other	TN	March 17	2
21	Govt weighs early dissolution	News	BP	April 12	3
22	Red shirts reject latest offer for a dissolution	News	BP	April 13	3
23	Their Majesties to Pay Medical Bills	News	TN	April 14	3

24	'Strategic move' by reds	News	TN	April 15	3
25	Censorship is doomed to fail from the start	Editorial	BP	April 11	3
26	These bloody clashes must cease immediately	Editorial	TN	April 11	3
27	Battle for Bangkok	Other	BP	April 11	3
28	Palette of political anarchy has only one colour	Other	BP	April 13	3
29	Our darkest hour	Other	TN	April 11	3
30	Democracy can't die	Other	TN	April 12	3
31	Bangkok in shambles	News	BP	May 20	4
32	A nation mourns	News	BP	May 21	4
33	Peace hopes fading	News	TN	May 19	4
34	Time to rebuild	News	TN	May 21	4
35	Law and order must prevail	Editorial	BP	May 20	4
36	There is no peasant's revolt	Editorial	TN	May 20	4
37	The radicalisation of politics by red shirts	Other	BP	May 21	4
38	Dealing with 'the devil', the reds and looking within	Other	BP	May 27	4
39	Amid discord, let us rediscover note of harmony	Other	TN	May 21	4
40	We have suffered as the US has, but we look worse	Other	TN	May 25	4

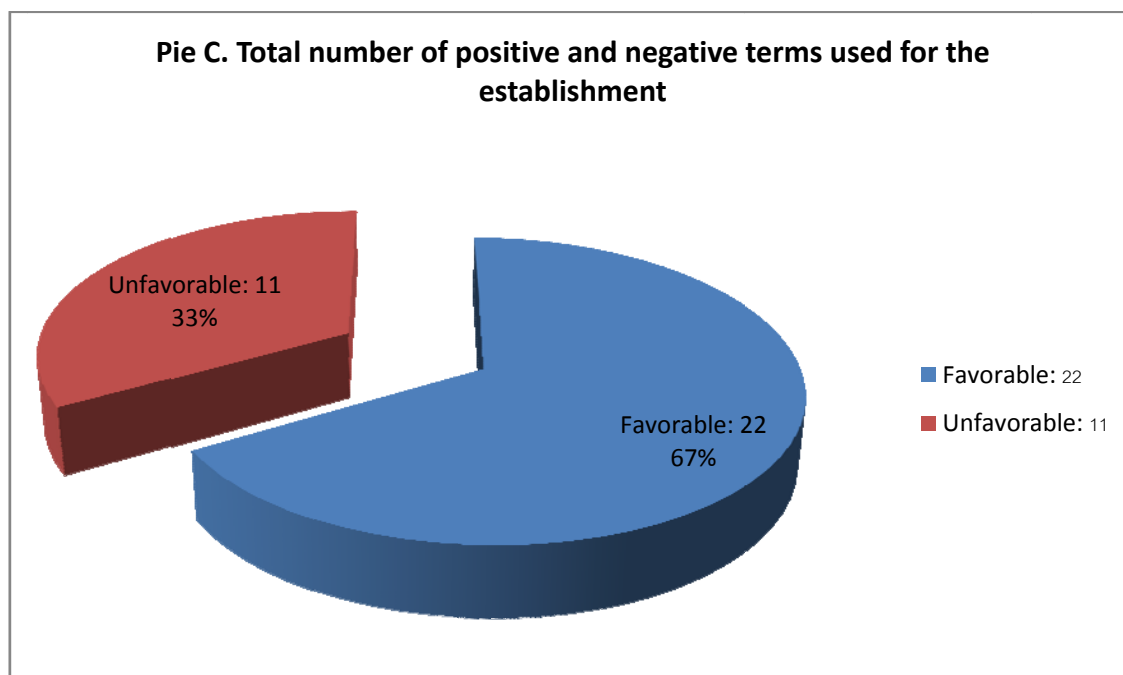


These findings seem to point to a mostly ‘objective’ reporting style, because neutral and specific terms together represent approximately three fourth of the total. Yet, it is also questionable whether a total of 136 unfavorable nouns, or an average of 3.4 per article, can be considered as a cue of an ‘unbiased’ media coverage or not.

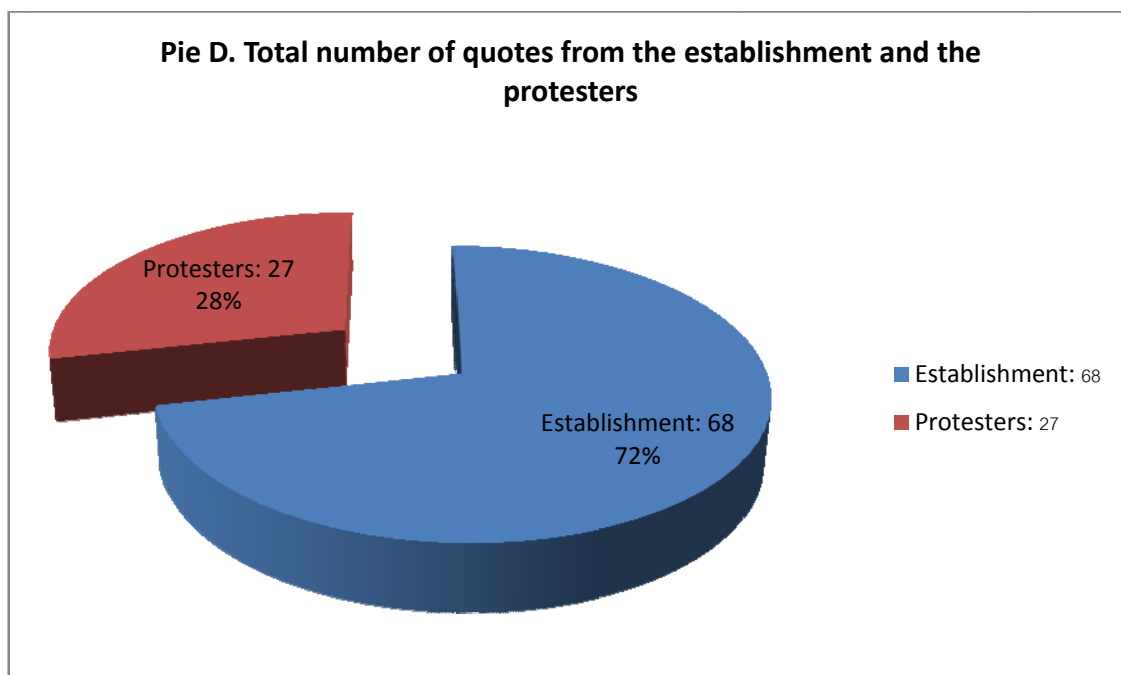
In fact, if we move to analyze the results of the adjective codes, as reported below in pie B, we see that in this case the unfavorable terms are used copiously. Almost half (45.6%) of the adjective codes utilized by the selected articles to describe the protest and the protesters have been unfavorable. Only about one third (34.2%) were neutral and one fifth (20.2%) were favorable.



The way the newspapers utilized terms to refer to the protest(ers) was in contrast to the one used for the establishment (see pie C). The terms used for the establishment were positive two third of the times, with only a third of the terms unfavorable. This seems to point to a media coverage which was favorable to the establishment and unfavorable to the anti-establishment forces.



The last codes collected in table E regard the number of times the articles quoted or cited an individual or an institution representing the establishment or the protest(ers) camp. As reported below in pie D, results show that the articles quoted the establishment 68 times compared to the 27 times they quoted or cited the protesters. That is, the establishment has been quoted more than two third of the times (71.6%) in contrast with the protest camp, quoted less than three times out of ten (28.4%).



In sum, findings suggest that the media message tended to be composed by specific nouns and unfavorable adjectives associated with the protest(ers), and in contrast by favorable terms used for the establishment. In addition, the two newspapers tended to fill the articles with more quotes from the establishment than quotes from the protesters, with a frequency more than two times higher (71.6% and 28.4% respectively). Such findings tend to confirm a number of characteristics of the Protest Paradigm, including the over-reliance on official sources, pointing to a media coverage favorable to the establishment.

To have a better insight on the results of the quantitative analysis, the next pages will treat the media coverage variations by comparing the two newspapers, the four phases and the three categories of articles.

Paradigm (see sections 1.3 and 3.2), the one which holds that, in covering a protest event, mainstream media tend to use a higher number of official declarations compared to the protesters' ones. This is one factor contributing to the media's unfavorable bias towards protest events. In fact, by giving more space to what one sides says means to give to that side more power of presenting his version of the 'facts', as well as his assumptions, theories and worldviews.

Apart from the space given to voices from the two sides, the results from the analysis show some important changes between the four phases. If we look at the terms associated with the protesters,

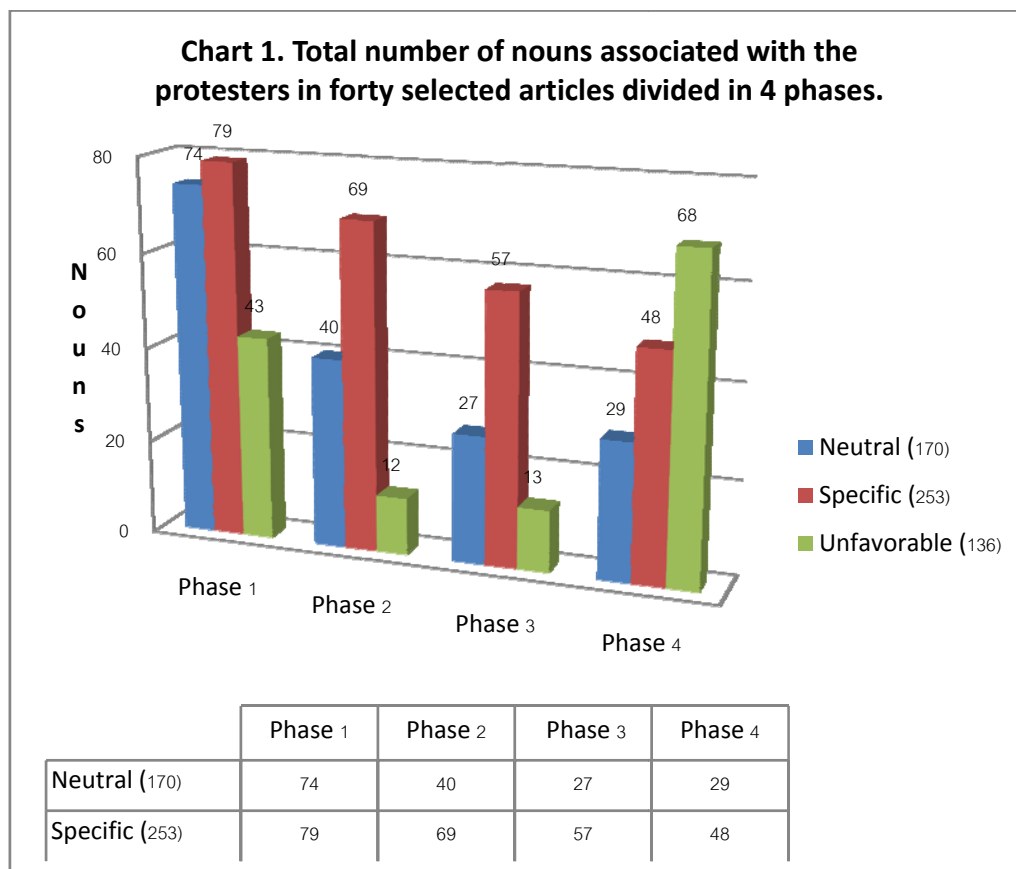


Chart 1 presents the nouns used in each of the four phases by the forty selected articles. It is evident how specific nouns decreased constantly from the first to the last phase. While they are the most used category of nouns used in the first three phases, in the fourth they are largely surpassed by the unfavorable terms. In poor words, specific nouns as 'UDD' and 'red shirts', and neutral nouns such as 'demonstrator' or

'protester', were the most used nouns in the first phase, but they progressively lost ground. Unfavorable nouns were not much used in phase 2 and 3, but they became the most used category in the last phase. This is partly understandable with the dynamic of the protest event, which in the last phase reached its more confrontational, violent and deadly stage. In the BP and TN, this reality was reported with the production of a media text filled with less specific and neutral nouns and more unfavorable ones, including 'extremist,' 'terrorist,' 'violence,' or 'tragedy.'

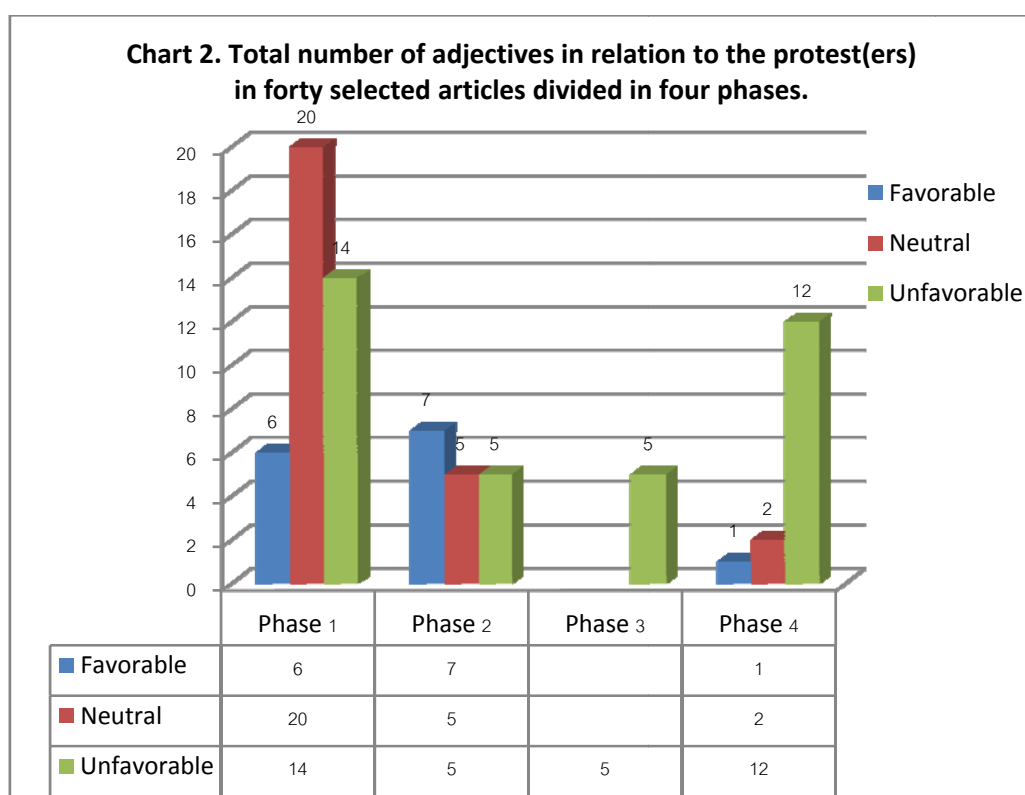


Chart 2 shows the results relative to the adjectives used by the selected articles in relation to the protesters. Also in this case, the differences between the four phases are remarkable. In particular, there was a high number of adjectives used in the first phase than in any other phase. Also, the first phase is the one with the highest use of neutral terms (20), compared to a lower number of unfavorable (14) and favorable (6) ones. Anyway, interestingly enough, even before the protest started in March 14th, BP and TN already associated the protest(ers) with a significant number of unfavorable

terms, which was more than the double than the favorable ones (14 to 6). This seems to indicate that the media message contained already a negative tone towards the protest(ers).

In the second phase, i.e. the beginning of the protest, there were more favorable (7) terms than neutral (5) or unfavorable (5). Yet, favorable adjectives were still a minority if compared to the combination of neutral and unfavorable ones. Anyway, a significant point is that, according to the results, the second phase was the period when the protesters were associated with the higher number of favorable terms. On contrast, in phase 3, which covers the period after the first seriously violent episode happened, favorable and neutral adjectives disappeared and only unfavorable adjectives were used. This seems to indicate that, once violence took place, the protesters lost all the relative ‘favorable’ coverage which they previously had. In phase 4, the most violent one, whose ‘core’ episode was the May 19th final crackdown, the protesters were associated only with unfavorable adjectives, with the exception of one favorable and two neutral ones.

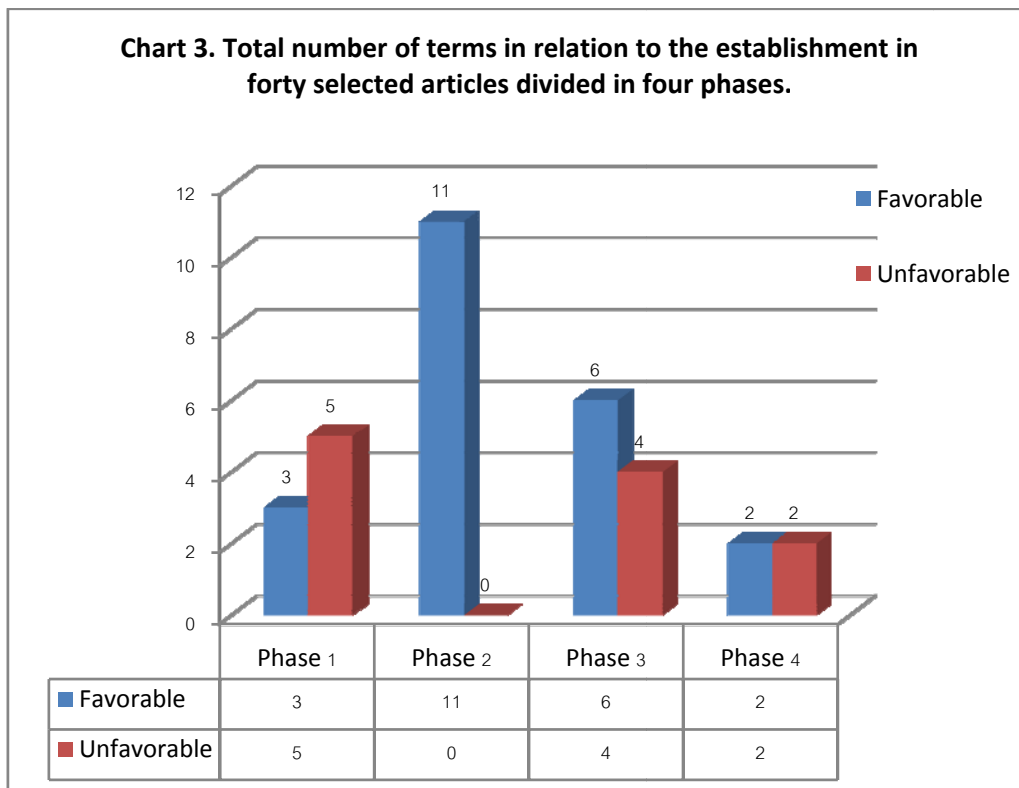


Chart 3 shows the results relative to the terms used by the selected articles in relation to the establishment. The first thing to notice is that the number of terms associated with the establishment was not particularly high. Secondly, the four phases produced different results. In the first, the establishment was mostly associated with unfavorable terms (5 to 3). On contrast, in the second phase the article items contained only positive terms associated with the establishment. The third phase presented mostly favorable terms (6 to 4), while in the last only 4 terms were found, 2 favorable and 2 unfavorable.

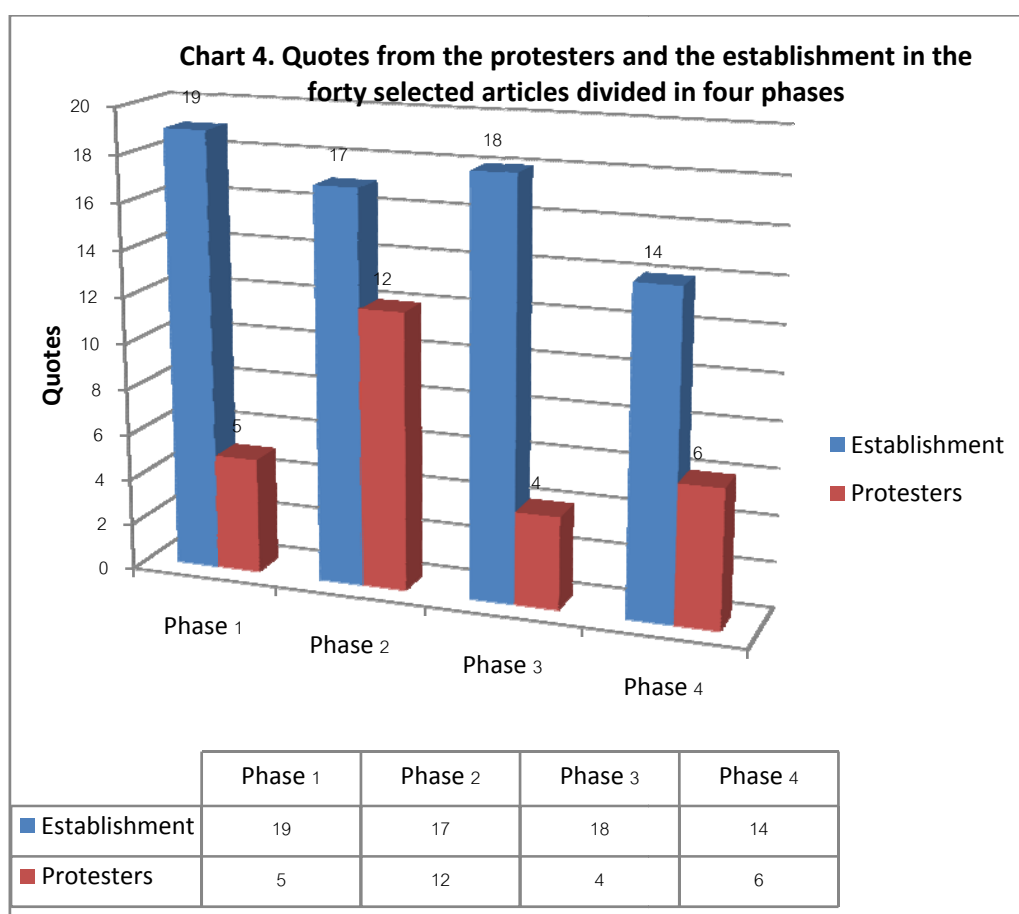


Chart 4 shows the quotes produced by the forty articles in relation to both the establishment and the protest(ers). Results are significant because they illustrate how in each of the four phases the Establishment was quoted or cited more than the Protesters.

In the first phase the establishment was quoted almost four times more than the protesters (19 to 5). This was similar to the third phase (18 to 4), while the fourth was slightly more even (14 to 6). The second phase was the one when the two camps were

quoted and cited in a more even manner (17 to 12). This can be seen as due to the fact that the second phase was the one when the protest began. In those days the dialogue between the two camps was to some extent more significant because the requests of the UDD to the government, the government's answers, and the UDD-government talks were arguably the most salient news together with the protesters' demonstrations. In the next two phases instead the dialogue and the negotiations were arguably less newsworthy, as violence had now taken the main space in the news.

5.3 Research findings: variations in the two newspapers

Table 2 and 3 divide the sample of forty articles according to the publication, i.e. respectively BP and TN. Thus table 2 reports the results from the twenty sample units selected from BP, while table 3 reports the results from the twenty articles selected from TN.

<i>Table 3. Total number of terms and quotes for phase and total in twenty selected BP articles.</i>										
<i>Phases</i>	<i>Codes</i>								<i>Quotes</i>	
	<i>Protest(ers) term codes</i>						<i>Establishment term codes</i>			
	<i>Noun codes</i>			<i>Adjective codes</i>			<i>1.Favo rable</i>	<i>2.Un fava ble</i>		
	<i>1.Neu tral</i>	<i>2.Spec ific</i>	<i>3.Unfavo rable</i>	<i>1.Favo rable</i>	<i>2.Neut ral</i>	<i>3.Unfav orable</i>				
1	48	40	26	5	8	10	3	4	2	10
2	23	51	4	2	2		9		5	7
3	8	27	5			2	1		2	9
4	12	24	33			2			2	7
Total	91	142	68	7	10	14	13	4	11	33
Ave.	22.75	35.5	17	1.7	2.5	3.5	3.5	1	2.7	8.2
%	30.2	47.2	22.6	22.6	32.2	45.2	76.5	23.5	25	75

amount of favorable (8, equal to 47%) and unfavorable terms (9, equal to 53%). The results seem to point to a greater pro-establishment bias of the BP, while it can be argued that TN was not a friend of the protest(ers) but nevertheless it was not necessarily a friend of the government and the army.

The last column presents one more difference, although a minor one, between the two publications: while BP used quotes from the establishment in the 75% of the times, TN did so slightly less: in the 69.2% of the cases. On the other hand, the BP used quotes from the protest camp in the 25% of the cases, while TN did so in the 30.8%. The difference between the two publications doesn't seem to be very significant. On contrast, it is perhaps relevant to notice that both publications highly relied on quotes from the government and the army.

Overall, the results of the comparison between the BP and TN's use of terms and quotes in relation of the two camps - protest(ers) and establishment - seem to indicate that both the media outlets produced a rather anti-protest(ers) media coverage. In particular, TN's stories used a higher number of nouns and adjectives related to the protest(ers), indicating a stronger anti-protest(ers) stance/bias. On the other hand, interestingly enough, despite the fact that TN appeared to be more unfavorable to the protest(ers) than the BP, yet this attitude may have not been directly translated into an outright pro-establishment stand, as the use of slightly more unfavorable than favorable terms in relation to the establishment seems to indicate. Nevertheless, both the publications relied mostly on establishment's quotations and citations, a fact that previous (see section 1.3 and 3.2) research considers as a factor which can contribute to the production of a pro-establishment coverage, regardless if this was a conscious or unconscious outcome.

To better understand how the media coverage unfolded in the different protest phases it is convenient to present the results from tables 2 and 3 into charts in order to highlight how the BP and TN media message mutated with the four protest phases.

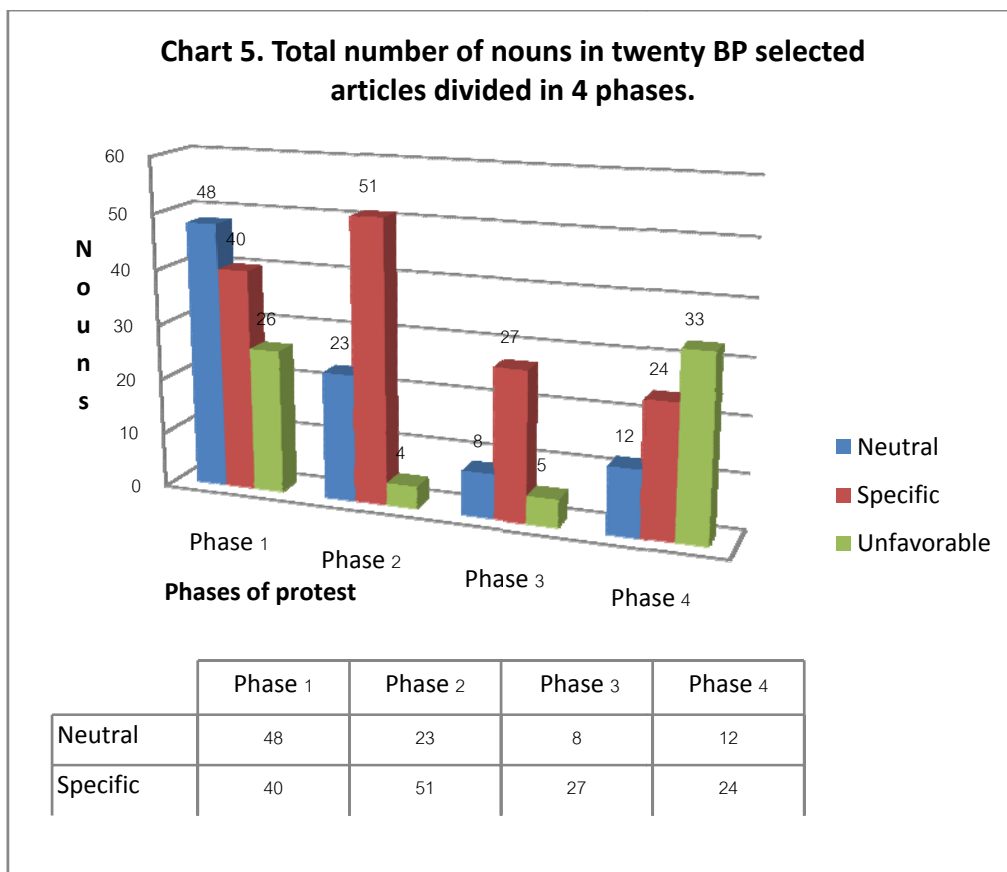


Chart 5 presents the noun codes produced by the BP in each of the four phases. In the first phase, BP used mostly neutral nouns (48) and less specific (40) and unfavorable (26) ones. On contrast, in the second and third phase the twenty BP articles used mostly specific nouns (51 and 27), secondarily neutral (23 and 8), and thirdly unfavorable (4 and 5). In the last phase, the results are opposite, with mostly unfavorable nouns (33), secondarily specific (24) and lastly neutral (12) ones. Again, as stated above in commenting chart 1, the violent clashes between soldiers and protesters during the last phase of the protest probably is the reason why the BP's articles produced a high number of unfavorable nouns related to the protest(ers).

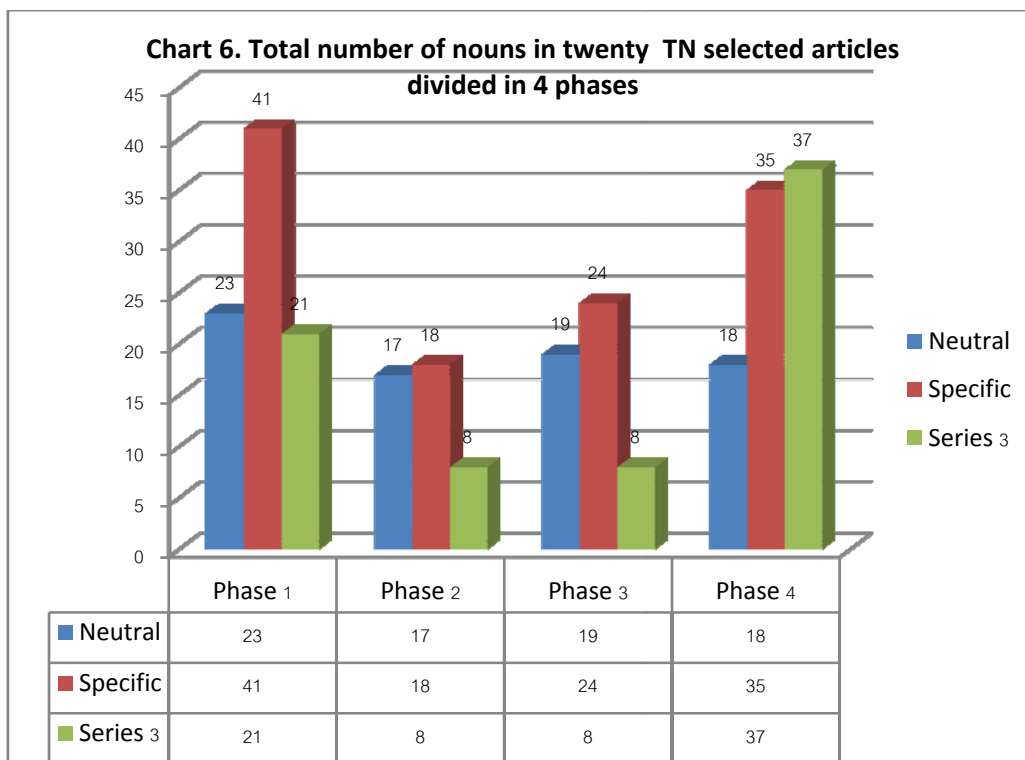


Chart 6 presents the noun codes produced by TN in each of the four phases. Differently than the BP, in the first phase not the neutral but the specific nouns were the most used. Another difference between the BP and TN is in the neutral terms. In BP they decreased from the first (48) to the second (23), and they were used even less on the third (8). On the last phase they slightly increased (12), but they were used more sparingly than specific (24) and especially unfavorable (33) terms. Similarly to the BP, also in TN unfavorable terms decreased from the first (21) to the second (8) phase, where they were used less than neutral (17) and specific (18) ones. In the third phase, unfavorable terms were employed again in less frequently than neutral and specific ones – respectively in 8, 19 and 24 cases. Finally, just like in BP, also in TN the unfavorable terms exploded in the last phase, when they were used 37 times, more than specific (35) and neutral (18) ones. It must be emphasized also the fact that TN, compared to the BP, the differences between the phases were relatively less marked, as to indicate that TN media message was relatively less influenced by the unfolding situation than the BP's.

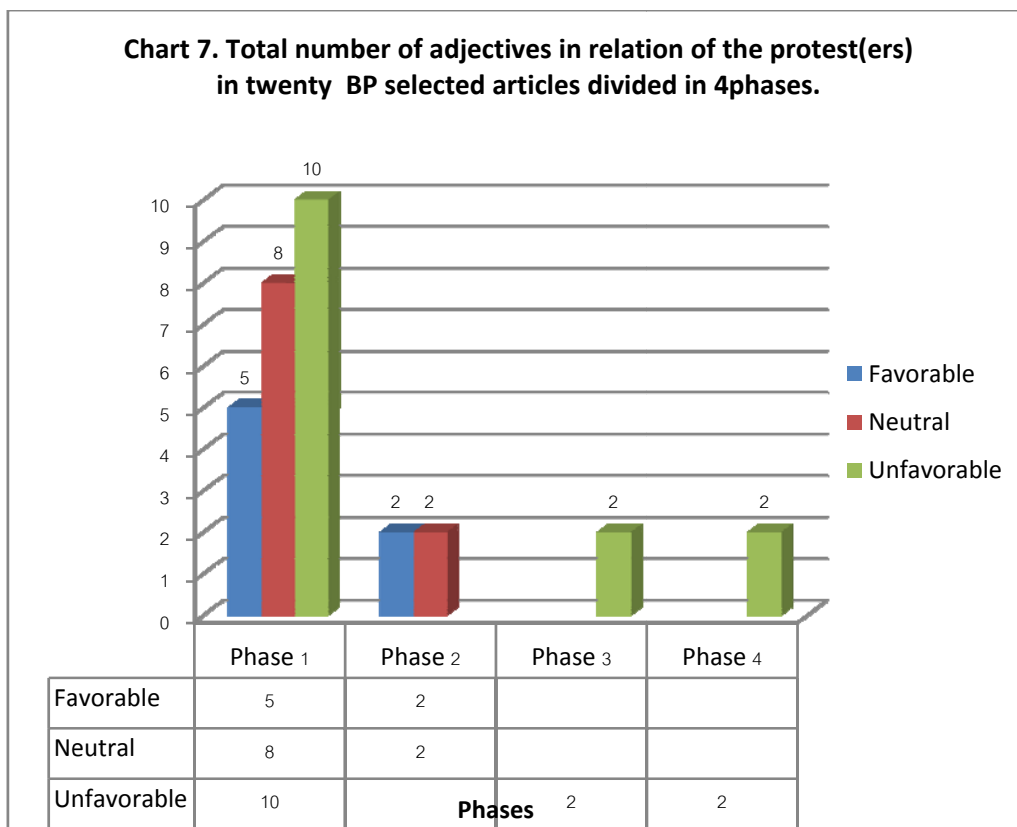


Chart 7 presents the adjectives produced by BP in relation to the protest(ers) in each of the four phases. The articles produced a limited number of adjectives, meaning that the protest(ers) was overtly evaluated only in a very restricted number of cases. The higher number of cases produced in the first phase is very likely a result not much of an evaluation on the protest(ers), but on the person of Thaksin Shinawatra, which was widely discussed in the first half of March because in the end of February there was a judicial sentence which seized a part of the former prime minister’s assets.

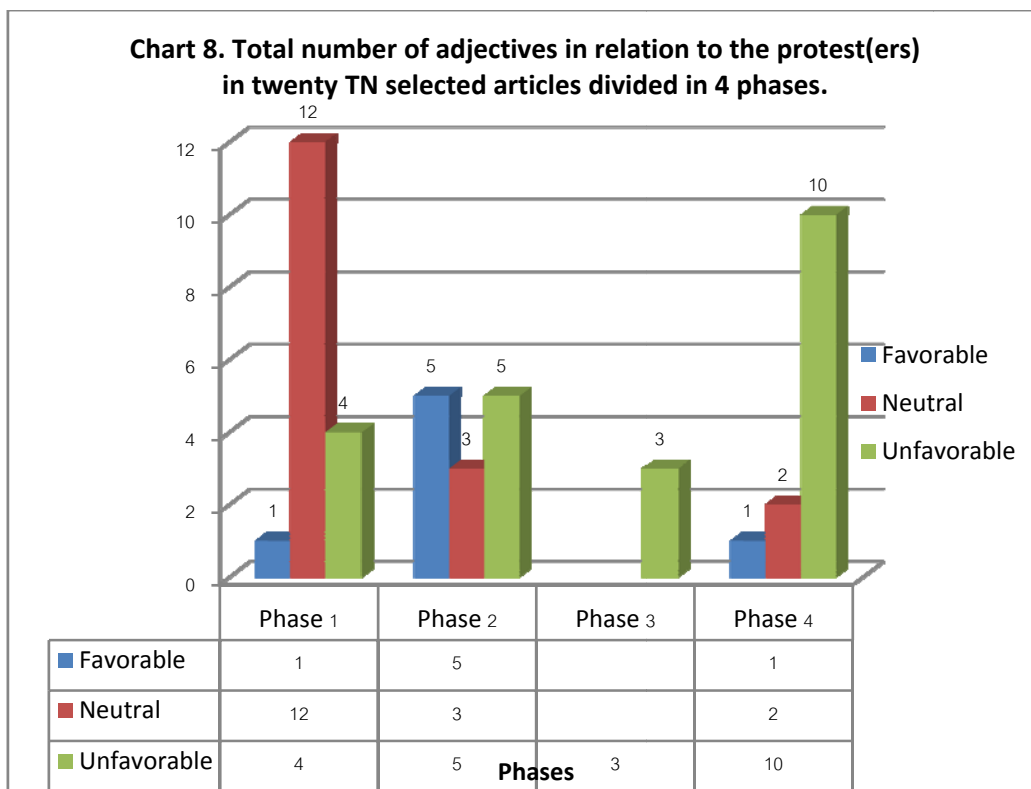


Chart 8 presents the adjectives produced by TN in relation to the protest(ers) in each of the four phases. The first thing to notice is that TN produced a higher number of adjectives to connote the protest(ers). Differently from the BP, in the first phase the adjectives were mostly neutral (12), while the unfavorable were three times less (4) and there was only one favorable adjective. With the beginning of the protest on March 14th, in the second phase the neutral adjectives were used less often (3), with a balanced use of favorable (5) and unfavorable adjectives (5). In the third phase, although TN articles used only 3 adjectives, yet all of them were unfavorable. In the last phase, with the explosion of violence on the streets the media message produced by TN connoted the protest(ers) with a rather copious number of unfavorable adjectives (10), which was more than three times higher than the neutral (2) and favorable (1) adjectives combined. This can be read as an indication that with the mounting unrest TN turned rather openly against the protest and the protesters, now more often evaluated as ‘angry,’ ‘dangerous,’ ‘violent’ and ‘deadly.’

5.4 Research findings: variations in three article's categories

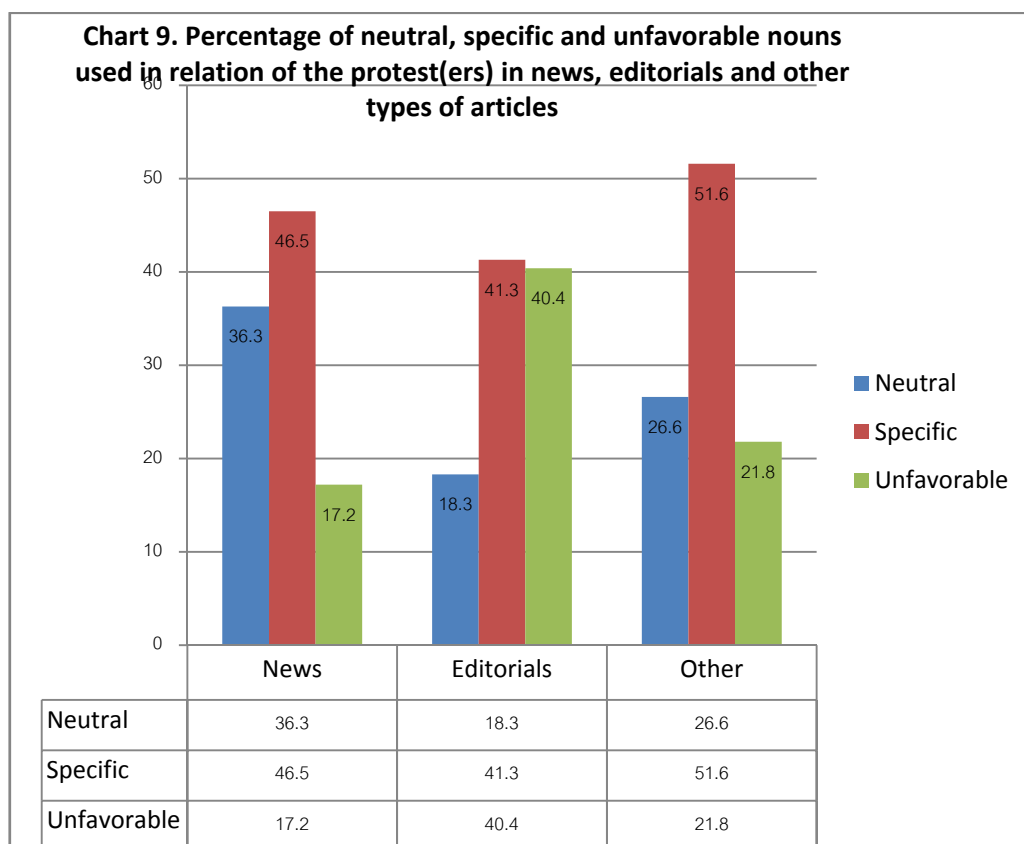


Chart 9 shows the percentage of neutral, specific and unfavorable nouns produced by BP and TN's articles in relation to the protest(ers). The results are divided according to the type of article, i.e. news stories, editorials and others (op-eds, analyses, etc.). Results show that all three types of articles mostly used specific nouns in relation to the protest(ers). Anyway, the editorials are the group which used specific nouns less often. Editorials are also the group which used unfavorable nouns more often, about two times more often than the other two groups. Also, editorials were the only category to use more unfavorable than neutral nouns (40.2% versus 18.3%). This can be understood because, as discussed before, editorials are usually the section of a newspaper where the staff, otherwise supposedly bounded to report 'hard facts' following criteria of objectivity and impartiality, feels allowed to express an 'opinion'. In fact, results show how the media message produced by editorials was substantially different from the other two categories also in the use of a limited number of neutral nouns (18.3%). News stories, which according to standard journalistic understandings strive to be as

subgroup of newspaper articles, both publications used relatively more specific nouns than neutral or unfavorable, and mostly unfavorable adjectives. At the same time, if we look at the column reporting the results of the establishment term codes, it is possible to notice that the BP used mostly favorable terms, 7, compared to 3 unfavorable, while on contrast TN used mostly unfavorable terms, 3, compared to 2 favorable. One more time, this seems to point to a more pro-establishment stance of the BP, while on contrast TN appeared to be critical towards the protest(ers), with 26.1% of unfavorable nouns and 42.1% of unfavorable adjectives used, but also somehow critical towards the establishment. Yet, TN used only a total of 5 terms in relation to the establishment, thus the data may be considered not particularly significant. On top of this, the last two columns show that TN mostly relied on establishment quotes (9 times compared to the 2 times the anti-establishment camp was quoted), thus suggesting the possibility that the TN media message in this particular group of articles contained a pro-establishment bias.

5.5. Conclusions

This chapter presented the results of a quantitative research done on a purposively selected sample of forty BP and TN newspaper articles.

Results seem to confirm the first characteristic of the Protest Paradigm, as exposed on section 1.3: BP and TN used a high number of establishment and official sources compared to the non-official ones and those critical to the establishment. In fact, in total more than the seventy percent of the quotations came from the establishment. This result was consistent throughout the event. That is, it was found in both BP and TN, in each of the four phases, and in each of the three types of articles. This is the same as saying that both BP and TN confirmed the existence of one basic feature of the Protest Paradigm, which contributes to the production of a pro-establishment coverage.

Besides, the two publications tended to construct articles by using specific nouns and unfavorable adjectives associated with the protest(ers). In contrast, the establishment was often reported with favorable terms.

More specifically, findings indicate that differences between BP and TN in the way they reported the protest(ers) was not marked: BP and TN utilized a similar percentage of nouns and adjectives. Also, the results of the comparison between the BP

and TN seems to indicate that both the media outlets did not produce a media coverage particularly friendly to the protest(ers), as it is evident from the higher percentage of unfavorable adjectives (46.8%) used for the protest(ers) compared to the favorable ones (18.2%). On the other hand, for the establishment the two newspapers used more favorable (22, or 66.6%) than unfavorable terms (11, or 33.3%).

In particular, TN's stories used a higher number of unfavorable adjectives (45.8%) related to the protest(ers) than neutral (35.4%) or favorable (18.7%), indicating a stronger anti-protest(ers) stance/bias. On the other hand, interestingly enough, despite the fact that TN appeared to be more unfavorable to the protest(ers) than the BP, yet this attitude may have not been directly translated into an outright pro-establishment stand, as the use of slightly more unfavorable (9) than favorable (8) terms in relation to the establishment seems to indicate.

Anyway, it also true that BP and TN produced a more neutral media coverage in the news stories, and to some extent in the third category of articles (op-eds, columns, analysis). In particular, news stories tended to use specific and neutral nouns in relation to the protest(ers) in more than the eighty percent of the cases, while in editorials this happened less often, in approximately the sixty percent of the times. This can be an indication that, although the two publications were overall not particularly friendly to the protest(ers), yet they strived to present an 'objective' report, especially in their news stories.

It has also been assessed that there were differences between the results from the four different phases of the protest under several aspects of analysis. For example, from that the second to the fourth phase the way protesters were treated became progressively more critical, suggesting that the media tended to see the protest(ers) as progressively less legitimate.

One last result which is important to highlight is that phase 1 produced a high number of unfavorable adjectives, as to suggest that the protest(ers) were already seen with a dose of bias even before the protest started and any controversial action eventually took place.

The next chapter will cast light on the BP and TN coverage of the protest thorough a qualitative analysis.

CHAPTER VI

MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE 2010 BANGKOK PROTEST: QUALITATIVE AND CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

In a sense, news is whatever the media tell us is news (however un-newsworthy it may appear by other standards) and, to a degree, what is not presented is prevented from becoming news. The media provide us a picture of what is happening only in a very selective sense. They structure the ‘pictures of the world’ which are available to us and, in turn, these pictures structure possible modes of action.

- James D. Halloran et al. Demonstrations and Communication: A Case Study. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970: 313.

The data presented in the chapter 5 have been corroborated with a qualitative and critical discourse analysis in order to better understand the BP and TN media message and its communicative proposes. News stories, editorials, columns, op-eds, analysis, and visuals all provided information to the reader about the events. They collected and presented ‘facts’ but also subtly or overtly provided interpretations, evaluations, comments and suggestions which consciously or unconsciously boosted particular understandings of the reality and specific points of view.

As argued by previous literature, the media message is influenced by a complex range of factors, including ownership, funding from advertising, the power of “news terminals,” the ability of the elite to discredit critical media, and ideology (Chomsky and Herman 1988). In a broad sense, ideological influence means that reality is filtered by the speaker or writer according to his and his environment ideologies. In other words, the media message is forged within the cultural understandings and ideologies which exist in a given society at a given time, and especially by the ideologies of those who control and operate the media (Fowler 1991; Fairclough 1995).

Consequently, who operates the media function as a gatekeeper which passes certain pieces of information and overlook at others; he is also a shaper of reality because he has the power of packaging in a determinate way the 'facts' which decides to pass on. In poor words, these are two traits of the power which media (and those who control them) have in influencing the audience. This is considered the utmost form of power, because if one can shape public opinion, he can strengthen/reproduce/change the power structures that exist. If one can convince other people to accept his right to act in specific ways, then he can so act. This is why critical theorists and cultural studies sociologist tend to describe a two-way relation between power and the media, that is: power controls the media and the media maintains power (Lukes 1974; Hall 1978).

Anyway, to be fair, it must be said that no society is monolithic. On the contrary, in every society at every given time there is always power and counter-power, and it is especially thorough the media that counter-power can challenge power (Gramsci 1971; Castells 2007).

To focus back on the object of this study, it would suffice to say that a media message can be rather direct in urging the readers to accept particular points of view, and thus to believe and/or act in certain ways. Anyway, more often a text and its producer do so subtly. This is way the present researcher has found useful to utilized critical discourse analysis (CDA) to discern the devices used by the writer to suggest a particular reading of the text, and thus to unlock the ideological assumptions buried in the text.

Newspaper texts can be understood as narratives which consist of information and 'facts,' but also of a subtext, i.e. an implicit and unspoken message. The underlying meaning can be suggested by categorizing people, actions, events, and places, or by using metaphors, catchphrases, cues and other symbolic devises, as well as by presenting the different actors in the story under different lights. This can be done by those grammar devices which are the main object of study of CDA (van Dijk 1993). In very poor words, we know that what is written in a newspaper article is a text/message transmitted from somebody to somebody else through the medium of language. The message transmitted through language encodes a cultural 'loading' (ideologies, beliefs, values, mind-sets, etc.). This 'loading' is a result of the cultural or sub-cultural environment in which the message is forged. This is what CDA helps to individuate

In this chapter the daily issues of the BP and TN published in the period March 1st to May 31st, 2010 will be qualitatively analyzed. The chapter unfolds according to the four separate significant periods of media coverage which we have individuated in the beginning of the research (see table A in appendix). The four phases are the following: the period before the protest; the beginning of the protest on March 14th; the first seriously violent clashes at Khok Wua intersection on April 10th; and the period around May 19th final crackdown. Each of the four phases is presented in a single section.

6.1 Pre-protest phase

The atmosphere of tension for the protests and fear of violence began mounting weeks before March. Mainstream media reported concerns about sparking violence, and this went together with a government's turn of the screw on public order. On February 13th the BP quoted Minister of Foreign Affairs Kasit saying that the red shirts movement "set up training centres around the country which had churned out about 100,000 agitators capable of disrupting society" and "plans to intensify its agitation" (BP. *"Asset case 'may spark violence', govt warns foreign diplomats"*. February 13th, 2010). The government and the mainstream media used this red shirts' supposed capacity of "disrupting society" to justify the government's establishment of security centers in the North and Northeast, which were intended to facilitate crackdowns against pro-Thaksin, anti-government and anti-2006 military coup protesters. Army troops were deployed in 200 checkpoints to prevent protesters from entering Bangkok (Bancha Khaengkhan and Suparat Iamtan. *"Huge boost in security."* TN. February 9th, 2010). On February 15th, police and soldiers established checkpoints and organized patrols in inner Bangkok, as reports from government security agencies continued to play up fears of anti-government rallies, even before the seizing of a part of ex PM Thaksin's fortune by a Court in February 26th. On February 16th the BP promptly titled *"Security forces ready for action"*, informing the public opinion that "soldiers were ordered to be strategically ready at Level 3, or a yellow alert, be watchful and monitor situations closely" (*"Security forces ready for action: Troops take up position at key city locations"*. BP. February 16th, 2010). Anyway, the red shirts said they did not want to protest against the

February 26th verdict on Thaksin. On the contrary, the UDD announced it would hold a massive protest in Bangkok on March 14th to call for new elections in order to change a government which the opposition considered un-elected, merely a result of a shady back-room oligarchic machination, and therefore missing popular ordination - in plain words, not democratic (*“UDD won't rally on Feb 26”*. BP. February 16th, 2010). Anyway, both the BP and TN did not catch this point, or at least they framed the whole issue in different terms through a personalization of the crisis on the figure of Thaksin, by stressing the threat of violence, and by marginalizing the protesters and their aims.

6.1.1 Thaksin, protest and fear: the development of ‘news angles’

The two weeks before the beginning of the protest was a crucial period in suggesting a framework within which the events of the March 14th to May 19th, 2010 UDD protest might be interpreted. The protesters began to gather in around the capital on March 12th and the first massive UDD rally took place in Bangkok on March 14th. In the two weeks before that date, the protesters were in full swing to organize the historical event, which was labeled as the “million-man-march.” According to their official declarations, the red shirts decided to stage the protest event because they questioned the legitimacy of the Abhisit government and thus they requested for the dissolving of the government and called for fresh elections. In spite of this, in the period before the protest began, the BP and TN assembled facts, quotations, and other narrative elements into news stories which left little or marginal space to the central political issues. The aims and objectives of the protest as stated by the organizers and the ordinary protesters received almost no coverage at all.

The BP and TN news frame preferred to personalize the political crisis around the persona of former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was generally described in negative or utterly negative terms. At the same time, the two print media focused on threats, unproved rumors, or whether violence was going to occur or not. The protesters were hardly given any voice. When they were given voice, it was usually to report a statement of a leader. Thus, the ‘ordinary’ protesters were refused voice, appearing more as an indistinct mob maneuvered by their leaders than as real citizens and social actors with their own rationality and motivations. Consequently, the protesters were portrayed as a dangerous “horde,” violent

or at least potentially violent, an unstable and deviant “dark force” capable of disrupting society.

In this frame, the threat of violence and destruction represented by the protesters was always countered by the establishment’s calm, balanced, and stable work to maintain peace, law and order. In other words, the frame was reduced into a simplistic binary framework where the negative pole, filled by the red shirt dangerous mob, was countered by a positive pole, represented by the establishment, which comprised government, army, police and the business community.

This news frame was constructed through editorials as well as by producing news articles with a greater number of quotations from the establishment and the Bangkok-based business community than interviews with the protesters or with other ‘ordinary’ citizens critical towards the establishment. The characteristics of the two poles were distinct. If the protesters were framed as irrational troublemakers, the establishment was instead portrayed as an accountable and reliable bloc, an institution constantly concentrated in its effort to shield the audience (i.e. mostly the Bangkok middle- and upper-class) from the dark force’s alleged attacks.

Behind the red shirts the reader was incited to imagine the shady terrorist-like presence of Thaksin Shinawatra, which appeared in virtually every single article dealing with the red shirts; whereas behind the institutional actors the reader could figure out the whole Nation, Religion and Monarchy, i.e. the holy-like trinity of Thainess.

To reinforce the suggestion, sometimes the utmost symbol of Thainess appeared. Then the pure, wise, bright, virtuous, quasi-divine example of His Majesty the King, the quintessential symbol of Thainess, was descended into the narrative to attract the people emotionally to the state and the institutions which the rulers dominate.

This research has individuated this dialectical narrative pattern since the first day of media coverage analyzed: March 1st, 2010. As an example, it can be useful to analyze the following opinion piece, a letter from a reader published by TN on March 1st:

“After days of particularly depressing news on the odious machinations of the assets case, the implications of the judgment and the utter greed that the web of intrigue had spawned, what a pleasure it was to see His Majesty the King leave hospital and looking so well.

This was truly the tonic that a country weary of the darker aspects of human nature needed. The return to health of such a beacon of service, selfless dedication and matchless virtue - truly the light of the nation - is well received.

Let all those who whine and complain and threaten in these difficult times contemplate what they have given to Thailand in comparison to His Majesty's unswerving devotion to his people and the good of his country throughout his long reign, and then behave with some humility.

Long Live His Majesty the King!

JAMES DUNDASS

BANGKOK”

In the above opinion piece, which TN selected and published, the author presents the quintessentially apologetic description of the King as an utmost selfless and virtuous being, possibly a *Devarāja* (god-king), in order to use such belief as a tool to oppose the alleged danger represented by the anti-establishment social actors. The author stresses the King's supposed exceptional virtues in order to request contemplation, deference and “humility” from “those who whine and complain and threaten,” clearly referring to Thaksin and/or the red shirted anti-government forces. It is easy to see how, although not clearly stated, the ideology of Thainess is buried in the text. As seen in the last chapter, ideological texts often base their apparently logical argument on some sort of assumption or presupposition which the author takes and presents as a given (Fairclough 1989). For example, if we make many people believe that there exists such thing as a ‘Thai culture,’ and that such thing has certain positive characteristics - however we cherry-pick them - which represent the believers’ identity, then people who believe to be part of ‘Thai culture’ can be more easily persuaded that ‘Thai culture’ is something that must be protected, and that things and people who do not behave accordingly to ‘Thai culture’ can be dangerous, and therefore can be identified and dealt with. In the opinion piece above, the assumption is the “matchless” and possibly semi-divine nature of the monarch. This politico-religious supposition is used as a bludgeon against political enemies, who by definition cannot be equal to “the light of the nation,” i.e. the King. To emphasize the ‘darkness’ of his political enemies, which are never directly mentioned but only alluded, the author employs dense terms such as ‘greedy,’ ‘complainers,’ and ‘threateners’ culpable of “odious machinations.” Basically, it is a reproduction of the simplistic good Us versus bad Them binary opposition, with the figure of the King used as a bright totem for the good Us camp against the evil and sinister Others, bearer of the “darker

aspects of human nature,” probably represented by Thaksin and his disciples. As seen in chapter 4, this ideology has been routinely used in Thai history to defend the dominant bloc by delegitimizing political opponents and eventually justifying crackdowns on them (Anderson 1976; Thongchai 1994; Saichol 2000; Pavin 2011).

In an interview published in the same day (*“From out of gloom a beacon of service”*. TN. 1 March, 2010) it is possible to decode another assumption linkable with Thai nationalism. In the article, a Bangkok-based entrepreneur named Kitti Chambundabongse proclaimed to be “quite optimistic that there would not be any further violence.” Interestingly, the reasons he adduced were the following:

"Thais are Thais. I expect there will be a compromise. Maybe not today, but eventually. I don't think Thai people will kill Thai people themselves."

Such an opinion, which was going to surface again and again through the three month-long political unrest, appears to be embedded with Thailand’s nationalist discourse. It is so in the extent that it reproduces the belief, fostered by Thai nationalism, that Thai nationals are somehow ‘naturally’ non-violent, peaceful, and ‘good.’ Such opinion is academically problematic and it is hard to sustain in a country where, on an almost daily basis, Thai-language newspapers’ front pages are covered with images of violence and assassinations. Moreover, without even mentioning that the ‘peacefulness’ argument has been clearly contradicted by a Thai history marked by several bloody events, it would be enough to remind that it clashes with the crude statistics which demonstrate how Thailand is a country where violence exists just like in other countries – actually, the Kingdom records more homicides than some of its neighbors, including Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.¹ In spite of all these facts, TN reproduced one more time the belief that ‘Thai people do not kill Thai people.’ If one accepts such false postulate, the consequence is that the ‘killers’ are to be defined and understood as somehow ‘non-Thai.’ As argued by Thongchai (1994), this othering process is an integrant part of Thainess. This suggests that ideological elements were disseminated in the media message.

The news framework suggested by the BP and TN was reproduced by a conscious or unconscious mix of ideology and journalistic techniques. As said above, apart from ideological assumptions derived from Thainess, such as that ‘Thai people do not kill Thai

¹ UN. “2011 Global Study on Homicide.” Available at <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/statistics/crime/global-study-on-homicide-2011.html>.

people,' one more technique was the personalization of the political crisis around the negative figure of Thaksin Shinawatra. As argued in an op-ed appeared on BP ("*Dealing with 'the devil', the reds and looking within.*" May 27th, 2010) by Charles Keyes, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology and International Studies at the University of Washington, in the eyes of "Many Bangkokians and supporters of the Abhisit government" the former prime minister became:

"the devil incarnate - a demon-like figure very comparable to the witches in traditional societies who are seen as the causes of all misfortunes and maladies."

The two print media kept reinforcing the personalization of the crisis by insisting on producing news regarding Thaksin and his judicial sentence, and by linking this to the UDD social movement, its plans and its actions. To (re)produce such frame, Thaksin's sentence, which came out on February 26th, was dealt over and over, day after day, with typically several articles in each issue. As an example, BP front page headline on March 1st was "Thaksin in the firing line." To amplify the effect, the headline was positioned below an exquisite photo of Wat Benchamabophit (Marble Temple), with a caption explaining that the day before marked "the anniversary of Lord Buddha teaching the principles of this religion to the monks he had ordained." It is thus arguable that the discourse of Thainess, with its *deva/mara* dialectic, was once again buried in the 'text,' i.e. in the front page, which comprehended the image above the fold, the headline on the image, and the article below. The image of the white Buddhist temple resembled a heavenly place standing above the hellish issues of politics and crime, personified by Thaksin and suggested by the word 'firing,' literally reminding the fire of hell.

Arguably, the personalization of the political crisis around the "devil incarnate" was played higher by TN than the BP. This is particularly visible in the last issues of the pre-protest phase. In the days immediately before March 14th, TN kept empathizing the importance of the Thaksin frame, also by giving it the front page headline both on March 12th and 13th, respectively: "*Will Thaksin be saved?*" (TN. March 12th, 2010, see photo 1) and "*Thaksin's last chance*" (TN. March 13th, 2010, see photo 2). On the contrary, in those days BP stressed more the fear frame than the Thaksin's one, as we will argue below.

Another characteristic of both the BP and TN's coverage was the over reliance on official sources, a practice which was evident especially on the front page articles. For example, in the above mentioned article ("Thaksin in the firing line." BP. 1 March, 2010), the

author mentioned as much as four official sources: “[t]he Office of the Attorney-General (OAG),” “OAG spokesman Thanapich Moolpreuk,” “Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva,” and the “Information and Communication Technology Minister Ronongruk Suwunchwee.” As argued by British scholar Duncan McCargo (2002: 73), the abundance of quotations is a common feature of Thai journalism, which uses poorly skilled and lowly considered young reporters who “hunt in packs” politicians and other prominent figures in order to obtain from them the statements which will be used to construct “lengthy stories comprising nothing but quotations”. Anyway, this practice produces inevitably a bias toward the official narratives, a result which is in line with the Protest Paradigm, as seen in chapter 3. In addition, in this article the three real persons quoted were given ‘functional honorifics’ (‘OAG spokesman,’ ‘Prime Minister,’ and ‘Information and Communication Technology Minister’). As argued by Machin and Mayr (2012: 82), “the use of the functional honorific makes the speaker appear more important and authoritative.” This means that an actor reported with a functional honorific is given a degree of respect and legitimacy. In the case of this article, which deals with the Thaksin judicial case, Thaksin’s own voice appears only in the middle of the piece, after the four official sources. Interestingly enough, Thaksin is not given any functional honorific. The author could have described Thaksin as the ‘former prime minister,’ but he doesn’t. The personification of ‘un-Thainess’ (see chapter 2) appears simply as ‘Thaksin and his allies.’ Therefore, Thaksin is given a lower degree of respect and legitimacy than the previous actors.

An analysis of the quoting verbs used is also enlightening. The verbs used to quote the four official sources are ‘to say’ and ‘to announce,’ two verbs which connote the subjects as disengaged with the events, but having power and legitimacy (Caldas-Coulthard 1997). On the contrary, the first verb used to report Thaksin is ‘to criticize.’ The author wants to inform that ‘Thaksin and his allies’ believe that the judicial process which had ended a few days before was unfair. This opinion could have been reported in many ways. Just looking at the verbal choice, without changing the structure of the sentence, it is possible to argue that the author could have used a number of other verbs, including ‘to say,’ ‘to announce,’ ‘to tell,’ ‘to declare,’ ‘to explain,’ and so on. Instead, the author chose an expressive verb, ‘to criticize,’ which carries the feeling of a complain, a grumble, a lament, or an accuse. In other words, with the verb choice the author pointed to two directions. The actor (‘Thaksin and his allies’) is not as neutral and authoritative as the previous establishment actors - because they ‘said,’ while he ‘criticizes.’ Second, the action expressed by the verb is something not factual,

giving the reader the feeling that Thaksin's opinion is just an assumption that can be contested and that the very use of this verb invites to doubt.

As if the words choice was not enough to point to a certain preferred reading, only seven lines after Thaksin's opinion is presented, the article manages to counter such opinion with a supposedly impartial, reliable and technical argument – an opinion poll:

“But a survey by Abac Poll of Assumption University released yesterday shows most respondents wanted the former prime minister to accept the case outcome because the verdict was clear and just.”

In this way Thaksin's opinion is definitely sandwiched between two more authoritative voices, represented by four official actors in one side and, on the other, by “most respondents” to an academic survey.

The last column, which comprises approximately a third of the article, is dedicated to the UDD plan to join forces on March 12 in order to move to the capital for a demonstration on 14 March. Although the UDD Secretary General Natthawut Saikua is quoted as saying that his movement is not violent and is not taking action for Thaksin (“The red shirts' fight now takes precedence over the fate of Pol Col Thaksin... It is the peaceful, biggest fight ever between those who are oppressed and the upper elite”), yet the not-too-subtle suggestion of the article is that the establishment's concerns about the possibility of violent episodes (presented in the first part), Thaksin's refusal of a sentence (presented in the second part) and the incoming red shirt demonstration are three linked issues.

As a second example of the BP and TN's high degree of reliance on official sources, it will suffice to mention another BP front page. On March 2nd the BP headed “Security agencies put on alert,” which suggested once again that a threat was menacing Bangkok. In the subhead the threat turned more concrete, as it was linked with the UDD planned demonstration: “order comes ahead of March 14 rally.” In this article, the first sentence managed to tie, once again, the threat of violence to Thaksin through the UDD:

“All security agencies have been placed on high alert in the run up to a planned demonstration by supporters of ousted prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra on March 14.”

On top of this, the article is interesting because, after the opening, the article quotes as much as eight different official sources:

- 1 The order from the Internal Security Operations Command was issued...
- 2 Isoc spokesman Ditthaporn Sasasmit said...
- 3 The Special Branch Police Intelligence office has briefed top police officers about the UDD's movements...
- 4 ...the deputy chief of the Metropolitan Police Bureau, Pol Maj Gen Piya Uthayo, said...
- 5 Army commander Anupong Paojinda yesterday called for national unity...
- 6 Pol Lr Col Charnwit Phumpho, deputy superintendent of Yannawa police station, said...
- 7 Pol Col Somchai Inthaphuang, superintendent of the Phra Pradaeng police station, said...
- 8 City police chief Santan Chaynanont said...

The first sentence in the article, reported above in number 1, is very solid and official. The author could have written that 'ISEAS ordered,' instead the verb 'to order' becomes a noun, a subject ('the order'), and it 'is issued.' This lexical operation removes the responsibility from the real actor (i.e. ISEA) and gives an impression of both authoritativeness and inevitability. Interestingly enough, to quote five of the eight sources the verb chosen is 'to say,' while the other three verbs are 'to issue,' 'to brief' and 'to call.' As seen before, 'to say' is a verb which connotes the actor as having power and legitimacy, but at the same time as disengaged from the event, neutral, not emotionally involved. The verbs 'to issue,' 'to brief' and 'to call' carry an even more authoritative connotation (Caldas-Coulthard 1997). Finally, after the eight official sources, the opponents are allowed a reply. Anyway, the opponents do not 'say,' as other actors generally did, neither they 'issue,' 'brief' nor 'call,' but they 'deny' responsibility regarding criminal actions:

"Pheu Thai Party deputy leader Plodprasop Suraswadi yesterday denied his party and its ally, the UDD, were involved in any way in the grenade attacks."

The verbal choice hides a hidden judgment. In quoting the opinion of the other actors, the author informed us that they 'said' something or, in three occasions, 'issued,' 'briefed' and 'called for.' But in quoting the last actor, an opposition politician, suddenly the author chooses the verb 'to deny.' In this sentence, verbs like 'to say,' 'to tell,' 'to announce,' 'to inform,' or 'to declare' were perfectly usable. What it is implied, then, it's that the actor does not have the moral standing for 'saying,' is not capable of 'explaining,' or does not have the composed neutrality for 'informing,' 'telling' or 'announcing.' The grammatical operations described above had the result of giving legitimacy to the establishment bloc while delegitimizing the anti-establishment actors.

Another operation employed to delegitimize the anti-establishment camp was to closely interrelated Thaksin and the red shirts to violence – whether it was some marginal mysterious violent episode or only the threat of possible future violence. Although in this pre-demonstration phase some red shirts’ declarations of peacefulness found their space in the articles published by the two print media, yet the main message focused on the threat of violence caused by their ‘restlessness.’ For example, at page 3 of the BP, the March 1st issue, there was an article that, under the caption “ruling aftermath” and the headline “Grenade attack spurs warning” (BP. 1 March 2010), argued that the case of a branch of Bangkok Bank in the capital attacked by a grenade blast was to be linked to the political tension in the country, i.e. the red shirt stance against the government, which itself was to be linked largely to the whims of a single person - Thaksin. Here the frame is evident: the threat of violence is linked to Thaksin through the red shirts. In other words, it is suggested that the red shirt mob is the criminal hand of Thaksin. No proof is given, except for the opinions of government and police sources, presented with the usual aura of authority. In addition, despite the headline, in the article the attack takes only a secondary place, acting as a veritable background of fear to underpin and reinforce the opinions of the establishment actors. Significantly, the piece does not even open with a description or an analysis of the attack, but merely by presenting the government’s position and (re)actions. The following is the opening sentence of the article:

“The government stepped up security following two grenade blasts in the capital on Saturday night and warned there could be more attacks before the massed red shirt rally on March 14.”

In the above sentence, the actor is the government, and the action is to ‘step up security.’ In other words, we are informed that the government did a certain action (‘stepped up security’) to preserve law, order and safety (presumably for ‘us,’ for the ‘Thai people’ or for the readers). Indirectly, the author is communicating that even before the attack there was a problem of security, which the government was already dealing with. Now, after the blasts, the government increased its action. Hence the author removes every possible responsibility from the government (and the police): there was no omission. In addition, he describes the government as having a clear goal - ‘to step up security’ – and thus portrays it as being the agent of a positive action. Anyway, we can argue that ‘to step up security’ is an abstraction, as it tells us little or none about what the government actually did. By using the words ‘the government stepped up security’ we are given the impression that ‘the government’ is actually doing something good for security, but what is that? Did the government install more cameras on the facades of building hosting banks in order to control them better against

eventual further attacks? Did it appoint more police officers to better patrol the streets? The author does not tell. As the attack took place only the day before the article, it is entirely possible that the only fact the author or the reporter really knew was that ‘a government spokesman promised that the government will try to step up security.’ Of course, such a sentence would have carried a very different meaning.

In the second part of the sentence the villain is introduced (“...there could be more attacks before the massed red shirt rally on March 14”). Although the individuals responsible of the attack have not been identified, the article presents a link between the UDD social movement and the grenade attacks. This is done by linking the government’s positive action and its warning to the planned red shirt rally, which thus acquires a negative connotation, it is at the antipodes of the government’s effort to ensure security. Interestingly enough, by choosing the word ‘mass,’ the sentence seems tailored to link the attack not just to a random red shirt sympathizer, but to the red shirts movement in general.

In the second sentence, the author presents the opinion of Abhisit:

“Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva said they [the attacks] were probably aimed at provoking political tensions following the Supreme Court ruling Friday to seize the assets of former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra. “I believe they will do it again,” Abhisit said.”

With Abhisit’s opinion, the news frame is further clarified: the pro-Thaksin red ‘mass’ is responsible of violent attacks and more violence is to come, as the villains are organizing their thugs to come down to Bangkok in scores. For the audience (i.e. the readers and the Bangkok citizens), the only hope appears to be the government, which is presented as a moderate, neutral, rational, peace-loving actor working for defending law and order. “This government doesn’t want to stand with any side. We just want peace,” Abhisit is quoted as saying.

On the very same day and on the same page 3, the right side hosted an op-ed signed by Surasak Glahan titled “Thaksin’s response fails to counter facts” (BP, 1 March 2010). The opinion piece works once again to cast Thaksin in a negative light. This is especially clear in the following sentence:

“In crying foul about the “political motivation” behind the Supreme Court ruling on seizure of 46 billion baht assets, ousted PM Thaksin Shinawatra has succeeded only in tired old emotional attacks on Thailand’s undemocratic post-coup era. He has failed to counter the truth that made the case against him possible.”

In the sentence above, verbs and nouns associated with Thaksin are chosen as to portray the actor as an immature individual, an irrational criminal which cannot be possibly taken for serious. ‘Crying foul’ is a metaphor with a descriptive verb that suggests loudness and pitch emotion (Caldas-Coulthard 1994), a choice reinforced by the nominalization of the Supreme Court’s action, which the author preferred to report as a ‘ruling’ instead of using the verb ‘to rule.’ In nominalization, i.e. when an action becomes a thing (as in ‘to rule’ which becomes a ‘ruling’), the actor is removed and thus the responsibility for the action is concealed. This gives the reader the impression that the event just happened, and that the outcome could have been hardly a different one, as if it was in the nature of things (Machir and Mayr 2012: 139-144). In this case, if we get the impression that the ‘ruling’ was ‘natural’ and no other result was possible, then the action of ‘crying foul’ against it appears even more irrational and childish. All this is stated directly in the second part of the sentence, when the author informs the reader that Thaksin “has succeeded only in tired old emotional attacks.”

If all this was not enough, at page 7 of the same issue the BP hosted one more opinion piece on the Thaksin’s case (“*Thaksin’s “poetic justice” is not over yet,*” BP, March 1st, 2012), where former BP editor Veera Prateepchaikul argues straightly that “the court has done a great job and justice was served.” Moving to the analysis of the UDD “planned mass protest in Bangkok,” Veera points out that:

All political activities which are meant to have the ultimate goal of overthrowing the government are acceptable so long as they are within the limits of the law and, above all, not meant *for the sake of just one person*” (italics added).

With these words, placed at the end of an article on Thaksin’s sentence, what is suggested, once again, is that the UDD can be seen not much as a socio-political movement with its own platform, grievances, and proposals, but rather as a mob raised and maneuvered by “just one person” for his own personal motivations.

The frame constructed by TN was rather similar to the BP. As in BP, also TN over relied on quotations from the establishment and interviews with individuals from government, army, judiciary or big business. Especially TN used to represent the red shirt social movement through the eyes of such elite’s social actors. In addition, being TN a business newspaper, economic factors received a stronger emphasis. Consequently, TN produced several articles focusing on the economic consequences of the state of tension in the country. The argument was that the tension which was expected to mount with the coming

protest would have had a negative impact for the national economy. With a conspicuous number of pieces stressing this point, TN suggested that the planned protest event was to be considered as a hazard for the economy, and consequently protesters were to be seen as a danger for the Nation. In order to emphasize this point, TN used the opinions of several economic experts and businessmen. As an example, in an interview published by TN on March 1, Witawat Jayapani, president of the Advertising Association of Thailand (AAT), said:

"The point is whether the Red Shirts turn violent or not. If unrest happens, the country will be worse off... Under the negative scenario, political unrest, would see businesses delay investments in brand communications and in launching related businesses. Many advertising budgets will be frozen" (TN. *"Political uncertainty makes forecast difficult."* (TN. March 1st, 2010).

Apart from business issues, TN used quotations from similar elite individuals also on political matters. As an example, the same day as the above interview, TN published another interview with Kaewsan Atibhodi, a member of the Assets Examination Committee, titled *"Court decision must be respected: Kaewsan"* (TN, March 1st, 2012). In discussing the 76 billion baht assets seizure case against former PM Thaksin Shinawatra, Kaewsan first argued that he somehow disagreed with the judges because he would have seized "the entire 'cow'," i.e. all Thaksin's assets and not just a part. Anyway, then the man states that "the court made a very good ruling with good details," and afterward that, regardless from his or other people's opinions, one must accept and respect the Court's decision: "I must give my full respect to the judges with my heart." Finally, after having defined "most ridiculous" an eventual appeal to the Supreme Court, Kaewsan enters into a more political discussion:

"The people who may like Thaksin but still have a conscience should change their stance after hearing the ruling... Thaksin will be further isolated... They [the reds or supporters of the former PM] are made up of many groups and their leader is overseas. They lack a clear-cut way to unite the groups and move them in the same direction. So, they won't have enough masses to mobilize unless they use more extreme measures to lead their supporters on..."

So, do you believe the red-shirt movement has lost its strength?

Yes. From now on, the roads will be more peaceful..."

The interview works to reinforce the frame which we have already delineated above, as Thaksin is portrayed in negative terms ("people who may like Thaksin but still have a conscience should change their stance... Thaksin will be further isolated..."), he is described as the boss of the red shirt movement ("...their leader is overseas"), and the red shirts are linked to violence ("the roads will be more peaceful..."). Publishing stories like this one,

filled with quotations or long interviews of Bangkok-based upper-class pro-establishment individuals on the red shirt movement, whereas red shirt protesters were not given any voice, TN positioned itself as a partisan political actor.

It is also true that a number of op-eds, columns and other opinion pieces presented a greater variety of perspectives. For instance, in an opinion piece by Achara Ashayagachat titled “*Ruling grants red shirts chance to move on*” (BP, March 2nd, 2010), the author argues that,

“red shirts now have to live their ideology and try to distance themselves from Thaksin’s influence to prove their mission is to truly bring about democracy and social justice.”

At the same time, the author also warns:

“But it is not only self-improvement that will set the tone for the red shirts’ future but also how society and the authorities react to the movement. To avoid any further violence, there must be adequate political space in Thai society for different groups with their different ideologies.”

Achara’s words partly counter the main frame otherwise proposed by both BP and TN in the way that the author does not propose the typical, simplistic binary division between dangerous red shirts troublemakers and a neutral establishment whose work is aimed at preserving peace and order. On the contrary, Achara states that the responsibility of avoiding violence rests on both the red shirts and ‘society and the authorities.’ Anyway, such opinions remained a minority. In fact, in the issue hosting Achara’s piece, BP presented a wider range of pieces in line with the dominant frame. For example, a few articles at page 3 and a commentary by Atiya Achakulwisut at page 9 of the same BP issue dealt again with Thaksin’s sentence, but mostly by criticizing the former prime minister for mixing politics and business and by suggesting a link between Thaksin and the threat of violence. The same did the BP’s editorial on March 2nd. Carrying the headline “*Nation being kept on edge*,” the editorial worked to reinforce the main news frame. In the article, Thaksin and the red shirts are once again portrayed as irresponsible social actors who threaten shared values and fight against responsible social actors: “...reasonable people accept the rule of law as society’s gold standard,” the editorial reads. In addition, the author suggests once again a link between the grenade attacks, the whole red shirts movement, and the Nation’s “terrible threat”:

“It is not entirely clear that [the attacks] are directly tied to the Thaksin legal decision and coming political demonstrations... it appears that dark forces are at work to challenge the government and security forces... Thaksin has to take a large responsibility for the unease... The government and the country must never give in to the violent and cowardly forces behind recent grenades and

bombs explosions in Bangkok. Authorities must tackle this terrible threat to public safety head-on.”

The simplistic binary opposition between bad anti-establishment forces and good establishment bloc is proposed again when the author states that “dark forces are at work to challenge the government and security forces.” Although the author acknowledges that there are no proofs linking the attacks to either Thaksin’s judicial sentence or the red shirts, yet a few lines later the ousted prime minister is accused of having “large responsibility for the unease.” The attack against a bank had happened two days before and did not injure anybody, yet the editorial considers it a “terrible threat to public safety” which “[a]uthorities must tackle... head-on.” The editorial not-too-subtle suggestion is that the dangerous “dark forces” which the “authorities must tackle” with all possible means are to be found within Thaksin’s UDD supporters.

At times, a single issue of the BP hosted two op-eds proposing different perspectives on the red shirt issue. For example, on March 5th at page 11 the BP hosted two pieces signed respectively by former Thai Rak Thai member Suranand Vejjajiva and Abhisit’s Minister of Finance Korn Chatikavanj.

Suranand’s piece “*Time to let the citizens decide*” (BP, March 5th, 2010) articulated UDD’s fundamental demand by arguing that PM Abhisit should dissolve the House of Representatives and “let the people decide who they want in government and what issue they want to address.” With his arguments, Suranand legitimated the UDD demands as reasonable and worth of being discusses. But we shall analyze more in-depth the second op-ed. In his piece Korn, after presenting his opinion on Thaksin’s verdict, widens his objective and deals with nothing less than politics, justice and democracy. Interestingly enough, the author calls for the people to understand and accept that in Thailand “justice” is routinely brought by the military through undemocratic coup d’états. The op-ed reads:

“...if there not had been a coup, would justice have prevailed? And why can’t Thai society not achieve justice without having to rely on coup-makers initiating the process? Does this mean that sometimes “undemocratic” actors place more emphasis on truth and justice than democratic ones? Maybe it is because the majority of Thais do not sufficiently care about truth and justice.”

Korn’s rationale assumes that in Thailand, for some unexplained reasons, justice can be brought only by undemocratic actors and acts, i.e. the army and the military coups. Korn does not make clear his definition of “justice,” not even how and why military coups are supposed to bring “justice.” One may argue that there is very little “justice” when an extra-

democratic actor as the army uses its weapons to oust a democratically elected Cabinet, dissolve the parliament, revoke the Constitution and censor the media. Yet Korn seems to assume the opposite, although he does not explain why. According to Fairclough (1989), when in a text we encounter such abstractions, we can take them as a clue that there is some ideological manipulation. In fact, the author puts the word “undemocratic” among brackets, somehow implying that he may not agree that a military coup d’état against a democratic government is an ‘undemocratic’ action. On top of this, it is worth to report another interesting part of Korn’s opinion piece:

“Perhaps, therefore, only the wealthy have the time and inclination to ponder on matters such as justice while the poor, who have to struggle to feed families, do not have that luxury. And when the majority is made up of poor people and the majority voice is what counts in a democracy, the resounding answer is seemingly “We don’t care.””

Here the author takes note of the involvement in politics of “poor people,” a category which, according to Korn, ‘doesn’t care’ of justice. One would suppose that it is the unprivileged, those who experience injustice in their daily life and ‘have nothing to lose but their chains,’ who can better understand the lack of justice in society, and thus be more willing to demand or struggle for social justice; yet Korn appears to embrace the opposite opinion. The reason, the author suggests, is that the poor “have to struggle to feed families, do not have that luxury [of pondering on matters such as justice].” On the contrary, it is “the wealthy,” according to Korn, that have “time and inclination to ponder on matters such as justice.” Korn’s not-so-hidden classist conclusion is that Thai citizens who are not wealthy should be somehow considered an inferior category of citizens, as they are too busy in basic natural activities such as trying to “feed families.”

Korn’s opinion, far from being original, is the argument of those mostly Bangkok-based middle and upper class individuals who believe that the majority of their fellow citizens is simply not ready for (real) democracy. They see their poorer countrymen, especially those in rural areas, as ignorant folk only capable of selling their vote to the highest bidder. Because of these circumstances, the argument goes, those who win the elections do so only by buying poor people’s votes, and thus they will run the country for the good of their own pockets at the expense of the national interest. As General Sonthi Boonyarataglin said in an interview shortly after leading the 2006 military coup d’état:

“I suspect many Thais still lack a proper understanding of democracy. The people have to understand their rights and their duties. Some have yet to learn about discipline... I think it is important to educate the people about true democratic rule” (*Straits Times*, October 27th, 2006).

Therefore, Korn, Sonthi and the likes think that Bangkok enlightened, moral and well-educated elite possesses a sort of moral duty to prevent the country from falling in the hands of ‘bad people.’ In other words, Korn, an Oxford graduate, suggested that in spite of what the majority of Thai citizens think or vote for, power should rest on the hands of those like himself - a conclusion which sounds all but democratic.

The belief that the support of a considerable part of Thailand’s poor for Thaksin Shinawatra confirms the argument that poor people lack moral and political understanding has considerable appeal to the Bangkok middle and upper class. The argument has its roots in the so-called ‘Thai-style democracy,’ an ersatz concept which shares similarities with the ‘Asian-style democracy’ and is nothing else than an authoritarian wolf in sheep’s clothing (Hewison and Kengkij 2010; Ferrara 2011). In fact, the concept of ‘Thai-style democracy’ was first developed to legitimize the dictatorship of Sarit Thannarat (1957-1961), a man who took power after not one but two coup d’etats, and then proceeded rapidly to dissolve the parliament, abolish the Constitution, disband political parties, enforce tight censorship on the media, and jail political dissidents (XXXX). The regime’s intellectual lackeys legitimated Sarit’s highly authoritarian regime through an appeal to the elements of Thainess and ‘Thai-style democracy.’

As seen in the chapter 4, Thainess is a highly hierarchical ideology, constructed by the elites to maintain their dominance over the subjected people. On top of this, Thainess is characterized by a not-too-subtle contempt for the poor. Saichol (2000: 17) explains that the propagandists of the ideology of Thainess “usually emphasized the importance of “*rut hi sung tam*” [know-your-place] behavior.” The know-your-place behavior was justified using religion, especially through the belief in Buddhist laws of *karma*, which supposedly promotes virtuous persons and demote evil ones. Such belief was elevated to be an important trait of Thainess in order to have the people accept hierarchical social relationships. During the five decades following the Sarit regime, the two concepts of Thainess and Thai-style democracy underpinned Thailand’s political and economic development, and today are still supported by sections of the Thai society. Consequently, if the ideology buried in Korn’s opinion piece is unlocked, then it is understandable how the author suggested that a military coup d’état against a democratic government brought “justice” and that only “the wealthy” can be able to cherish “justice.” Such contempt against the poor was (and is) a central ideological ingredient of pro-establishment forces such as the ‘Democrat Party’ and the yellow shirted PAD, an

hyper-royalist movement which proposed to form a parliament where only 30% of MPs would be democratically elected.

Anyway, to say that Thailand's poor lack moral and political understanding, are ignorant, bought off, and so on and so forth, is academically problematic at best. Just to point to a different perspective, it would be enough to cite Australian National University fellow Andrew Walker, who has studied and written on Thailand's rural voting. Walker (2008) synthesized the Korn-like arguments as follows:

“Political commentators have regularly asserted that the Thai populace, and especially the rural populace, lacks the basic characteristics essential for a modern democratic citizenry. Accounts of the deficiencies of the voting population often focus on three key problems. First, uneducated rural voters are parochial and have little interest in policy issues. Lacking a well-developed sense of national interest they vote for candidates who can deliver immediate benefits. Secondly, given their poverty and lack of sophistication they are readily swayed by the power of money. Vote buying is said to be endemic. Cash distributed by candidates, through networks of local canvassers, plays a key role in securing voter loyalty. And, thirdly, rural electoral mobilisation is achieved via hierarchical ties of patronage whereby local influential figures can deliver blocks of rural votes to their political masters.”

On contrast to the above assertions, Walker (2008) drew from his analysis of Baan Tiam village, an hour's drive from Chiang Mai, to show how rural people may not have a deep grasp of the intricacies of politics, but they are more than capable of making a decision about which party they feel will do the most to improve their lives:

“From the perspective of Baan Tiam's rural constitution, the Thaksin government was elected because a majority of voters considered that TRT candidates and policies best matched their values for political leadership. Often the match was imperfect but, on balance, TRT was the most attractive alternative on offer. This electoral decision was swept away in a wave of urban protest that culminated in the sabotaged election of April 2006 and the coup of September 2006. Coup supporters and constitutional alchemists have sought to de-legitimise Thaksin's electoral support by alleging that it is based on the financially fuelled mobilisation of an easily led and ill-informed rural mass. This erasure of the everyday political values contained in the rural constitution represents a much more fundamental threat to Thailand's democracy than the tearing up of the 1997 charter.”

In other words, Walker (2008) argues that Thaksin's party and government made the effort to listen to what rural voters needed and asked, and then effectively implemented policies to match those requests. The result was improving the voters' lives. No doubt rural people considered this a positive politico-economical arrangement. Consequently, Walker implies that rural voters' decision to support Thaksin, his party and his government was not a sign of stupidity or 'lack of time,' but a rational political behavior.

The anti-rural prejudices have also been countered by prominent Thai intellectual Thongchai Winichakul, professor of Southeast Asian history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The scholar wrote:

“The blame usually falls on the less educated and poor voters, mostly in rural areas, who allegedly sell their votes in exchange for short-term and petty material benefits. They lack the proper understanding of democracy, it is said, and lack good morals because they are ignorant and uninformed due to their lack of education. They are held to be partly responsible for the failure of democracy. Most of the education campaigns against vote-buying target the rural population and the urban poor. They are held to be infected by the disease, while the urban educated middle class are less so or not infected at all. The latter are champions of democracy whose task is to clean up politics. Certainly, the discourse on vote-buying is not groundless, and there are people who care for nothing but petty material gains. But the discourse is a gross generalisation based on the urban middle-class bias against the provincial-based electoral majority” (Thongchai 2008: 25).

Thongchai (2008: 27) does not just explain that “rural citizens are more or less informed and conscious of their interests like their urban counterparts,” but he goes as far as arguing that the assumption of superiority by the Bangkok middle and upper classes is rather a sign of their ignorance:

“The urban middle class, in general, are uninformed and ignorant; their bias robs them of the opportunity to learn about their rural counterparts.”

Even more straightly, Chang Noi once wrote (TN, September 1st, 2008):

“In truth, the problem is not that upcountry voters don’t know how to use their vote, and that the result is distorted by patronage and vote-buying. The problem is that they have learnt to use the vote only too well.”

Regardless of this, what it matters for this research is that opinions such as the one articulated by Finance Minister and top-Democrat Party member Korn Chatikavanj in the above analyzed op-ed were not an exception, but they were rather a part of the basic ideological assumptions which sustained the BP and TN news frame during their coverage of the red shirt protest.

6.1.2 “UDD rural hordes head for the capital”

As protest day approached, rumors and tensions kept rising. On March 8th, TN reported that, according to the government, 6,000 assault rifles and explosives had been stolen from an army battalion and might have been “on their way to Bangkok” (“*Stolen arms cache fuels fears: Weapons believed headed for Bangkok*”. BP, March 8th, 2010). UDD leader

Natthawut Saikua voiced suspicion that the Army had staged the theft in order to have a pretext pin to blame demonstrators for any violence (“*Weapons theft may be an 'inside job'*”. TN. March 8th, 2010). On March 9th, TN warned of that “[a]uthorities in Bangkok began bracing yesterday for possible grenade attacks in many areas of the city during a rally by the red shirts” (“*Fears of grenade attacks at key sites*”. TN. March 9th, 2010). According to PM Abhisit, amongst the protesters heading for Bangkok there were not less than 2,000 “well-trained hardliners” and he claimed to have received intelligence that there was a terrorist bombing threat ready to take place on March 14th. The article added that,

“[a]n [anonymous] Assumption University student said they got messages via forwarded emails and mobile phone SMS telling them to stock up on food and to withdraw money from banks.”

Such news elements gave the impression that demonstrators coming from upcountry were a sort of apocalyptic natural disaster, say a flood or a tsunami. To cope with such challenge, the very same day, March 9th, the government decreed the Internal Security Act (ISA) from 11 to 23 March. The Act “effectively hands control over to the military, with the right to impose curfews, set up checkpoints and restrict the movements of demonstrators.” PM Abhisit and Deputy PM Suthep announced that they were moving into an Army safe house at the Peace-keeping Operations Command during the duration of the ISA, while a 50,000-strong security force was deployed in Bangkok. On March 12th, five bombs exploded in Surat Thani, a Democrat Party stronghold in the south of Thailand. Nobody was injured or killed and it was not clear who was behind the bombings. No arrests were made (“*Five bombings in Surat Thani*”. BP. March 12th, 2010). On the same day, the BP covered a UDD rally in Nonthaburi which took place the day before by stressing the red shirts’ supposed lack of ‘sophistication’ in comparison with a pro-establishment group:

“Unlike the more sophisticated yellow-shirt demonstrators, their rivals, the red-shirts only repeated familiar scripts that they already knew by heart. The speakers did not present listeners with sophisticated arguments, satisfying themselves with defaming Privy Council president Gen Prem Tinsulanond and accusing him of being behind Thailand’s demise since the September 2006 coup and proclaiming that Abhisit Vejjajiva was merely heading Prem’s proxy administration...” (BP. “*Red turn up in full force.*” March 12th, 2010).

Similarly, TN tended to depict the UDD sympathizers as simpleton supporters of Thaksin. In TN’s narrative, the Thaksin frame continued to have a more central importance compared to the BP. As already said, TN dedicated the headlines of both the March 12th and March 13th front pages to Thaksin (see photos 4 and 5). In this way, the complexity of the protest event was reduced to a personalization frame, tailored around the figure of the

Recognized Enemy. Of course, this does not mean to say that, on TN, the personalization frame overcame the fear frame. On the contrary, the two frames coexisted. As an example, on the March 13th front page the headline and the above the fold piece focused on Thaksin but, at the same time, they uphold the news frame by reproducing the link between Thaksin, the UDD and violence, as it is evident in the following lines:

Thaksin... has to do whatever it takes to make sure the red rally creates a big impact at least in terms of numbers. This *desperate situation has prompted fears* that if the red shirts are unable to form a mass big enough, the chances of making a *“statement through violence”* might increase. (Tulsathit Taptim.. *“Thaksin’s last chance.”* TN. March 13th, 2010. Italics added).

Slightly differently, in the days before the beginning of the UDD mass rally, BP stressed less the Thaksin frame and left a major space to the fear frame. On March 13th, the day before the rally, the BP front page carried the headline *“Red rage rising”* (BP. March 13th, 2010) on a photo of Phahon Yothin Road congested in a traffic jam amidst red shirt demonstrators (see photo XXX). Below, three subheads:

- 1 *“Jaturporn say clash is unavoidable”*
- 2 *“Abhisit say “hopeful” for peaceful protest”*
- 3 *“UDD rural hordes head for the capital.”*

The first two subheads worked to reinforce the news frame which, as discussed above, tended to present the political crisis in a simplistic binary dialectic where the anti-establishment forces were the irrational, violent, ‘negative’ pole, whereas the establishment was the rational, peaceful and ‘positive’ pole. This is suggested by including the unfavorable word “clash” into the subhead dedicated to UDD co-leader Jatuporn, while in contrast for the establishment’s subhead BP was selected the favorable word “hopeful.” Such suggestion was then supported by the third subhead - “UDD rural hordes head for the capital” – where the protesters were represented as “rural hordes.”

In zoology the word ‘horde’ denotes a large moving mass of animals. In social science, anthropology and ethnology, ‘horde’ is generally used to describe people living in nomadic societies. In everyday English, the noun appears more apt to indicate some sort of

half-civilized mob instead than citizens who join a demonstration. Basically, it is hardly arguable that the word is not indented to imply a negative judgment about the protesters. The whole front page conveys the image of a Bangkok seriously endangered (“clash is unavoidable”) by the “red rage” rising from the emotionally unstable, half-civilized “rural hordes head[ing] for the capital.” The only hope, once again, is represented by the emotionally stable, fully-civilized, sophisticated and peaceful PM Abhisit and by the government he leads and the institutions he represents.

If we place March 13th BP front page in context with the March 9th front page of the same newspaper, the frame gets further clarified. That day the BP, as well as TN (see photos 2 and 3), presented a photo above the fold showing PM Abhisit reporting to the King. The photo caption on the BP read:

“Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva briefed His Majesty the King on his decision to apply the Internal Security Act to metro Bangkok and assign 6,000 soldiers to duty.”

The photo caption on TN read:

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva is granted an audience with His Majesty the King at Siriraj Hospital yesterday to report on the political situation.

due to one of the strictest *lèse-majesté* laws in the world (Streckfuss 2011), it is arguable that by publishing on the front page the image the BP furnished a boost of legitimacy to PM Abhisit and to his decision to apply the ISA.

Finally, after weeks of government and mainstream media's 'strategy of tension,' on Sunday, March 14th, the largest demonstration in Thai history took place in Bangkok. It was peaceful ("*In Convoys of Red, Rural Masses Stage Historic Protest*". IPS. March 14th, 2010).

6.2 Beginning of the Protest: March 14th rally and aftermath

In the last subchapter we have seen that, before the beginning of the protest, the BP and TN news frame focused on the following aspects. First, Thailand's socio-political issues were generally reduced to a 'personality' matter revolving around ousted PM Thaksin Shinawatra, a man who had been already elevated to the status of National Enemy since at least the years 2005-2006 (see chapter 4). Secondly, it was affirmed or implied that protesters were not much more than bought off thugs at the service of Thaksin. Thirdly, the media focused on the threat of violence associated with the planned demonstration.

The anti-government protest was organized by the UDD social movement to contest the legitimacy of the Abhisit government, to ask the PM resignation and fresh elections. Anyway, TN and BP news frame did not focus on the protesters' objectives and demands, and neither on the political significance of the event, let alone on the government's legitimacy. The underlying socio-economic, political and historical causes of the protest were also not analyzed.

6.2.1 The 'Red threat'

An analysis of the media coverage of the March 14th rally evidences that TN and BP did not substantially change their pre-protest news frame. The day after the demonstration of March 14th, TN and BP tried to downscale the historical and political importance of the demonstration by avoiding the central, social and political questions which were being posed

by the protest. On the other hand, although the demonstration was peaceful, in the news coverage the threat of violence remained high.

For the day of the demonstration, it is useful to present a brief comparison of the news media covering of TN and BP with that of some renowned international media. The international media represented the event of the first day of protest, March 14th, as a “massive” protest against the government to ask for the prime minister’s resignation and fresh elections. *Time* magazine titled “*Amid Massive Protests, Thai PM Won't Step Down*” (*Time*, March 15th, 2010) and reported 100,000 demonstrators and 30,000 troops. Under the headline “*Red tide: Protestors against the Thai government take to the streets again,*” *The Economist* (March 15th, 2010) wrote:

“Some 100,000 red-shirted protesters stood under a scorching sun to hear speaker after speaker denounce the current prime minister, Abhisit Vejjajiva, and the ruling elite that installed him. They called for Mr Abhisit to resign and hold fresh elections.... The current divisions are also class-based, regional and, increasingly, ideological. It will be hard to find a compromise when so much is at stake.”

Another British paper, *The Telegraph* (March 15th, 2010), titled “*Thai prime minister Abhisit Vejjajiva rejects Red Shirt ultimatum.*” The author explained:

“Abhisit Vejjajiva, the Thai prime minister, has rejected an ultimatum by tens of thousands of protesters to dissolve parliament or face further demonstrations.”

IPS news agency titled “*In Convoys of Red, Rural Masses Stage Historic Protest*” (*IPS*, March 15th, 2010) and read:

“...an estimated 80,000 anti-government protesters from the northern and north-eastern belts of Thailand had been ferried in to the capital in a scene never witnessed since the country became a constitutional monarchy in 1932, say analysts, who described it as “phenomenal” and “a historic moment.””

In stark difference, the coverage of the event produced by TN and BP did not emphasize the exceptionality of the event in terms of popular participation, historical importance or political significance. According to the two Thai print media, no “massive,” “phenomenal” or “historic” protest took place. The two media outlets failed also to give a fair coverage to the reason why the “Red tide” swept Bangkok.

The BP front page on March 15th presented a photo of a boat on the Chao Phraya River filled with red shirt protesters. The front page carried the head “*UDD sets noon deadline*” with, below, three subheads: “*Military puts crowd number at 100,000*” – “*Red*

threaten to march on military base” – “*PM Abhisit refuses to quit, rejects coup talk.*” On top, the front page presented two quotations, one from PM Abhisit Vejjajiva and the other from UDD co-leader Jatuporn Prompan. Abhisit was reported as saying:

“House dissolution or the prime minister’s resignation are possible in the democratic system. But it must be based on rationale. And my reasoning is in the national interest.”

Jatuporn was reported as saying:

“If there is one gunshot there, 100 Abhisits, 100 Preams and 100 Prayuths will not be able to control the situation any more.”

The way the BP selected and presented the pieces of information and the quotations on the front page are revealing of the news frame which had been already constructed in the pre-protest phase (see 5.2.1). After having assessed that the “crowd” numbered 100,000, the dangerous nature of the protesters is once again suggested in the second subhead: “*Red threaten to march on military base.*” Here the author employed the verb ‘to threaten’ in order to express the UDD plan to demonstrate in front of an army base. In this case, it can be argued that the verb seems to point to an overemphasis, an overlexication or an excessive description of the action. It is so because the sentence would be grammatically correct even without the verb ‘to threat,’ as follows: ‘Red to march on military base.’ Otherwise, different verbs could have been employed, as for instance ‘to plan’. Therefore, from a critical discourse analysis perspective, the author seems to be anxious of suggesting the reader that the march is to be interpreted as a ‘threat,’ and thus it is given a negative connotation.

The two quotations are also powerful. Once again the establishment, here represented by PM Abhisit, is portrayed as the agent of actions only when they are “based on rationale” and are “in the national interest.” On the contrary, the anti-establishment side, here represented by UDD co-leader Jatuporn, is not portrayed as an agent characterized by rationality or altruism – in fact, his reasons are not reported. More specifically, for the establishment the BP selected a quotation which explains why Abhisit should not resign, by suggesting that this is not a selfish action but it is rather for the common good (“in the national interest”). On contrast, for the anti-establishment the BP did not report a quotation explaining why Abhisit *should* resign and why this too could be positive for “the national interest,” as in fact it was being argued by the anti-government forces. The point of the March 14th protest was just about this: asking Abhisit to resign. Instead, the BP once again refused to give importance to such central issue by avoiding to report the reasons of those who asked for

Abhisit's resignation, preferring instead to select an apparently provoking quotation involving the threat of violence ("...one gunshot..."). In short, selecting those two subheads, the BP suggested that rationality and common interest rested on the government, while the threat of violence came from the opponent side.

On such a historical day, March 14th, the BP editorial did not deal with the protest, but on the same page 10 a cartoon represented a Democracy Monument crowded with red shirt demonstrators and, below, the same place emptied from demonstrators but filled with trash. A Bangkok Municipal Authority's street sweeper with a broom was looking at the mess with two exclamation marks on the top of his head. Thus, the cartoon reduced the significance of the UDD demonstration to a mere issue of street littering. The protesters were only able to produce a massive amount of trash. Full stop. Hence the image suggested a dose of unreasonable disorder and confusion as a possible connotation of the protest.

Just like the BP, also TN haplessly missed the main political issue, offering an article about the problem of street traffic flows in Bangkok caused by the demonstration ("*It's business as usual for offices; police hope for smooth traffic flow.*" TN. March 15th, 2010) and a story centered on the issue of how the protest was a negative thing because it damaged national economy, with as main course the opinion of the Korn Chatikavanij, prominent co-leader of the Democrat Party and Minister of Economy ("*Prolonged political unrest could hurt Thai economic recovery.*" TN. March 15th, 2010). The newspaper published also a letter carrying the headline "*Democrats' message isn't getting through*" which suggested that the protest was caused by a mere lack of communication between the Democratic Party and the citizens (TN. March 15th, 2010).

After the March 14th rally, the protesters did not leave the streets. Instead, they established themselves in a protest camp located in the area of Phan Fa Bridge, where the central stage was located. The area is adjacent to Government House. Apart from daily speeches from the main stage at Phan Fa Bridge, the protesters planned and carried out a series of actions and events to widen the protest and pressure the government:

"They began driving long protest convoys of Red Shirt supporters through different parts of Bangkok, disrupting traffic but also demonstrating the support they enjoyed among ordinary Bangkok residents, thousands of whom came out to cheer the passing vehicles. Adopting a tactic from the earlier PAD protests, they also attempted to disrupt the functioning of government, descending in thousands on the 11th Infantry Division army base where Abhisit had attempted to organize an alternative seat of government away from the surrounded Government House" (HRW 2011: 47-48).

The March 15th demonstration in front of 11th Infantry Division army base, where most top army bosses are housed and where PM Abhisit and other members of the cabinet were staying for security reasons, became the main issue in the pages of both TN and BP the following day. On March 16th, the BP front page presents a photo with a smiling Abhisit boarding a helicopter. The caption reads:

“Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva boards a helicopter with cabinet ministers yesterday to leave the 11th Infantry Regiment as red shirts march towards the army camp in Bang Khen district. The Black Hawk later took him to the air force headquarters before he returned to the regiment in the early evening by car.”

The article in the front page carries the headline “*Abhisit dismisses call to dissolve House*” (BP, March 16th, 2010) and the subhead “*Red shirts turn up heat in capital and provinces.*” Following are reported substantial extracts from the article:

“The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) is threatening to splash 1,000 litres of the red shirts’ blood on the entrances of the Government House to protest against the administration... Pol Maj Gen Prawut Thawornsiri, spokesman for the operations centre of the Royal Thai Police, said police had stepped up security for government offices to the highest levels following the M79 grenade attacks at the 1st Infantry Regiment on Vahavadi Rangsit Road yesterday.

Thaksin ... urged his supporters... to be ready to show their power at provincial halls. ...concern about more demonstrations upcountry prompted the Interior Ministry yesterday to order security at all government offices to be beefed up, especially at provincial halls.

Mr Abhisit was given a boost by leaders of all coalition parties who confirmed with him in talks on Sunday night that a House dissolution was not the way to help a country get through its political crisis, a source said. But Thaksin last night urged Banharn Silpa-archa, Newin Chidchob, Suwat Liptapanlop and Phinij Jarusonbat to desert the Democrat Party-led government, saying they were supporting a “falling tree.”

As Mr Abhisit was holding his news conference at the 11th Infantry Regiment in Bang Kheng district yesterday morning to say he would not dissolve the House, red shirt demonstrators were marching from the main protest site on Ratchadamnoen Avenue to the regiment.

But the prime minister avoided confrontation with the red shirts by flying out on a Black Hawk helicopter to stay at the air force base in Don Muang. An army source said Mr Suthep suggested Mr Abhisit to leave the regiment to ease the mounting pressure from the protesters and prevent them from settling in at the regiment.

The army also avoided confrontation with the protesters by broadcasting friendly messages on loudspeakers. Suracha Prapolsi of the psychological operations unit was one of the officers in charge of the task to calm the red shirts anger. To ease the atmosphere, the military played music, mostly composed by the king, along with songs of unity. Some red protesters clapped when they heard Klai Rung, one of the tunes composed by His Majesty.

In the article the author presents the PM’s decision to reject the protesters’ demand for resignation, as well as the protesters’ further moves. From the quantitative table sheet analysis (see Table 3) we drew a number of important data. First, regarding the sources and

spokespersons being quoted or cited, we can notice a disproportion of establishment sources against their opponents. The story includes as much as thirteen establishment actors being quoted or cited, namely Pol Maj Gen Prawut Thawornsiri, the Interior Ministry, the police, PM Abhisit, four leaders of the coalition parties (Banharn Silpa-archa, Newin Chidchob, Suwat Liptapanlop and Phinij Jarusonbat), an army source, deputy PM Suthep, the army, and Suracha Prapolsi (an officer of the psychological operations unit). In contrast, only three opponent's actors appear in the piece: Thaksin, the UDD and the red shirt demonstrators. On top of this, it is important to notice that in the establishment camp there are eight actual persons named: Prawut Thawornsiri, Abhisit, Suthep, Banharn Silpa-archa, Newin Chidchob, Suwat Liptapanlop Phinij Jarusonbat, and Suracha Prapolsi. On contrast, in the opposite camp only Thaksin is named. As argued by Machin and Mayr (2012: 80), “[i]t is useful to ask which kinds of participants are individualised and which are collectivised in texts, as we reveal which group is humanised.” In this case, the protest leaders are not individualised, (and neither are the tens of thousands protesters), and thus they remain a generic, indistinct group. This operation, which as we will see it was not an exception but rather the norm in TN and BP news coverage, contributed to the dehumanization of an undistinguished group of ‘rural folk.’ If on top of this we add that the only actor individualised is Thaksin, the Recognized Enemy (see chapter 4), the result is that the information allows the reader to feel empathy and understanding with the establishment actors but not with the opposite camp, where the Major Villain stands above a red ‘mob.’

An analysis of the verbs used to report the actors' statements and to represent their actions is also enlightening. The establishment is reported two times with the neutral structuring verb ‘to say.’ In addition, the other verbs – ‘to avoid’ (two times), ‘to step up,’ ‘to give,’ ‘to hold,’ ‘to confirm,’ ‘to suggest,’ ‘to be,’ ‘to play’ - work to inform the audience of a number of positive actions performed by the establishment actors: police “stepped up security,” leaders of all coalition parties “confirmed” that Abhisit shouldn't resign and ‘gave’ him a boost, “Mr Suthep suggested Mr Abhisit ... [how] to ease the mounting pressure from the protesters,” Abhisit “avoided confrontation with the red shirts,” “the army also avoided confrontation with the protesters” and finally the military “played music” in order “to ease the atmosphere.”

On contrast, the opponent camp hardly performed any ‘positive’ action. For them, the following verbs are used: ‘to urge’ (two times), ‘to say,’ ‘to threaten,’ ‘to splash,’ ‘to march,’

and ‘to clap.’ Apart from the use of the neutral ‘to say’ one time, for the rest the author informed the readers that Thaksin “urged” (two times), the UDD “is threatening” and the demonstrators “were marching.” The three verbs suggest instability, restlessness, danger; a stark contrast if compared to the mature and smooth actions of the establishment as seen above. Only at the end, when “[t]o ease the atmosphere, the military played music, mostly composed by the king, along with songs of unity,” the protesters, or better, only “some red protesters,” revealed to possess a minimum amount of reason, which was awakened by the artistic skills of His Majesty the King.

The whole article appears to be structured in order to suggest an ingroup-outgroup polarization, with the typical ingroup favoring and outgroup derogation, i.e. the association of Our group with good things and Their group with bad things. This is done by over filling the story with thirteen establishment actors versus only three opponents. Second, it is done by nominalising eight establishment actors versus only one anti-establishment – Thaksin - who moreover had been already elevated to Major Villain as seen in chapter 4. Third, it is done by focusing on the actors’ actions instead than analyzing the objectives and causes of the protest. Fourth, it is done with the verbal choice, by presenting the establishment actors as stable, rational and non-violent, as when they ‘avoid confrontation’ with the protesters, and on contrast by suggesting the unstableness and irrationality of the protester side, which performs bizarre, confrontational and potentially violent actions for apparently no reasons, as their reasons are not reported.

As argued in section 5.2.1, the structural opposition of the contrasting concepts of ‘good establishment’ and ‘bad protesters’ constitutes the veritable pillar of TN and BP news frame of the March to May UDD protest. In this article, we are never openly told who is the ‘good’ actor and who is the ‘bad’ one, but the participants are evaluated through oppositions. According to van Dijk (1998), we have ‘ideological squaring’ when opposite classes of concepts such as ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘peaceful’ and ‘violent,’ ‘friendly’ and ‘unfriendly,’ or ‘calm’ and ‘angry,’ are overtly included in a text or they are implied through structuring concepts. In the final sentence of the article presented above, the structural opposition, implied and suggested throughout the entire text, becomes finally overt, and thus the framework is more easily unmasked:

The army also avoided confrontation with the protesters by broadcasting friendly messages on loudspeakers. Suracha Prapolsi of the psychological operations unit was one of the officers in charge of the task to calm the red shirts anger.

Here the author describes the army, just like he did with the PM before, as ‘avoiding confrontation with the protesters.’ Readers are also informed that a psychological team was employed to placate the protesters’ “anger,” but even this was not enough, and thus the army resorted to the use of “friendly messages” in the form of tunes composed by nothing less than the highest and holier institution in the Kingdom. Only then, thanks to His Majesty’s authority and musical skills, some protesters began to act in a more civilized way. This is a weapon of last resort to delegitimize the protesters by suggesting that the army is the social actor working beside or in behalf of the King, the quintessential symbol of the Nation. Therefore, with this suggested frame the demonstrators are confronting not much an ‘unelected government’ or an extra-democratic institution responsible of anti-democratic actions as the army, as the protesters argued, but the Nation itself.

In other words, if Thailand’s mainstream cultural understandings as seen in chapter 4 are taken into account, in the piece and especially in its closing sentences the author suggested that Thainess and the positive connotations attributed to this ideology rested on the establishment side, where they were defended with maturity, skills and authority by the army and the government. The defenders of Thainess were kindly offering the demonstrators to abide to the system and thus to be included again into the Thai ‘imagined community,’ or otherwise face the risk of being excluded and categorized as un-Thai, and possibly face the consequences of such utmost betrayal.

In the article, the protesters are portrayed as confrontational and angry, but one of the main issues of the story, if not the main one, is left unmentioned. There is no cue of the reason why approximately one hundred thousand citizens rallied on the streets in Bangkok to oppose the government and the army, which they perceived as defending a flawed regime and an unjust society. The author doesn’t even say why exactly the protesters were demonstrating in front of that particular army station, neither in which way they were ‘angry’ or why. The total absence of these central arguments from the text can be assumed as a cue that an ideological manipulation took place: the author selected and assembled the news elements as to suggest that the UDD ‘mob’ was attacking and disrupting law and order, as well as the core assumptions of the dominant values of Thainess; whereas the government, the army and other establishment actors were legitimized as working efficiently and as smoothly as possible to preserve law, order, moral and unity following the exemplar model of His Majesty the King.

The ideological manipulation through opposing structuring concepts invite an approach and understanding of the protest as being merely caused by the protesters' pointless intransigence. This is an oversimplification which of course ignores the history of the red shirt socio-political movement, the complexity of the reasons behind the protesters' stance and actions, as well as the multitudes of nuanced ways the protest came into being and can be possibly understood.

In sum, we are here in front of an Us-Them dialectic, where Them are negatively connoted (threatening, attacking, marching, pressuring, being angry), whereas We are associated with positive values (nationalism, responsibility, non-violence, friendliness, unity, Monarchy), positive activities (stepping up security, controlling the situation, avoiding confrontation, playing music) and positive goals (help the country, preserve law and order, protect the institutions, foster unity and harmony). These are prominent categories of the ideological schema organizing this and similar opinion articles.

Apart from the photo and the article above analyzed, the opposition 'good establishment' versus 'bad anti-establishment' is used also on the column which the BP presented on the left side of its March 16th front page. The column reported the UDD plan to stage an unconventional form of protest involving protesters donating a small quantity of blood each to be splashed on symbolic places, including the gate of the prime minister's house. It will be enough to say that the column carried the worrying headline "*UDD warns there will be blood*" (BP. March 16th, 2010) and thus, once again, among the broad range of statements, plans, and positions expressed by the UDD, BP selected and presented on the front page an element suggesting a dose of brutality, cruelty and violence associated with the anti-government camp. A quantitative content analysis of the text shows how, also in this case, the piece followed the Protest Paradigm framework by quoting a number of official sources, all of them cited to criticize the protesters' planned action, as the following:

The Public Health Ministry has warned the protesters against the possible transmission of diseases... The permanent secretary for health Praijit said the red shirts could go into shock... Red shirt protesters shrugged off...

The March 16th issue of the BP presented also a number of opinion pieces. For example, at page 4 an op-ed signed by Pradit Ruangdit ("*Abhisit and his govt must move fast to defuse crisis.*" BP. March 16th, 2010) revolves around the main news angles, i.e. the ones already established in the pre-protest phase, as seen in section 5.1.1. The text informs the

reader that:

The red shirts' demand that the House be dissolved to pave the way to a general election has fallen flat after Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva rejected their ultimatum.

To explain why the UDD request had been rejected, the author presents the official rationale and the government 'beliefs':

They [the leaders of the coalition parties] all agreed the ... UDD demands were not the way out of the political crisis. The government has dismissed the UDD demands as impractical and believes the UDD as set its sights even higher than just a House dissolution.

After that, the author presents the government's actions:

The government has done all it can to ease the tensions by facilitating the demonstrations, accepting the right to peaceful assembly, repeatedly stressing that it is not the political enemy of the demonstrators, and putting in place security measures against violence.

Here the framework is similar to the one analyzed in the front page article above. Basically, the government is the agent of a number of positive actions, in contrast with the anti-government forces and their "impractical" demands. Once having argued that the government has done "all it can to ease the tension," the piece is concluded by putting the responsibility of further developments not even on the UDD leadership but directly on Thaksin's shoulders:

Now the UDD's demands have been rejected, the ball is in Thaksin's court and he has to decide on his next move.

6.2.2 Dissonant voices within *The Nation* and *Bangkok Post*

To argue that TN and BP selected and constructed their news coverage to promote a particular understanding of the UDD protest does not mean to say that no different perspectives were presented. On the contrary, both TN and BP hosted a number of different voices. TN's most cacophonous voice was senior journalist Pravit Rojanaphruk, while in the BP different positions mostly found space in op-eds, where personalities like liberal-leaning entrepreneur Songkran Grachangnetara or Suranand Vejjajiva, who served as a Prime Minister's Office minister in Thaksin Shinawatra's government, were invited to write several times. For example, on March 16th, at page 9, BP published an op-ed signed by Songkran ("*Amazing Thailand... and its vulgarities.*" BP, March 16th, 2010) where the author expressed views which explicitly countered the dominant news frame. The author expressed the opinion

and voiced the fear that the country was sliding into nothing less than “an all-out class war”:

I believe the UDD with its “million-man-march” began as a political movement to counter the machinations of the PAD and the Democrats, but I’m afraid it has now snowballed into an all-out class war. Essentially, the war is now between the haves and have-nots.

Songkran suggested avoiding simplistic readings such as the view that all bad was spilling out from one man (Thaksin). He invited instead to try focusing on the legitimate questions which were being raised by the protest:

Instead of blaming it all on Thaksin, we should start to reflect and ask the right questions. Why have the poor chosen a morally compromised billionaire to be the leader of their movement? What have we done as a nation to cause these people from the rural provinces so much pain and suffering that they need to march on the capital to demand that their voices be heard? And have these people in the past being treated with the respect and fairness that all human beings deserve?’

Although the author did not claim to have all the answers, yet he openly criticized the attitude of those like Finance Minister Korn (see chapter 5.1.1) who were ignoring popular demands and were showing contempt towards the poor:

‘But I know that the attitude displayed by Korn Chatikavanij in his article, “Personal Reflections on the Asset Seizure,” published in the Bangkok Post is not a way forward, if reconciliation is to be achieved... as a citizen and commentator, I must admit I was disappointed with the tone of his reasoning and thought that his rhetoric was amazingly condescending with the poor and tinged with supreme arrogance, unique only to those ordained by God to be the rightful rulers of a grateful and subservient nation.’

In a partially dissimilar way, TN did not host as many op-eds countering the dominant frame as the BP did. Nevertheless, TN senior journalist Pravit Rojanaphruk produced articles on an almost daily basis which suggested an understanding of the ongoing political crisis which differed visibly from his media organization on virtually every central aspects. While most other pieces over relied on official sources and left ordinary protesters voiceless, Pravit’s articles were often reports of the ‘real life’ in the protest zones, with the average woman and man participating at the rally as main news sources, often together with a mix of official and academic voices. For example, in a piece published on March 13th (“*Rajdamnoen a sea of red as protesters set up camp.*” TN), the journalist filled the article with quotations from four ordinary protesters, with a woman expressing the following opinion:

We must keep vigilant tonight. They know more red shirts will arrive tomorrow and maybe they want to stop us tonight and create a situation to justify a clampdown.

Such an opinion, which was widely shared among the anti-establishment camp as well as among Thai and international observers, was mostly absent from both BP and TN news articles because it countered the dominant news angles.

Pravit distinguished itself also for reporting in his articles the positions of the Thai-language red shirt media, which he followed closely. For example, in a piece Pravit reported extracts from an article appeared on the pro-UDD paper Thai Red News where UDD co-leader Jaran Dittha-apichai offered advice to the anti-government activists on how to achieve victory:

First, he wrote, red shirts are on the right side of history in trying to overthrow the country's old elite. He urged red shirts to be brave and to be willing to bear with difficulty the brunt of the "historic" demonstration. Jaran also urged demonstrators not to fear the threat of suppression and to fight non-violently, as well as to be disciplined in following orders from leaders. "The duty of democratic struggle this time is right, just and lofty because it's a struggle against the elite who are the root cause of stumbling and failed democratisation." (*"Protest peacefully: red shirt media."* TN. March 13th, 2010).

This means that opinions which countered the official and mainstream version of the protest found their space on TN through the pieces signed by Pravit. By giving voice to leaders and sympathizers of a social movement which was otherwise largely delegitimized by Thailand's mainstream media, Pravit challenged the ongoing process of delegitimation and even dehumanization of the protesters. This counter-narrative was also evident by the grammar used by this journalist. Pravit's pieces were practically the only articles published by TN where favourable adjectives were associated with the protesters, as in the following headline: *"Reporter joins sociable reds on trip to PM's safe house"* (BP. March 16th, 2010). Here the protesters are portrayed in favourable terms already in the headline, where they are defined as "sociable" and their protest action becomes simply a "trip." The sympathy displayed by ordinary bystanders to the protesters was also reported:

Many people along both sides of the streets, mostly proletarians, cheered and waved at the passing red shirts. Some handed out bottles of water, while others danced or waved red handkerchiefs. "Today is the day we will show that the old elite are no longer in charge," a voice blared from a megaphone of one pickup. "Abhisit, get out!" shouted others as some passers-by also joined the chant (Pravit Rojanaphruk. *"Reporter joins sociable reds on trip to PM's safe house"* BP. March 16th, 2010).

Anyway, the reactions of bystanders with divergent views were also reported:

Not all were receptive. Earlier, as I exited the Skytrain, a mother was telling her 10-year-old daughter to learn something from the occasion. "The power of

money," she said from the elevated pedestrian bridge, referring to the strongly held belief that the rural red shirts were all being paid to protest in Bangkok by ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra, now a fugitive living abroad. "And how can they say they're not causing traffic jams?" The vehicular procession crawled along at walking pace. "And look at their symbol - red like the Khmer Rouge! Thaksin was good at the beginning but not later on," she said. "Don't wave at me," she told the crowds below, but more for her daughter to hear. "Go and die!" "Oh, why should I waste my time with you people," she mumbled to herself again. "Let's get something to eat. This is a waste of time and concentration." (Pravit Rojanaphruk. "Reporter joins sociable reds on trip to PM's safe house" BP. March 16th, 2010).

Moreover, questionable opinions of UDD sympathizers were not concealed:

a Tesco Lotus worker in a green uniform walked past with a red bandanna on her head. We heard someone shout that Abhisit had decided not to dissolve the House. "If he does not dissolve it, then *I'll burn stuff*," the Tesco Lotus lady told herself loudly as she walked by. (Pravit Rojanaphruk. "Reporter joins sociable reds on trip to PM's safe house" BP. March 16th, 2010, italics added)

Pravit wrote also analysis pieces, where experts such as academics were called to explain the political situation. For example, once Pravit interviewed Thammasat University anthropology lecturer Yukti Mukdawijitra ("*The reds are emerging active citizens, anthropologist says.*" TN. March 24th, 2010). The academic explained that it was wrong to consider the protesters just as bought-off individuals or simpletons following a charismatic leader, but he rather suggested to see them as "emerging active citizens." Following, some extracts of the article:

The lecturer also warned about Bangkokians and educated Thais persistently deluding themselves about the dynamics of the red shirts. "They see the movement as being prone to violence, while I would like to call them 'brutal peace makers' [who are calling for negotiation and peace] who should be looking for structural peace, not immediate peace," he said. He also warned peace advocates to not exacerbate the situation through discourse about the red shirts being violence prone. "Try to speak their language. Talk about justice," Yukti advised. He said it was imperative that Bangkokians and the elite stop believing the red shirts are just blind supporters of ex-PM Thaksin Shinawatra or that they had been paid to join the protest, and instead recognise that they are fighting for justice and that they are, indeed, politically conscious.

The issue of the mainstream media representation of protesters as simpleton folk and as being violent prone was particularly dear to Pravit, who wrote pieces where he openly criticized "the contempt displayed... [by] Thai mainstream media outlets... [which] has been so blatant and numerous that a tome could be compiled from it" (Pravit Rojanaphruk. "*Some attitudes towards red shirts shameful.*" TN. April 1st, 2010). In an article published on March 18th ("*Rally symbolic of a brewing class struggle.*" TN. March 18th, 2010), Pravit argued that Thailand mainstream media personalized the country's political crisis around the figure of

Thaksin Shinawatra, but this impeded them to grasp the signs of a growing socio-political malaise

The mainstream mass media has been so busy blasting Thaksin Shinawatra for being the cause of all political evil that it has failed to see the seeds of the class struggle that have been germinating since the 2006 coup...

...with or without Thaksin, there is growing recognition that the poor are oppressed and exploited, and their demands for greater socio-political and economic equality have gone unheeded by many in the mainstream mass media, which continues writing columns lambasting Thaksin. Or perhaps they simply don't want to admit what they're seeing? The level of disdain and bias among the educated middle-class and the elite, mostly in Bangkok, is appalling.

For this study, it will be particularly interesting to report Pravit's view on another central issue: violence. We have already assessed in chapter 5.1.1 that one of the most interesting facets of both TN and BP's news media coverage was how they kept emphasizing the risk of violence. As seen above, this news angle was continued also after the beginning of the protest. Clearly, the two print media were playing high the issue of violence. In an interview to the online newspaper *Prachatai.com* ("*Interview with Pravit Rojanaphruk on the day the media did not control what is right alone*". Prachatai. March 15th, 2010. Accessed at <<http://www.prachatai.com/journal/2010/03/27998>>"), Pravit tried to make sense of Thailand's mainstream media behaviour by arguing that there was an "attempt to set a clear target from the start that the red shirts have to create violence. So these people have no legitimacy." In other words, the issue of violence was being emphasized in order to delegitimize the anti-government forces.

According to Pravit, such a frame was a result of the media-politics interplay which developed since the years of the Thaksin Shinawatra government (2001-2006), the mainstream media tended to support the anti-Thaksin yellow shirted protests and the subsequent military coup d'état. In particular, the underlying reason for the media's anti-Thaksin bias, according to Pravit, was the following:

"PM Thaksin interfered with the media before the coup, [and as a result] almost all [the media] accepted, legitimized, or even praised the coup... [even if] 4 years since the coup there is no calm, the country is more divided and there is unprecedented criticism of the old elite. This is a cost that I think is likely to be very high, which the mainstream media does not accept."

For such reasons, the journalist argued, Thailand's mainstream media could now hardly change their news angle but they would rather stick on their stance also by ignoring the questions raised by the UDD social movement:

“In particular, the media does not accept the fact that every day the not insubstantial group of red shirts have many questions about double standards, especially transparency and accountability of the old elite which the red shirts call the ‘amat’. If you read the red shirt press, you see that they savage the old elite and what cannot be denied is that many of the red shirts’ questions are questions that must be answered. And it’s a pity that mainstream media pretend not to see that these questions are legitimate and should be asked and are looking for answers.”

From these lines we can see how, before any clash and eventually the violent final crackdown took place in May, Pravit already pointed out at the attempt to associate the anti-government demonstrations to violence as a way to delegitimize them and thus flush away their demands. So the journalist put it plainly that the mainstream mass media were ignoring legitimate questions posed by the protesters. In Pravit’s words:

“What I think is a tragedy is not being able to see the feelings of many poor people... So ask, hey, apart from being fed by populism and receiving money or patronage, are there any other reasons in society that make these people feel they cannot accept the old political system where the old elite has influence in the background? I think this is what is missing in questions about current political problems in Thailand.”

Thailand’s mainstream media missed such questions, preferring to stress over and over two different news angles. The first was the issue of Thaksin, accused of corruption and of an unscrupulous quest for power at the expense of the country. The second was the threat of violence, evoked in order to pave the way to eventually unleash the troops to suppress the protest.

6.3 April 10th clashes at Khok Wua intersection

This is too much. It makes our country look uncivilized and weird.

- Ploi Khancharoensuk, advertising copywriter and red shirt opponent. (Bangkok Post. April 11th, 2010, page 8, left column “They said”)

In the end of March the negotiations between the Abhisit government and the UDD did not succeed in reaching an agreement. The UDD requested the Parliament to be dissolved in fifteen days, while the government offered a nine months road map, citing a number of reasons which supposedly made inconvenient and risky to dissolve the House in a nearer

date, including the state of the Thai economy and fact that a safe and peaceful environment was needed as a guarantee for candidates to campaign.

The collapse of the negotiations convinced the UDD, on April 3rd, to change its tactic by

“moving its supporters into Bangkok’s upscale central commercial center in the Ratchaprasong district, which it vowed to occupy until it achieved its political objectives—a tactic reminiscent of the PAD’s occupation of Bangkok’s airports in 2008 to bring down the then Thaksin-backed government” (HRW 2011: 49).

The protesters were now occupying two areas of Bangkok, namely Phan Fa intersection and Ratchaprasong intersection.

“Shadowy violence” began to occur too, with unclaimed grenade attacks on the 1st Infantry Division headquarters on March 15th, at the Ministry of Public Health building on March 23rd, and at the army-run Channel 5 television station, the Customs Department, and the National Broadcasting Service of Thailand television station on March 27th. The attacks did not cause any death (HRW 2011: 49). As the attacks remained unclaimed, the government and the army pointed the finger on ‘armed elements’ within the UDD, while the UDD leadership replied voicing suspects that somebody within the establishment mounted the attacks to blame on the protesters in a sort of ‘strategy of tension.’

In the end of March both TN and BP voiced their stand in favor of a negotiated way out from the crises, but their news frame did not deviate significantly from the one previously established. After the negotiations collapsed, the two media outlets used the threat of violence to push the delegitimation of the protesters to a new high.

On April 2nd, BP carried the headline “*Rally poses new threat*” (BP. April 2nd, 2010) and the subhead “*PM says govt won’t respond pressure.*” The article proposed once again the opposition between violence prone protesters (“...new threat”) and a balanced establishment which was working to preserve law and order. More specifically, the UDD rally planned for the day after was portrayed, by using government sources, as an action capable of influencing negatively the negotiations:

Plans by the red shirts to stage a mass rally in Bangkok tomorrow are jeopardizing the possibility of further talks with the government, a senior administration representative says.

The threat of violence was stressed again:

The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) has called a mobile rally to force the Democrat Party-led administration from office. Some believe it could turn violent.

Always on the front page, an image showed a map of the country indicating the cities where anti-UDD protests were going to take place: Krabi, Koh Samui, Chanthaburi, Rayong, Lumpini Park in Bangkok, Udon Thani, and Chiang Mai. The caption read:

Reds rejection day – tourism operators and university lectures gather today at venues nationwide to protest against plans by anti-government red shirts to stage a rally in Bangkok tomorrow.

A column on the right carried a headline which stressed the negative economic consequences of the protest (“*Stand-off is ‘damaging the country’s good image.’*” BP. April 2nd, 2010). The only source was Dusit Nontanakorn, chairman of the Thai Chamber of Commerce.

Below the fold, one more article carried the following headline: “*Doctors say HIV found in red shirts’ splattered blood*” (BP. April 2nd, 2010). The article contained worrisome information, with a group of doctors, belonging to the Mahidol Brotherhood, who claimed that:

tests have confirmed the blood splattered by the red shirts two weeks ago was contaminated with infectious diseases like HIV and hepatitis and also mixed with pig blood.

The Brotherhood:

issued a statement saying it was concerned about possible outbreaks of disease caused by the UDD’s bloodletting.

According to the Brotherhood, the situation was:

particularly worrisome... because the blood was found to have unusually high levels of infectious virus.

The article informed as well that the doctors:

urged the government and health authorities to seek ways to curb possible outbreaks of infectious diseases as a direct result of the blood splattering as well as to ensure the red shirts were made aware of hygiene and disease prevention measures.

Although the UDD leadership declared that the Brotherhood’s claim was a scam because blood tests never took place, yet the article appeared on the front page with a headline which, by using the verb ‘to say,’ reported the opposite claim as a neutral, authoritative and reliable piece of information.

The beginning of April was a watershed for the destiny of the Thai political stalemate. On April 5th the Civil Court declared the government had authority to clear the protesters from the city center because they were violating the 2007 Constitution, which “allows public gatherings on the condition that they do not affect law and order or threaten public safety” (BP. “*Reds’ fate rests with Isoc.*” April 6th, 2010). On April 7th PM Abhisit, “admitting the Internal Security Act had failed to deter violence and threats to national security,” placed Bangkok and the neighboring provinces under emergency decree (BP. “*Emergency rule.*” April 8th, 2010). The same day, protesters “stormed the parliament, forcing lawmakers to abandon their session and cabinet members to flee the compound over back fence” (BP. “*Protesters storm the parliament.*” April 8th, 2010).

The day after, BP legitimized the prime minister’s decision to use the emergency rule with a number of articles where official sources such as government officials, army generals, businessmen and other prominent individuals explained the ‘necessity’ for such a law. In one article published on the front page (BP. “*Business leaders support emergency rule.*” April 8th, 2010), Charoen Wangananont, a spokesman of the Federation of Thai Tourism Association, is reported as saying:

“The state of emergency is needed because the protesters broke the law and the public is worried that the situation will erupt into violence, just like during Songkran last year.”

The editorial, carrying the headline “*Red shirts are going too far*” (BP. April 8th, 2010), recognized that the nine-month political road map to fresh elections proposed by PM Abhisit was too long, yet this point was incidental, and the piece resolved into a backlash on the protesters:

The UDD leaders must understand they will not earn any sympathy for their political cause from the people of Bangkok by holding them hostage, just as they will not succeed in forcing the government to submit to their demand for an immediate House dissolution with their disruptive and provocative tactics.

At the same time, the Abhisit government must also realize that its nine-month political road map to fresh elections is too long and will never be accepted by the protesters.

While the opposite sides are still showing restraint in not resorting to the use of force, the protesters must be condemned for causing unnecessary hardships for the capital residents with their protest marches and seizure of Ratchaprasong intersection.

Similarly, TN’s April 10th editorial (TN. “*Ongoing conflict threatens Thai credit rating.*” April 10th, 2010) legitimized the government’s decision to impose the emergency

decree. As usual, the government was portrayed as “forced” to take such a harsh decision, and the original sin rested on the red troublemakers:

...political chaos forced Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva to declare a state of emergency - or martial law - covering Bangkok and its neighbouring provinces. . The government is struggling to restore calm as the red-shirt protesters continue rallying...

Being a business newspaper, TN kept stressing the economic impact of the political crisis on the national economy:

Japan Rating Credit Agency... warned that if the political scene further deteriorates, it would affect the government's ability to manage economic and public policy... Moody's Investors Service has also come out with a similar warning.

While the clashes between troops and protesters started to escalate, the government decided to use censorship against critical media. In the morning of April 8th, PM Abhisit ordered to shutdown the pro-protesters People Channel TV “claiming the satellite television station had distorted information and affected national security” (BP. “*Pm defends shutdown of reds’ People Channel TV.*” April 9th, 2010). PM Abhisit “said the channel aired disinformation so people would turn on the government. This endangered national security”. People Channel TV was not the only news media outlet to be censored, Internet websites were censored too:

“The government yesterday blocked access to 36 websites, most with live broadcast of the red shirts rallies. Others include news website prachatai.com and Fah Diew Kan magazine’s online political forum, sameskybooks.org” (BP. “*Pm defends shutdown of reds’ People Channel TV.*” April 9th, 2010).

The government’s restriction on critical media was not welcomed by the UDD activists. On April 9th, thousands anti-government demonstrators stormed the Thaicom satellite station at Pathum Thani’s Lat Lum Kaeo district to protest government’s decision to stop the pro-red shirt PTV cable channel from broadcasting. The protesters “broke through lines of troops and forced thousands of them to withdraw from the Thaicom Plc ground station” (BP. “*Abhisit vows to defy red.*” April 10th, 2010). As a countermove, “Abhisit ordered the army to deploy 30 companies, or about 4,500 soldiers, to retake the Thaicom station and cut off the PTV signal again, which they did”. Following this episode, BP reported that “an army source said a mass mobilization of forces... indicated a possible crackdown on red shirt demonstrators at Ratchaprasong intersection was in the offing”.

6.3.1 Thailand's "darkest hour"

On April 11th, BP front page carries an oversized photo which covers 8/10 of the page. The photo shows an injured soldier carried on the arms of two fellow soldiers, blood spills from his head. Caption:

"HELPING HAND: Soldiers carry an injured comrade after clashed with red shirt protesters in Bangkok yesterday."

The page carried a headline on the top - "*BATTLE FOR BANGKOK*" (BP. April 11th, 2010) – while in the bottom of the page BP published the following commentary:

It is very regretful that the rally of the red shirt protesters turned violent yesterday, leading to some of the worst bloodshed in the country's history and resulting in hundreds of wounded and at least eight dead.

The Abhisit Vejjajiva administration had no choice but to enforce the law after the red shirts had repeatedly broken the law by occupying the Ratchaprasong intersection, forcing the capital's business heart to close down.

There was also the confrontation at the Thaicom satellite station in Pathum Thani on Friday, forcing the satellite station to resume broadcasting the People Channel TV, the television station of the red shirts.

The invasion of Thaicom was the last straw for the Abhisit government, which yesterday decided to force the red shirts out of Ratchadamnoen Avenue.

But the red shirts refused to leave and fought back, which led to the bloodshed.

Although many may agree with the government's move to enforce the law, nobody wanted it to become violent, and it is now a major setback for democracy in the country.

During the last five years, Thailand has been locked in a rift between two pressure groups – the red and yellow shirts.

After the election, under the new charter written after the coup in September 2006, the now-defunct People Power Party won the most seats in the House and formed a coalition government, but the yellow shirts refused to accept it and came out and rallied against the then government for 193 days, ending with the seizure of airports.

The yellow shirts ended their rallies only after the court ruled to dissolve the People Power Party on charges of election fraud. The Democrat Party-led coalition took over the administration, but it was also rejected by the red shirts.

This means that both the red and yellow shirts refused to accept the rule of democracy. They only accept it when the party they support rules the country.

Now the country has been trapped in this deadlock and there seems no way out from the current political impasse.

Some anti-red shirt groups may be frustrated by the government's decision to withdraw from the fight at Ratchadamnoen Avenue last night, but we support the decision.

If the government continued its actions and forced the red shirts to leave the two rally sites, we don't believe the conflict would be over and many red shirts would only go underground and continue to fight against the government, and that could lead to a civil war, and if so, it means the end for Thailand.

After a break for a night, we hope both sides calm down and resume their talks and settle their conflict.

Further fighting will only cause further losses of life and more damage to the country.

As His Majesty the King once stated, nobody can claim victory if victory is the wrecking of the nation.

April 10th was a juncture time of the March to May 2010 political crisis because for the first time the government ordered the army to “crackdown” on the protesters in order to force them out from an occupied area, an event which resulted in twenty-six human lives lost (HRW 2011). The importance of the above article, placed on the front page the day after the tragedy, lies on the BP's justification of the state's action, violence, and killings and in the use of the cruel event to further delegitimize the protesters. Although this research does not intend to assess the responsibility over the killings happened in the night of April 10th, 2010, yet the way the event was framed seems to point to an unambiguous political stand of the BP.

The evening and night before the April 11th issue of the BP was published, twenty-six people were killed: twenty-one civilians and five soldiers (Human Rights Watch 2011: 62). Yet BP chose to devote almost the entire front page to a photo of a wounded soldier carried by his comrades. Previous research (e.g. Shoemaker 1982, McLeod 1995; McLeod and Detenber 1999; Arpan *et al.* 2006) demonstrated how accompanying visuals are powerful elements which affect cognitions.

In particular, a study conducted by Laura Arpan and her team (Arpan *et al.* 2006: 14) suggests that “visual information alone can be an important piece of evidence audience members use when evaluating contentious issues and protest groups covered in the news.”

In mainstream media, visuals tend to be an additional element in the critical coverage of protest(er)s which challenge the status quo, depending on the extent to which the images maintain or emphasize the typical negative framing associated with the Protest Paradigm (see chapter 3). In other words, more the photos accompanying news reporting focus on negative or conflictual aspects of the event, more they work to delegitimize the protest.

In our case, BP had a wide range of option to construct its front page. To name a few, it could have had chosen images of the clashes, the streets, demonstrators in action, soldiers in action, injured demonstrators, injured soldiers, dead demonstrators or dead soldiers. Yet, as an “important piece of evidence”, the paper chose a photo of a wounded soldier carried by his comrades. In addition, BP gave to the image an unusual wide space, approximately four fifth of the total space available on the front page. In fact, no other issue of the newspaper in the three months period analyzed in this research presented a front page with a similarly large image. Such editorial choice can be interpreted as a determination to drive the readers to feel empathy for the wounded soldier, and consequently more broadly for the troops, while suggesting that violence came from the opposite side, i.e. the protesters, presumably guilty of having attacked the soldier.

The image makes also a perfect companion for the analysis positioned below it, which argued openly in favour of the government’s decision. Besides, the author doesn’t make a mystery of his opinion concerning the protesters by accusing the UDD of being an anti-democratic group, as well as by pointing to the protesters as the sole actor accountable for the killings. This confidence appears rather stunning, as the clashes went on until late at night and thus the piece has been arguably written while the situation was still convulsed; without even mentioning that the number of casualties among the protesters was four times bigger than the five soldiers killed.

Regardless to the complexity of reality, the analysis of the BP was clearly and neatly in favour of the government and the army and against the UDD and the protesters. A critical discourse analysis of the text can unlock the ideological position already in the first sentence, where the author reports the “bloodshed” and the events which led to it without mentioning the government and the army. To the author, the red shirt’s rally simply ‘turned’ violent by itself, and thus ‘led’ to the terrible tragedy. In the author’s words:

It is very regretful that the rally of the red shirt protesters turned violent yesterday, leading to some of the worst bloodshed in the country’s history and resulting in hundreds of wounded and at least eight dead.

The author assumes that the agent who brought violence into being was “the rally of the red shirts.” This rally, for reasons which are not revealed, suddenly “turned violent,” and a “bloodshed” simply happened. As the government and the troops are absent from the sentence, it would be understandable if a reader uninformed of the facts would come up with

the idea that the protesters merely killed themselves in a suicidal orgy of blood. A possible different perspective, for instance that the agent leading to the bloodshed was not “the rally” but the military intervention ordered by the government, is wiped out by simply removing the military and the government from the sentence. According to Fairclough (1993), removing a possible agent from the text can be read as a strategy to conceal the agent’s responsibility for the action.

After having assumed that the responsibility for the tragedy lied on the protesters’ side, in the second sentence the author moves to justify the government’s decision to deploy troops. According to the author, the government “had no choice but to enforce the law” by trying to disperse the protesters from the area of Khok Wua intersection because the protesters “had repeatedly broken the law by occupying the Ratchaprasong intersection, forcing the capital’s business heart to close down.” The author seems to suggest that “the capital’s business heart” of Ratchaprasong, occupied by the protesters, holds a great economic importance for the country. But even if this assumption is correct, the author fails to explain why then the government did not try to clear the Ratchaprasong intersection, instead of sending troops to the Khok Wua intersection, located approximately ten kilometres far from the “business heart.”

In the next lines, the author deals with the confrontation between troops and protesters which took place at the Thaicom satellite station in Pathum Thani on April 9th, the day before the clashes at Khok Wua intersection in Bangkok. To the author, the Thaicom confrontation was “the last straw for the Abhisit government,” which drove his decision “to force the red shirts out of Ratchadamnoen Avenue.” Again, the government’s decision is grammatically presented as consequential to previous protesters’ actions, and thus it is suggested that the government was compelled to do what it did, and that its decisions are rational and inevitable. But how and why the decision of the government was really a direct result of the previous protesters’ actions? The consequentiality is not overtly elucidated; the point is not further clarified, but simply suggested. Nevertheless, after this assumption, the author moves to construct one more sentence which, one more time, suggests grammatically that it was the protesters’ action to lead to the “bloodshed.” As the author puts it:

But the red shirts refused to leave and fought back, which led to the bloodshed.

At this point we start to realize that the author has a consistent pattern for constructing

the text, which is coherent with the frame we have already individuated in the pre-protest phase (see chapter 5.2.1) and which is as simple and clear as this: the establishment's decisions and acts are rational and inevitable reactions caused and justified by the anti-establishment's previous actions. On the contrary, the protesters' decisions and actions are confrontational, unreasonable, unjustifiable, and lead to violence, bloodshed and death. The following sentence is also revealing of the author's utter effort to defend the government and its actions:

Although many may agree with the government's move to enforce the law, nobody wanted it to become violent, and it is now a major setback for democracy in the country.

The twin assumptions that the government's move reflected the will of "many" and that was not ill-intentioned ("nobody wanted it to become violent") reinforce the assumptions of the previous sentence, where the author suggested that the bloodshed was a result of the protesters' decisions and actions ("red shirts refused to leave and fought back, which led to the bloodshed"). But the most interesting aspect of the last sentence is that, to present this argument, the author uses hedging twice ("many," "nobody"). It is arguable that the author uses hedging in order to deliberately produce ambiguity on what in fact is nothing but a claim - *his* claim - and not a fact. Hedging is the term used by linguists to describe the way speakers use terms or grammar to avoid directedness or commitment. Hedging is a device used by speakers to distance from the text, to dilute the power of their statements, or to cover a personal opinion which lacks of concrete evidence by presenting it as a generally held belief (Machin and Mayr 2012: 186-206). In our case, the author uses hedging to imply that the government's decision had the support of a good part of the population ("many"), and that not a single person ("nobody") wanted violence. For the aim of our research, it is not important here to stress the fact that actually there were individuals and groups that did want violence,² or to engulf in a speculation on what percentage of the public agreed or disagreed with the government's move. The point is to analyze critically the text in order to try to unlock the hidden meanings, motivations and ideologies of the author. So, what is the real reason for saying that "many may agree"? The fact is that the truth of this assertion, who these "many" people are and what relevance they eventually have to the author's argument is

² "At Khok Wua junction, pro-government Yellow Shirt supporters also came out behind the army lines, according to a military medic. The medic told Human Rights Watch that the Yellow Shirts came to the back of the army lines to offer the soldiers cold water and then urged the soldiers to attack the Red Shirts, shouting provocative slogans like, "Kill the Red Shirts! Kill them all!" Human Rights Watch interview with military medic [name withheld], Bangkok, June 16, 2010 (Human Rights Watch. 2011: 57).

not manifest. It is more likely that the structure is used by the author to ‘dress up’ his personal opinion in a commonsensical outfit. If this argument is correct, than the author used this structure to distance himself from what he thought and wanted to say, which likely sounded more like the following: ‘*I agree with the government’s move to enforce the law.*’

After assessing the central points of his argument, the author makes a historical detour in order to further delegitimize the protesters by arguing that the UDD is an anti-democratic social player because it “refused to accept the rule of democracy.” The reason adducted by the author to claim this point is purely that the UDD “rejected” the “Democrat Party-led coalition.” This point appears both simplistic and mysterious. It is surely an oversimplification of the complex and multilayered events which led to the creation of the UDD social movement, as well as of the events which unfolded between 2006 and 2010 (see Keyes 2012 for a brief history of the UDD). But it is also a puzzling point, because it seems to claim that an individual or a group who ‘rejects’ or oppose a government in office is necessarily ‘refusing the rule of democracy.’ On the contrary, we know that democratic activists, groups and social movements tend to contest the legitimacy of governments.

Once established with the above mentioned assertions that the UDD is an anti-democratic group, the author moves to defend the government from the critiques from the other side of the political spectrum:

Some anti-red shirt groups may be frustrated by the government’s decision to withdraw from the fight at Ratchadamnoen Avenue last night, but we support the decision.

If the government continued its actions and forced the red shirts to leave the two rally sites, we don’t believe the conflict would be over and many red shirts would only go underground and continue to fight against the government, and that could lead to a civil war, and if so, it means the end for Thailand.

Here probably the author touches the highest heights of his oratorical skills. While in the beginning of the article he presented the crackdown on the protesters not as much as a government’s decision but rather as an inevitable consequence of the protesters’ actions, here instead the agent is the government, and not the protesters: it was a “government’s decision to withdraw from the fight.” The action, *ca va sans dire*, was a positive one, because a different decision, the author argues, could have led to “civil war” and even to “the end for Thailand” – whatever this is supposed to mean. The point suggested by the author is that Thailand avoided a great tragedy thanks to the government’s wise decision to withdraw.

After a call for fresh talks, the article is completed with a *grand final*, nothing less than a quotation from His Majesty the King:

As His Majesty the King once stated, nobody can claim victory if victory is the wreaking of the nation.

Since the King is officially considered the highest socio-politico-religious authority in the Kingdom, where each subject is taught to love and revere the monarch, and dissenters are hardly tolerated (Streckfuss 2011), such a conclusion works to frame and lock the previous arguments and assumptions into an utterly authoritative shield.

A further cue of the ideological manipulation which forged the BP news frame of the event is possibly unlockable in the following page. At page 2 of the same issue (April 11th, 2010) the BP presented eight photos of the clashes. Five images out of eight showed the soldiers, including one with a dead soldier (caption: “*A soldier was shot dead during the fight*”), one with an injured soldier (caption: “*BROTHERS IN ARMS: Soldiers carry an injured comrade during clashed with anti-government protesters yesterday*”), one with a man described as a soldier in plain clothes threatened by the protesters (caption: “*A soldier who lost his way during a clash with the red shirts stuffed his uniform in a rubbish bag before leaving Khao San Road in plain clothes provided by people living in the area, to avoid being caught by angry protesters*”), one with soldiers advancing, and a last one showing a military track possibly attacked by demonstrators (caption: “*The wheels of a military track burn at Khok Wua intersection*”). Of the eight photos, only two showed protesters: one was an image of four protesters in a haze of tear gas, which arguably suggested an interpretation of them as street rioters or hooligans, while the other one showed an injured protester (caption: “*a red shirt supporter was rushed to the ambulance after the attack*”). The numerical unbalance between images of soldiers and civilians appears to be hardly explainable if not by an editorial decision. Moreover, it is also the characteristics of the images selected that point to an understanding of the soldiers as victims of some sort of violence, including the photo of the military vehicle with burning tyres, the one with an injured soldier and another one with a man which the caption describes as a soldier who had to take off his uniform “to avoid being caught by angry protesters.” On top of this, in spite of the fact that twenty-one of the twenty-six casualties were civilians, the only photo of a dead body published by the BP was that of a soldier. The civilian side was the most affected by violence, yet the BP decided to emphasize, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the violence suffered by the army.

In the same issue of BP, the editorial did not deal directly with the clashes but it rather focused on the government's decision to enforce censorship on opposition media (BP. "*Censorship is doomed to fail from the start.*" April 11th, 2010). Following is the editorial:

After the government disruption of the signal from People Channel TV (PTV), the red shirt's "voice" in Pathum Thani Lat Lum Kaeo district, the Thai Journalists Association and the Thailand Cable Television Association issued a joint statement which called for the closure of PTV and a politically related website unconstitutional, adding that it reflected a double standard in law enforcement.

The statement could also have read that such attempts at censorship in a modern society are sure to fail. There are simply too many outlets and sources, including blogs and mobile phone texts, to shut out. What's more, it is human nature to believe the worst of the state when it begins to censor information.

Yesterday afternoon government security forces started to move against red shirt protesters camped at Phan Fa Bridge and by 8pm television film crews were recording war-like scenes. There have been a large number of casualties as well.

It can and will be argued that this section was inevitable because the government could not allow major parts of the city to be taken over indefinitely by the demonstrators, even though precedents have been set involving other groups of protesters which would seem to suggest public and private property can in some cases be appropriate without challenge from the government.

Irregardless from this debate, which will likely rage for a long time to come, after a remarkably violence-free month-long protest, clearly the turning point leading to bloody conflict came with the declaration on Thursday of a state of emergency in the capital and nearby provinces, and in particular the closure of PTV, which the declaration paved the way for.

In giving the reason for the cutting PTV's signal, Prime Minister's Office Minister Sathit Wongnongtoey said "the authorities needed to suspend the broadcast because contained distorted facts and was aimed at inciting public unrest."

This is certainly valid to an extent and it is an important point. All media have a responsibility not to inflame passions and to strictly adhere to the truth, especially in a climate as volatile as this one.

Yet in taking the drastic action of closing the stations were sure to be ratcheted up a notch. A better response of the government would have been to very publicly challenge PTV reports it felt were false and inflammatory.

It is also unfortunately that protesters and their sympathizers apparently feel they are not able to get the truth from other media sources. This makes of them somewhat of a "captive" and easily manipulated audience.

Interestingly enough, the author does not explicitly condemn censorship *per se* and neither he criticizes the prime minister's decision to enforce it, but rather argues that

such attempts at censorship in a modern society are sure to fail. There are simply too many outlets and sources.

The author reports the official justification for censoring opposition media by reporting an official statement:

In giving the reason for the cutting PTV's signal, Prime Minister's Office Minister Sathit Wongnongtoey said "the authorities needed to suspend the broadcast because contained distorted facts and was aimed at inciting public unrest."

The above government's position was presented by the BP editorial as at least partly legitimate:

This is certainly valid to an extent and it is an important point. All media have a responsibility not to inflame passions and to strictly adhere to the truth.

Evidently, according to the BP editorial team, "the truth" was only the government's truth, and, at least "to an extent," the government was right in censoring different perspectives.

The April 10th army crackdown at Khok Wua intersection ordered by PM Abhisit was also framed as rational and as a result justified. This is done with a very common technique, as seen in other articles before. The BP, when dealing with controversial establishment's actions, suggests that they were unavoidable:

It can and will be argued that this section was inevitable because the government could not allow major parts of the city to be taken over indefinitely by the demonstrators

After the above described effort to justify the government for having enforced censorship on critical media and for having order a bloody and unsuccessful military crackdown on the opposition, the author concludes the editorial with an emblematic attack on the protesters:

It is also unfortunately that protesters and their sympathizers apparently feel they are not able to get the truth from other media sources. This makes of them somewhat of a "captive" and easily manipulated audience.

Interestingly enough, the author argues that "protesters and their sympathizers" are to some extent a "manipulated audience" because they are too dependent on the red-leaning media, which now the government has just censored. Such a hint leaves one wonder whether the pro-government citizens are or not equally "manipulated" by the army-owned, government-owned and pro-establishment media in general, especially now that "other media sources" have been blocked. But this hypothesis of the existence of an audience "manipulated" by pro-government media is not considered by the author, who demonstrates to be more concerned of citizens being "manipulated" by critical media than by mainstream ones.

TN news frame of the Khok Wua clashes was similar. On April 11th, TN in its front page placed the headline “*Our darkest hour*” on a photo, placed above the fold, which depicted a moment of the clashes which took place the day before between the army and the demonstrators. Below the fold, a left column of analysis carried the headline “Yesterday's bloodbath is a wake-up call to halt the slide towards anarchy” (TN. April 11th, 2010). Following is the article:

The saddest thing is everyone had predicted this and there were so many opportunities to prevent it. In the end, either the curse was too strong or the dark wills of some of those involved to see it happen simply overwhelmed efforts to stop it from happening. A nation that once thought it had matured learned the hardest way that it hadn't.

In terms of cruelty, October 6, 1976 was worse. And yesterday's death toll was lower than most previous political turbulences. It's the way a divided Thailand rolled relentlessly towards yesterday that exposed a national flaw bigger than the ones causing the previous tragedies. Despite everything - modern education, better political knowledge and everyone's claims to have "democracy" at heart - nothing could stop the bloodbath. And if rumours last night about a coup in the making come true, then the big wounds inflicted yesterday will only be aggravated.

It started off like a ceasefire day, with red-shirt protesters mulling a return to the Thaicom uplink station in Pathum Thani after PTV was taken off the air again on Friday night. Then skirmishes began near the Phan Fa Bridge between protesters and soldiers at the First Army Region headquarters, and soon after that tension escalated as troops formed lines to try to edge red shirts from the streets. Water cannon and tear gas were used, baton charge initiated and finally rubber bullets were fired.

The troops' mission, as the government declared later in the afternoon, was to "reclaim" public spaces as authorised under the state of emergency. The red shirts put up tough resistance, resulting in new skirmishes, which grew more violent as the hours passed. But our worst tragedy in 18 years took place at the Khok Wua intersection.

The government said troops fired rubber bullets and tear gas whereas demonstrators fought back with guns, grenades and petrol bombs. Yet casualties were much heavier on the civilian side, although compared with previous political clashes, troops suffered unprecedented death and injury tolls this time.

Embattled Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva last night vowed to carry on and insisted that people must not jump to conclusions regarding who was to blame for the casualties. He promised an independent investigation and pledged that he would never allow personal interests to get in the way of government attempts to resolve what has become our biggest and bloodiest crisis in modern times.

With everyone equipped with better tools to record the violence, evidence will pour in over the next few days. Yet finger-pointing has already begun. The body of a red-shirted guard was carried onto the Phan Fa stage last night, as leaders of the movement tried to settle among themselves what should be their next move. Some wanted to "bring on the war", but others solemnly admitted that the losses were enough.

Calls for both warring parties to "stop immediately" were coming from all directions. Abhisit, if he manages to survive what promises to be a staggering backlash in the next few days, will be first under pressure to reconsider the state of emergency.

The heavy weight of the losses will also be measured against the inconvenience, economic turmoil, defiance and other behaviour of the red shirts. Previous government tolerance, displayed to the point that Abhisit was ridiculed for being weak, may not help his case much after all.

The uncertainties, however, are outweighed by the sad truth that the division that culminated in yesterday's bloodbath will only deepen. A TV programme last night that was supposed to find a way for Thailand to dig itself out of the current tragic impasse erupted into a blame game, with one side of speakers calling on the premier to show responsibility and the other saying the prelude to the clash must also be taken into account.

Talks will be renewed and the force of peace may have its rare chance to prevail. But even optimists cannot believe that an actual healing process can really begin any time soon. The nation, however, has no choice but to try.

As the headline suggested, the article intends to argue that the "bloodbath" which took place the day before was to be interpreted as "a wake-up call to halt the slide towards anarchy." In fact, going through the article it becomes evident how the main concern of the author is disorder, lack of law-abidness, and national division. From the text emerges that these dangers arise from the red shirt group (see Table 5).

First, it is interesting to note that, although the article is about the violence which took place the day before, when twenty-one civilians and five soldiers were killed, yet the author does not refer explicitly to the facts and does not mention the number of civilian and soldiers killed. The verbs 'to kill' and 'to die' do not appear in the text. While the article is not a report but an analysis, yet by not informing the reader about the pivotal details of the story the author seems to base his analysis on pre-understood terms.

Interestingly enough, the author opens by stating that "everyone had predicted this." On the basis of this assumption, the author wonders why violence was not prevented, arguing that "either the curse was too strong or the dark wills of some of those involved... simply overwhelmed efforts to stop it from happening." Thus the complexity of the reasons and events which led to the protest, the several actions and decisions took by the protesters and the government during the one-month long stalemate, as well as the convulsed clashes which went on for hours on April 10th, were drastically reduced to two possible causes: either an unavoidable 'strong curse' or some mysterious "dark wills." Other possible causes, less unavoidable and less mysterious, are not taken into account by the author. For example, the decision of the government to use the ISA or the failure of two rounds of talks between the UDD leaders and the government are not considered possible causes. The

decision of the government to block the broadcast of the most important pro-protester TV channel, resulted in clashes between troops and police the day before the Khok Wua intersection massacre, is not considered either.

In the sentence which more closely tries to report the facts, the agent is removed:

Water cannon and tear gas were used, baton charge initiated and finally rubber bullets were fired.

Who used water cannons and tear gas? Against who were they used? Who charged who? And who finally opened fire? The author doesn't say. According to Fairclough (1993), removing the agent from the text can be read as a strategy to conceal the agent's responsibility for the action. In this case, it was the army that used "cannon and tear gas" and fired "bullets," therefore the structure of the sentence removes the responsibility of the action and possibly of the killings from the army. The author's effort to hide or lessen the troops' responsibility is identifiable in other parts of the text too, as in the following lines:

The troops' mission, as the government declared later in the afternoon, was to "reclaim" public spaces as authorised under the state of emergency.

Here the author's effort to validate the actions of the soldiers is evident, as the author describes the troops' action as a "mission," a word which carries the meaning of a special task assigned to a special group. In fact, the author reinforces this meaning by quoting indirectly an authoritative social actor (i.e., the government) and by further explaining that the "mission" was "authorized" by the law. Thus, the troops are legitimized in their actions. Finally, this is followed by one more sentence, which works to suggest that the responsibility of the violence falls completely on the demonstrators, guilty of resisting to the army and not abiding to the law:

The red shirts put up tough resistance, resulting in new skirmishes.

By using the verb "resulting" to link the first part of the sentence to the second, it is suggested once again that the "skirmishes" came about as an unavoidable consequence of the citizens' "resistance." This opposing connotation is further constructed in another sentence:

The heavy weight of the losses will also be measured against the inconvenience, economic turmoil, defiance and other behaviour of the red shirts. Previous government tolerance, displayed to the point that Abhisit was ridiculed for being weak, may not help his case much after all.

Here the author invites to ponder the human losses with the red shirts' "behaviour." Protesters are associated with a number of negativities – "inconvenience, economic turmoil, defiance" – whereas the only 'critique' to the government regards its supposed excessive "tolerance," portrayed as so magnanimous to be "ridiculed for being weak." Such supposed benevolent stance of Abhisit and his government, the author argues, "may not help." Therefore, further and higher forms of repression against the demonstrators are not excluded.

"*Our darkest hour*" is also a powerful nationalist and anti-protester piece. The ideology buried in the text can be unlocked by observing at the personification of the concept of the Thai Nation. According to Machin and Mayr (2012:171), "Personification means that human qualities or abilities are assigned to abstractions or inanimate objects." For example, the author describes Thailand as "A nation that once thought..." In reality, nations are not humans but political constructions. Thus they do not possess human qualities or abilities as 'thinking' or 'feeling.' Personifying the Nation as an agent of human-like activities generates multiple results. First, the author throughout the text attempts to conceal who the real agents actually are. Second, he manages to hide the real actors' opinions and actions behind a concept – Thailand, or Nation - that is highly valued by many Thais and constitutes one of the three holy-like pillars of the dominant ideology of Thainess. Third, the personification reduces the huge variety of opinions, worldviews, social positions and economic situations of the over sixty million Thai citizens to a single unified and humanized entity – the Nation – which as a sick lady is now troubled by internal problems. This abstraction induces the reader to feel empathy for the imagined concept of the Nation, rather than for the human beings killed or injured in the clashes. In other words, by inviting the readers to concentrate on supposed "big wounds inflicted" on the Andersonian "imagined community", the author skillfully drives away the reader's empathy from the dead bodies and the injured citizens. Hence we are told that the Nation has "to dig itself out of the current tragic impasse" and thus "has no choice but to try" a "healing process." The logical consequence of accepting this nationalist simplification of the complex and multifaceted socio-political differences which exist in Thailand suggests that socio-political "division" is a threat and "will only deepen." The corollary is that the reader is invited to see socio-political struggles are abnormal and

negative features, a sort of internal illness affecting the imagined Thai body, whereas unity and law-abidingness are the normal and expected state of the Nation.

The nationalist subtext is a clue of the ideological prism of the author. In fact, it could be argued that socio-political ‘divisions’ are basically a sign of the existence of different opinions and especially of different contrasting interests within a society, whereas struggles are not much a social pathology but rather a common feature of every community at every given historical time because, as a rule, societies are diverse and contradictory and they always include both power and counter-power (see chapter 4). Anyway, the aspect which most interest our research is that, once again, the underlying causes of what the author considers as an “illness” are not analyzed.

Although first the author reports PM Abhisit as saying that “people must not jump to conclusions regarding who was to blame for the casualties,” and then assures that “evidence will pour in over the next few days,” yet the whole article works to legitimize the government and the army and delegitimize the protesters. It is because it is implied that it is the protesters who are “to blame,” not the establishment, and that social “division” is an “illness” that is threatening the Nation, a concept which is personified and portrayed in serious danger. The danger comes from a deviant group identified as “red shirts,” while the government and army are portrayed as those who are trying to defend the Nation. Talks are presented as a solution, although “even optimists” are actually not optimist. All this, as said, is stated and implied without reporting the facts, without informing the reader of the death toll, and without quoting anyone but the government and the prime minister.

6.4 May 19th final crackdown

In the beginning of May there was a point when an agreement between government and UDD seemed close, only to back away at the last moment. After many on-again, off-again talks, when on May 12th the UDD leadership refused to break up the protest camp, PM Abhisit withdrew his November election offer and warned of an imminent dispersal of the occupied zones (HRW 2011: 74-75).

On May 13th, Major General Khattiya, also known as *Seh Daeng* (Red Commander), was shot in the head by a sniper during an interview with a *New York Times* reporter. He died on May 17th. Khattiya was acting as a sort of UDD ‘military’ commander, and was widely considered among the most intransigent leaders. Although circumstances are still unclear, according to HRW (2011: 76) Khattiya was probably shot by an army sniper in order to remove him from his UDD leadership role.

On May 14th, the CRES set out new rules of engagement that allowed the use of live fire against the protesters:

Under the new rules, soldiers were allowed to use live ammunition in three circumstances: as warning shots to deter demonstrators from moving closer; for self-defense; and when forces have “a clear visual of terrorists.” The term “terrorists” was left undefined, giving soldiers no guidance as to what constituted a permissible target and providing a basis for the use of firearms and lethal force that exceeded what is permitted under international law in policing situations. On May 15th, “Live Firing Zone” banners were hoisted by the authorities in areas where troops reported coming under heavy fire, such as Ratchaprarop and Bon Kai. Civilians, including medic volunteers, were reportedly killed and wounded by army snipers in these areas (HRW 2011: 80-81).

Between May 14th and May 18th clashes went on, with dozens people killed:

During the clashes that occurred between May 14 and May 18, the new rules of engagement either facilitated more shootings of demonstrators or were simply ignored. Between the shooting of Khattiya and the final dispersal of the protest camp on May 19, at least 34 protesters and 2 soldiers were killed in the clashes, and another 256 wounded (HRW 2011: 82).

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW 2011:82-83), Royal Thai Army soldiers and snipers fired also to unarmed civilians:

Human Rights Watch’s investigations found that army snipers in buildings overlooking the protest sites, as well as soldiers on the defensive barricades on the ground, frequently fired on protesters who were either unarmed or posed no imminent threat of death or serious injury to the soldiers or others. Many of those whom soldiers targeted apparently included anyone who tried to enter the “no-go” zone between the UDD barricades and army lines, or who threw rocks, petrol bombs, or burning tires towards the soldiers—from distances too great to be a serious threat to the soldiers’ lines.

6.4.1 “Bangkok in shambles”

During the five days of ongoing fierce battle between May 14th and May 18th both TN and BP continued the news frame previously established. Violence was now an everyday reality on the streets of Bangkok and the two print media outlets reported it. Anyway, the opposing connotation was continued by the framing techniques analyzed in previous chapters. The opposing connotation became clearer, with Them (the protesters) now not subtly but openly associated with a number of negative aspects, with words such as

“terrorists” utilized always more often to refer to Them (protesters).

With the city enflamed by the continuous clashes, visuals became an even more significant news element. As already discussed, visuals are an important cognitive element for the reader and they can be used to reinforce the Protest Paradigm, i.e. the negative reporting of protest events by mainstream media (Arpan 2006). It can be argued that TN and BP front pages in this pivotal period used visuals to produce or reinforce a particular understanding of the events. Powerful photos were chosen but, interestingly enough, in the six front pages produced by TN and the six produced by the BP between May 15th and May 20th, only one carried an image with soldiers (TN, April 18th). The other eleven front pages carried visuals of protesters, scary non-protester bystanders, or murky Bangkok’s streets and skylines. Once again, the government and the army have been removed in order to dissociate them from the mayhem.

Again, in controversial stories TN and BP tended to remove the government and army’s agency also from the text. As an example, on the May 16th front page of BP (“*THE EDGE OF ANARCHY*”) the author writes:

At least 24 civilians have been killed and almost 200 people wounded since the violence renewed on Friday... Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and the CRES said most of those killed were the victims of terrorist attacks or had turned to each others.

Here in the first sentence the author removed the agent of the killings. Who killed the civilians? In critical discourse analysis, the removal of the agent is a cue which points to an ideological manipulation of the text (van Dijk 1993). In this case, it can be argued that the author did not want to suggest that the agent, i.e. the killer who “killed,” belonged to the Us side. Afterwards, in the second sentence the question is answered by quoting two official sources, the prime minister and the CRES. Their version is reported with the neutral structuring verb ‘to say,’ thus adding a dose of authority to what could have also been reported as a claim. The two establishment sources explain that the twenty-four civilians were killed by ‘terrorists’ or otherwise they killed “each other.” Also in this text, as it often happened in TN and BP’s articles, the author uses only establishment sources. This is in line with the Protest Paradigm (see chapter 3.2) and leads to a text biased in favor of the establishment. In fact, in this case it is possible to speculate that different sources, as for example the families of the victims, could have had opinions diverging from the one of the PM and CRES.

Editorials became progressively more scolding against the protesters. April 18th's BP editorial is a direct attack against the UDD, as it is already apparent from the headline: “*The shame of the UDD*” (BP, May 18th, 2010). It will be useful to report it in its full length:

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva is facing a fair share of criticism both locally and internationally for his decision to contain the protesters at Ratchaprasong intersection by force. But the blame for the violence, the closure of schools, the end of normal life in Bangkok falls squarely on the shoulders of the leaders of the UDD. The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) has failed its followers, and all Thais. The prime minister will be criticized in the future for his failure to lead and his decision to depend on the army when he did finally act. But the red shirts deserve to be condemned for suborning, encouraging and now supporting deadly violence without reason or justification.

Mr Abhisit at least had a plan. He offered to call nationwide elections on Nov 14, and to abide to the results. He also offered a reliable timetable to achieve the elections. More, the prime minister made it clear that if the UDD leadership had quibbles over his plan, or the road map to achieve it, he was open to discussion. He even offered amnesty for acts of political dissidence including breach of emergency regulations, pledging only that all parties would have to face charges for the criminal acts.

The red shirts then proceeded to make excuses. The likely reason is that the leadership suffered a split over the offer by PM Abhisit. Some UDD core members, in particular ex-MP and longtime politician Veera Musikhapong, were in favour of accepting the prime minister's road map. But the hard faction of the UDD leader apparently felt that victory was within their grasp. They proceeded to fabricate a strip of weak excuses and self-serving, selfish demands to the government. The prime minister withdrew his election offer, and events deteriorated until going murderously out of control.

The main fallacy of UDD's delaying tactic was that victory was close. No such victory was, or is, near. The closest the red shirts would, or could, achieve is an outright seizure of power, something akin to a military coup but even worse. The UDD have no legitimate claim to power. Even though the Puea Thai Party won the most seats in the last elections, this is nothing more than an anachronistic fact. Many of the Puea Thai's MPs have defected to other parties. In any case, many of the UDD leaders were never elected to anything, not even to the leadership of the red shirts.

Consider the UDD argument that Abhisit was unelected. First and foremost, it does not follow that such a government is illegitimate. More important at the moment, no other person has stronger legal claim to the premiership; no other group has a stronger claim to form a government. The constant repetition of the lie that the government is illegitimate will never make it true.

The red shirts have manoeuvred themselves into a corner. One would wish that this was the only bad news. But dozens of deaths and hundreds of wounded attest it was far worse. Schools are closed, businesses are shuttered, foreign embassies have actually evacuated families and some staff. The “war in Bangkok” is the top stories in media around the world.

If the UDD have a shred of honour, they will lift their protest and approach the prime minister to negotiate an election date. Thaksin Shinawatra, if he has dignity remaining, will urge the red shirts to return home and prepare to fight a national election. Mr Abhisit should be urging this course; but mainly, the red shirts themselves should realize their errors and end this tragic, violent game immediately.

Once again, there is hardly any analysis of the multifaceted aspects of Thailand political crisis, but “the blame” and the “shame” are attributed to the anti-government forces. On top of this, it is openly stated what in a number of other previous pieces was just subtly

suggested: the protesters encourage and support “deadly violence without reason or justification,” and thus they are irrational, criminally violent and totally unjustified in their actions. As usual, the Us side, here represented by Abhisit, is totally different. Abhisit “at least had a plan,” the author writes, thus suggesting that the Others did not even have a plan. Abhisit was also the agent of a number of positive actions: he “offered” (three different things), he “made it clear,” and his timetable was “reliable.” But this good plans, behaviors and activities crashed into the negative characteristics of the Others. They ‘made excuses,’ they were “split,” they had a “hard faction,” and they did “fabricate a strip of weak excuses and self-serving, selfish demands to the government.” As seen in section 5.2, the structural opposition of the contrasting concepts of ‘good establishment’ and ‘bad protesters’ constitutes a basic aspect of TN and BP news frame of protest. In this article, this move is overt and thus it can be considered a case of point, as when the author states that “The UDD have no legitimate claim to power” and “no other person has stronger legal claim to the premiership” than Abhisit.

Pieces like the one just analyzed paved the way for ultimate repression of the protest. On May 20th, the day after the final crackdown, the BP presented a front page with a photo of Bangkok’s skyline covered in smoke. The headline announced: “*Bangkok in shambles.*” The three subheads read:

Buildings set on fire, looting widespread – Leader of the red shirts surrender to police – Clashes leave 2 protesters, 1 news photographer dead

The photo caption read:

Smoke billows from CentralWorld at the Ratchaprasong intersection. Unidentified arsonists set fire to the shopping centre shortly after the surrender of the red shirt leaders yesterday afternoon.

On the top of the front page, the editor selected two photos, one each for two of the main co-leaders of the UDD being arrested. One caption read:

Union for Democracy against Dictatorship leader Jatuporn Prompan, left, turns himself in with other UDD leaders at the Police headquarters.

The other caption read:

Natthawut Saikua, second from left, and Wiphuthaleng Pattanaphumtha, right, on their way from the Ratchaprasong rally site to the national police headquarters.

The first thing to notice is that no soldiers appeared in the visuals. No ‘clashes’ or

‘crackdown’ were shown, but only a smoky Bangkok skyline and two UDD leaders being arrested, as to suggest that those responsible of shambling Bangkok were now under arrest. If we move to analyze the headline and the three subheads, we see once again that the army or the government are absent.

Also the front page of TN presented a large image of a smoky Bangkok skyline. On top, an oversized headline read “*FIERY ANARCHY.*” As already argued, in the media reporting of protest events, visuals which portray violence are considered as capable of reinforcing in the audience negative understanding of the protest. The word “anarchy” is also a term which in popular and journalistic language is usually associated with disruptive and asocial behaviors of individuals and groups. On top of this, no visuals of troops were displayed. Differently than in the BP, the UDD leaders turning themselves to the police were not showed.

Both the newspapers used their editorials to reaffirm their pro-government stance. The BP justified the crackdown already in the headline (BP. “*Law and order must prevail.*” May 20th, 2010). Following is the piece:

It has been one of the darkest days in Thailand’s modern history, a day of violence most of us had not wanted to see happen. But the tense situation in Bangkok over the past four days since the shooting of Maj-Gen Khattiya Sawasdipol, alias Seh Daeng, at Sala Daeng intersection last Thursday, had spiralled steadily out of control, making areas around the red-shirts’ Ratchaprasong protest site into war zones as red mobs, supported by armed “men in black,” fought street battles with security forces.

Despite the street mayhem and reign of anarchy, attempts were made by all parties concerned to secure a peaceful end to the protest and a return of normalcy to life in the capital. The latest attempt brokered by a group of senators led by Prasobsook Boondej, the Senate speaker, managed to secure an agreement for the red shirt leaders to enter an immediate peace process with the government.

Unfortunately, this was rejected by the hardcore red shirt protesters who booed and jeered their leaders and Senator Lertrat Lettanavich, who led the mediation effort, when they took to the stage to announce the outcome of the meeting Tuesday night. The protesters rejection of the brokered peace process should come as little surprise, even among the leaders themselves who were to blame for the rebellion among their men. It was the leaders themselves who, for the last two months, had repeatedly spoonfed the protesters with messages of hate against the government and the so called amataya elites, to the point that their minds became poisoned with a deep hatred against and distrust of the government and the amataya.

Even more disgusting has been the sowing of seeds of hatred in the minds of innocent children among the protesters, and the use of children, women and elderly as human shields.

As such, the red shirt leaders must be fully held accountable for all the consequences perpetrated by their protesters and the street mobs.

With the collapse of the peace talks, the government was held with no other option but to press further with the use of force to break up the protest at Ratchaprasong intersection. The blockade operation, backed with armoured personnel carriers and troop reinforcements, was launched before dawn yesterday. Belatedly though it has come, this has proved to be the right decision. By about 2pm, seven red shirt leaders, among them Natthawut Saikua, Jatuporn Prompan and Dr Weng Tochirakarn, had turned themselves in to the police headquarters to face charges which include violation of the emergency rule and committing acts of terrorism.

Sadly, their surrender failed to calm the tempers of hardcore protesters, who immediately ran amok, torching several buildings around the protest sites.

An expected curfew will hopefully enable security forces to deal more effectively against the rioters. The government must act even more quickly to effectively put down this rebellion, in order to restore peace and order to the capital as soon as possible.

In the first sentence we see how the author accurately follows those framing techniques we have already analyzed in the last sections (see 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3), where the author writes that the protesters “fought street battles *with* security forces” (italics added), and not all the way around. In this way, the agency of a ‘negative’ or confrontational action (i.e. ‘to fight’) is given to the “red mobs” and the “men in black,” not to the soldiers.

In the second part for the article we learn that “attempts... to secure a peaceful end” were made by a group of senators who tried to broker a negotiation between government and UDD. Anyway, the author explains that the deal “was rejected by the hardcore red shirt protesters who booed and jeered,” two verbs that once again suggest a dose of irrationality or even barbarism of the crowd, an indistinct ‘horde of rural folk’ (see 5.1.2), possibly incapable of sustaining the rational debate involved with a peaceful negotiation. But “The protesters rejection of the brokered peace process should come as little surprise, even among the leaders themselves who were to blame for the rebellion among their men,” the author says, thus partially removing the responsibility from the unsophisticated and uncivilized crowd in order to blame their leaders, who “repeatedly spoonfed the protesters with messages of hate against the government and the so called *amataya* elites, to the point that their minds became poisoned with a deep hatred against and distrust of the government and the *amataya*.” Here we see, once again, the reproduction of the belief held by sections of Thailand urban middle and upper class that the ordinary demonstrators were nothing more than simpletons “spoonfed” by evil and flawed leaders to ‘hate’ the government and the elite. As assessed most notably by Thongchai (2008), these are generalisations, but also clues of the bias urban middle and upper class individuals have against the non-urban electoral majority.

Afterwards, the author reserves more negative terms to his opponents, calling “disgusting” their political propaganda, which according to the author was meant to instil

“hatred in the minds of innocent children.” The protesters are accused also of having used “children, women and elderly as human shields.” In critical discourse analysis, this is called a norm and value violation and it is considered a fundamental way of establishing a distinction between Them and Us. This othering process is done by emphasizing how the Others violate basic norms and values of Our society, ethic principles that We hold dear. In this case, the BP editorial accuses the protesters of having destroyed the innocence of children by poisoning their minds with “hatred.” On top of this, the Others are accused of having been particularly cruel with the most defenceless human beings, i.e. children, women, and elderly, by using them as “human shields.” This is clearly supposed to be a violation of the most basic social norms and values of Our society. By doing that, the author implies, the protesters have placed themselves outside the realm of civilization, if not of the whole humanity. Accusing the protesters of such “disgusting” and barbaric crimes equals dehumanizing Them, and thus the author can rightfully conclude that “the red shirt leaders must be fully held accountable.”

After having dehumanized the protesters, the author moves to justify and uphold the government decisions. The excuse is the same used to justify the government in the BP and TN editorials analyzed before (see chapters 5.2 and 5.3): “the government was held with no other option”, it was forced to what it did. Then, of course, “this has proved to be the right decision.” The piece concludes with another typical litany, inciting the government to increase the repression: “The government must act even more quickly to effectively put down this rebellion, in order to restore peace and order to the capital as soon as possible.”

Just like the BP, also the TN editorial on May 20th was written in support of the government and the army and as a backlash on the protesters. The piece carried the following headline: “*This is no peasant's revolt.*” And the following subhead: “*Red leaders were happy to stir the protesters into a frenzy and then abandon them when the battle seemed lost.*” Following is the full piece:

If anyone still thinks the ongoing street battle in Bangkok is a war between the urban rich and the rural poor, they need to think again. First of all, it might be easy to come to this simplistic perception as video after video and photograph after photograph suggest. On the one hand, there is a professional military armed with modern weapons, while on the other is a bunch of ragtag villagers and urban poor using Stone-Age weapons. Outnumbered and outgunned, these red shirts are putting their lives on the line to “liberate” this kingdom from the evil rich.

At first it was, “No, we don't have any weapons. We are peaceful people.” But as the past six days have showed, these red shirt liberators are no longer camera shy. The closer the camera gets to them, the cockier they get. One man was in his underwear dancing for them. Another put up his

toddler on the barricade. Somehow there was a desire to perform for the camera. One wondered why.

It's also difficult to miss the English signs and placards around the red enclaves. They read: "Democracy" and "Stop killing innocent women and children" and so on. And while television cameras capture these placards, red leaders turn up the heat on the stage, getting the crowd rowdy.

And as these images and sound-bites shape the context of understanding of these events, meanwhile, on the government side we hear the word "terrorist" over and over to the point that it becomes almost meaningless.

It has been a hard-sell for the government counter-propaganda strategy, partly because homemade rockets and slingshots cannot be compared to hijacked planes crashing into tall buildings. But playing the "terrorist" card could prove disastrous, especially when the time comes to make concessions.

The red leaders have succeeded in getting their crowd into the fight of their lives. And then all of a sudden, after hundreds had been injured and scores killed, they wanted to call it quits. Unfortunately, they created Frankenstein, and the monster is tossing Molotov cocktails into shopping malls.

Nevertheless, through the lens of television cameras over these past weeks and months, the world has seen a compelling story made from incomprehensible data that reinforces what the audience wants to believe. The bottom line is that people believe what they see.

And what they see is a greedy elites versus the impoverished poor, and of course, the latter will always be right, as they hold the moral high ground. It's a mindset that shaped human history and it sells, and it is easy to consume once it is reduced to bite-size.

But is "good versus evil" the only way to see a developing country like Thailand - through the same lens that one used for other troubled places like Manila two decades ago or Rangoon just a year ago? The uprising in Thailand is no Philippine's "People Power" and Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva is no Ferdinand Marcos.

Never mind Tiananmen Square, but let's imagine if this was Paris, London or New York, the reds doing what they have done, they wouldn't have lasted for more than a week.

Is it because third world countries do not deserve the same kind of civility and ground rules that we see in Western society? Being reminded of one's deep prejudices isn't pleasant.

Furthermore, the fact that Abhisit made a serious offer - to hold a general election by November - that was rejected by the red leaders makes one wonder if the people's mandate was ever on their mind in the first place. They seem to care more about getting bail after this wave of street battles comes to an end than the wellbeing of the ordinary red shirts.

But the red leaders do not have a monopoly on selfishness and insensitivity. Their role model, Thaksin Shinawatra, was seen strolling along the Champs Elysees in Paris with his youngest daughter while his red followers were taking the bullets, partly to help pave the way for his pardon and the return of his money seized by the state - and partly, of course, for democracy, liberty and justice for all.

Since the headline – “This is no peasant's revolt” - the editorial makes clear its aim of challenging the view that the “street battle in Bangkok is a war between the urban rich and the rural poor.” The accuse appears to be directed mostly to international media, which in those days where the object of critique from sectors of the Thai public. In subhead, the author

moves to discredit the UDD leadership, which according to the author stirred the protesters and then abandoned them. In the piece, the author picks up a number of bizarre actions performed by a number of ‘cocky’ protesters:

One man was in his underwear dancing for them. Another put up his toddler on the barricade. Somehow there was a desire to perform for the camera. One wondered why.

This narrative technique is understandable within the framework of the Protest Paradigm, as seen in chapter 3.2. While covering protest events, mainstream media tend to report more the actions of protesters than their reasons and demands, and in reporting their actions the most bizarre actions are covered more than ordinary actions. This has the result of portraying the protesters as different individuals from the non-protesting audience. This leads to an understanding of the protesters as a Them in an Us-Them divide where the author, the establishment and the non-protesting audience belong to the Us. The episode of the protesters who “put up his toddler on the barricade” works also in the discursive structure known as norm and value violation, as seen also above in the analysis of the BP editorial published on the same day (BP. “Law and order must prevail.” May 20th, 2010). By reporting this ‘amoral’ action committed by a single protesters, the author suggests the readers the impression that the Others do not share the same moral values of Us.

Subsequently, the author moves his critique from the ordinary protesters to their leaders. Their crime, according to the author, was to push protesters “into the fight of their lives.” Doing this, “they created Frankenstein, and the monster is tossing Molotov cocktails into shopping malls.” In these lines, as seen in previous texts analyzed, the author removes one side from the “fight.” The protesters are described as fighting, but we are not told who they are fighting (and why). By removing from the “fight” the side he stands for, i.e. the establishment (army and government), the author reveals the ideological standpoint which influenced his perception of the events and which drove the writing of his piece.

In the next part, the author seems to criticize the international media news coverage by claiming that “the world has seen a compelling story made from incomprehensible data that reinforces what the audience wants to believe,” i.e. a simplistic story of “greedy elites versus the impoverished poor.” The critique is interesting and it would be appealing to hear why this version is wrong. After all, European countries too have a rather rich history of violent or less violent confrontations between “greedy elites versus the impoverished poor.” Anyway, the author doesn’t do that, but he rather turns into arguing that “the uprising in

Thailand” was different from the previous uprisings in Myanmar and the Philippines. Again, we are not told why. Then he moves to Europe, saying that in “Paris, London or New York, the reds doing what they have done, they wouldn't have lasted for more than a week.” Whether this point is correct or less, yet it is hard to understand what is the link between this assumption and his previous argument that the protest should not be considered an elite versus poor confrontation.

After having accused an unnamed “Western” interlocutor of prejudices against “third world countries,” it is the time for the writer to spend some good words for his country’s establishment. Consequently, we are informed that Abhisit’s offer was “serious” but was “rejected by the red leaders,” who are identified as evil human beings who do not care enough of the “wellbeing of the ordinary red shirts.” In critical discourse analysis, this is called Apparent Altruism. It is the move used to pretend understanding and genuine interest for the positions and the wellbeing of (some of) the Others. Since altruism has a positive connotation, the move has a self-presentation function. Anyway, although it shows that he cares about (some of) the Others, the real ideological basis of this discursive move is in the interest of the speaker. In this case, it is doubtful that the writer genuinely cares of the wellbeing of ordinary protesters, but one thing it is evident: the sentence is aimed at accusing the UDD leadership of immorality for misleading their people, and of responsibility for the clashes because they supposedly “rejected” Abhisit’s “offer,” which the author describes as “serious,” somehow betraying his personal opinion.

The piece is concluded by presenting one more time the National Enemy, Thaksin Shinawatra, accused of being ‘selfish’ and ‘insensitive’ just like the UDD leaders. With this closure, we see how the article is constructed according to the news frame developed by TN and BP already in the first and second phase. As discussed earlier, it is a three-pronged narrative where the core elements are the Recognized Enemy (Thaksin), his bought off and simpleton thugs (UDD protesters) and the violence caused by the “Frankenstein” generated by Thaksin’s whims through the gangster-like UDD leaders and down to the brainwashed rural folk pushed “into the fight” against a “professional military.”

6.4.2 Thainess under attack: the Other Within and the Other Outside

The worst political violence in nearly four decades eventually left almost one-hundred people dead and thousands injured. TN and BP news frame legitimized the government and the army, and delegitimized the protest, as seen in the previous sections.

In such a pro-establishment media environment, public intellectuals as Pravit, as well as digital and international media, were the sources many had to draw on in order to have information about the ongoing standoff and confrontation between the protesters and the government. No wonder, when what initially began as a peaceful protest eventually escalated into a violent confrontation, the government and security forces censored and blocked many critical and alternative media, as seen in section 5.3, although they could not stop foreign journalists from doing their job. In Thailand international media had historical importance as a force of change:

“During the mass demonstrations against the Suchinda Kraprayoon government which followed in May 1992, the international media was regarded by progressive elements in the Thai press as an important ally in publicizing military attempts to suppress popular protests by means of violence” (McCargo 1999: 553).

McCargo (1999) makes no hint of protests or anger by ‘ordinary’ Thais against the international media for insensitive, inaccurate or biased reporting in 1992. Quite differently, in year 2010 a part of Thai public opinion protested against international media coverage. The protest erupted in the new media and was eventually picked up by traditional ones. When a Bangkokian woman wrote an open letter of protest accusing CNN of inaccuracy and bias in reporting news concerning Thailand, the letter quickly spread through Facebook and Twitter, blogs and online discussion forums, until TN eventually published it on May 19th, 2010, thus somehow validating the critique as just, or at least newsworthy (Napas Na Pombejra. "*Open letter to CNN.*" TN. May 19th, 2010). The letter claims that in CNN reports “all details about the government's position have come from secondary resources” and “No direct interviews with government officials have been shown.” It would be easy to discard the accusations as inaccurate by pointing to the fact that the CNN and the accused journalists had in fact interviewed and published several “direct interviews with government officials,” including one with Finance Minister Korn Chatikavanij and a military spokesman on May 14th (in the article “*Thai Army says it did not shoot protest leader.*” CNN. May 14th, 2010. Accessed at <

government.protests/?hpt=T2>), or again by broadcasting an interview with Thai government spokesman Panitan Wattanayagorn on May 17th (Sara Sidner, “*On the scene: Bangkok at boiling point.*” CNN. May 17th, 2010. Accessed at < <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/05/15/thailand.scene.sidner/> >). In spite of the evident speciousness of the accusations, the open letter is significant for this study under several other aspects of analysis. Therefore, it is better to quote the letter in its full extent:

Recently, CNN Thailand correspondents Dan Rivers and Sarah Snider have made me seriously reconsider your agency as a source for reliable and accurate, unbiased news. As of this writing, thousands of CNN's viewers have already begun to question the accuracy and dependability of its reporting as regards events in Afghanistan, Haiti, Iraq, Iran, in addition to Bangkok.

As a first-rate global news agency, CNN has an inherent professional duty to deliver all sides of the truth to the public who have faithfully and sincerely placed their trust and reliance in you. Your network, by its longtime transnational presence and extensive reach, has been put in a position of trust and care; CNN's journalists, reporters, and researchers have a collective responsibility to follow the journalist's code and ethics to deliver and present facts from all facets of the story, not merely one-sided, shallow and sensational half-truths. The magnitude of harm or potential extent of damage that erroneous and fallacious news reporting can cause to (and exacerbate), not only a country's internal state of affairs, economic well-being, and general international perception, but also the real lives and livelihood of the innocent and voiceless people of that nation, is enormous. CNN should not negligently discard its duty of care by reporting one-sided or unverified facts and distorted truths drawn from superficial research, or display/distribute biased images which capture only one side of the actual event.

Rivers and Snider have not done their best under these life-threatening circumstances because many other foreign correspondents have done better. All of Rivers' and Sniders' quotes and statements seem to have been solely taken from the anti-government protest leaders or their sympathisers. Yet, all details about the government's position have come from secondary resources. No direct interviews with government officials have been shown; no interviews or witness statements from Bangkok residents or civilians unaffiliated with the protesters, particularly those who have been harassed by or suffered at the hands of the protesters, have been circulated.

Why the discrepancy? Why the failure to report all of the government's previous numerous attempts to negotiate or invitation to the protesters to go home? Why no broadcasts shown of the myriad ways the red protesters have terrorised and harmed innocent civilians by burning their shops, enclosing burning tyres around apartment buildings, shooting glass marbles at civilians, attacking civilians in their cars, and worst of all, obstructing paramedics and ambulances carrying civilians injured by grenade blasts during the Silom incident of April 24, thereby resulting in the sole civilian casualty? The entire timeline of events that have forced the government to take this difficult stance has been hugely and callously ignored in deference to the red 'underdogs'.

Rivers and Snider's choice of sensational vocabulary and terminology in every newscast, and choice of images to broadcast, has resulted in law-abiding soldiers and the heavily-pressured Thai government being painted in a negative, harsh and oppressive light, whereas the genuinely violent and law-breaking arm of the anti-government protesters - who are directly responsible for overt acts of aggression not only against soldiers but also against unarmed civilians and law-abiding apolitical residents (and whose actions under American law would by now be classified as terrorist activities) - are portrayed as righteous freedom fighters deserving of worldwide sympathy and support. This has misled the various international human rights watchdogs to believe that the Thai government is sending trigger-happy soldiers out to ruthlessly murder unarmed civilians without cause.

As a current resident of war zone Bangkok who has experienced the effect of the red protests firsthand and is living in a state of constant terror and anxiety as to whether her family, friends and home will get bombed or attacked by the hardcore anti-government paramilitary forces - I appeal to CNN's professional integrity to critically investigate and scrutinise the misinformed news reporting of your above-named correspondents. If they are incapable of obtaining genuine, authentic facts from any other source except the red protest leaders and red-sympathising Thai translators or acquaintances, or from fellow non-Thai-speaking journalists who are similarly ignorant of Thai language, culture, history and society, then perhaps CNN should consider reassigning field correspondents to Thailand.

I implore and urge you to please take serious action to correct or reverse the grave injustice that has been done to the Thai nation, her government, and the majority of law-abiding Thai citizens and expatriate residents by the poorly researched and misrepresented news coverage of the ongoing political unrest and escalating violence in Thailand.

Copies of this open letter have also been distributed to other local as well as international news media and social networks for public information. Please feel free to contact me further should you require any additional concrete and reputable evidence in substantiation and corroboration of my complaints and claims stated above.

Napas Na Pombejra, Bangkok.

As said, the opinion piece was initially expressed and circulated on the internet in both Thai and English language, it was analyzed by several blogs and read by countless netizens days before it was accepted into traditional media and published in TN. This is significant because shows the new media's role in shaping public opinion and informing traditional print media. In addition, we can also study how Thailand's media interact with international media and what (a part of) the Thai audience thought about the international media news coverage of Thailand's political crisis. In fact, in the second paragraph of the piece we read that the

“magnitude of harm or potential extent of damage that erroneous and fallacious news reporting can cause to (and exacerbate), not only a country... but also... innocent and voiceless people... is enormous.”

This criticism works in Thongchai's (1994) Thai nationalist frameworks in the way in which it posits international news as foreign Other seeking to harm – “enormously” - the Thai Nation, embodied here by “the innocent and voiceless people.” As seen in chapter 3, dominant classes work hard to create cultural hegemony, which in times of crises works as a useful reserve of popular consent against forces of change, moving common citizens in defense of an order they have actually not chosen but they have been thought to revere as both intrinsically natural and mystically divine, even if potentially fragile when attacked by external forces or internal deviant elements.

In this case, there are two enemies, one internal and one external, standing out against the Thai Nation and its “innocent people.” The first group of enemies are the devilish protesters, “whose actions under American law would by now be classified as terrorist activities.” The second enemy is individuated in the foreign media, accused of being biased, “non-Thai,” “ignorant,” “superficial,” “red-sympathizer” and “incapable of obtaining genuine, authentic facts” from anyone else than “the anti-government protest leaders or their sympathizers.” Interestingly enough, Napas’s letter authorizes a narrow understanding of the 2010 protests as anti-Thai behaviors, a construction which certainly fits in the imagination of Thailand as a harmonic and peaceful Buddhist country under the guidance of benevolent philosopher-kings and the protection of armed knights of Thainess, an “amazing” tourist destination enriched by warm weather and friendly smiling locals. It also invites an approach and understanding of the protest as just being caused by the reds’ intransigence, a simplification which of course ignores the multitudes of nuanced ways this protest came into being, unfolded and can be possibly understood.

However the key to understand her argument comes when she retaliates against CNN journalists who supposedly misrepresent or are unable to report the “genuine, authentic facts.” At this point the letter is remarkable, one more time, because the author opens up the critique against CNN on the basis of “Thai language, culture, history and society,” placing them as unique and thus hardly understandable by “ignorant... non-Thai-speaking journalists.” In this sense, the whole letter is exemplar in demonstrating how constructed notions of Thainess were also at stake in 2010, as well as of the power of hegemonic ideologies in times of crisis.

Additionally, referring to Thailand as a “she,” this letter works, consciously or unconsciously, in feminizing Thailand, refining and polishing the Andersonian “imagined community,” personifying the country and portraying *her* as fragile, and therefore as more exposed to the threat of the red villains. At the end of the letter, Napas begs CNN to “... please take serious action to correct or reverse the grave injustice that has been done to the Thai nation, her government, and the majority of law-abiding Thai citizen.” The whole narrative, while serving as a poetic way to construct the imagined damages done to Thailand by a supposedly biased “foreign” reporting, it also evokes a gendered understanding of a dominating masculine foreign culture inserting alien ideals and worldviews into the Nation, endangering *her* – which equals to a sort of imperialist, cultural rape. As seen, in mainstream

narratives of Thai history, enlightened kings bore the task of filtering foreign features into the cauldron of Thainess, carefully choosing supposed ‘good’ elements and rejecting alleged ‘bad’ ones, just like the good farmer separates wheat from ryegrass. Therefore, the *j'accuse* of Ms Napas implies that such a quasi-divine task from which the survival of the Nation depended and may still depend cannot be certainly left on the hands of “ignorant” and “non-Thai” individuals as the two CNN reporters smashed in the article.

Her piece concludes with an apparently conciliatory tone – “Please feel free to contact me further...” – which in fact, after having accused the CNN and its reporters of such multiple and enormous damages, sounds just paternalistic. In addition, the writer offers her availability for proving “additional concrete and reputable evidence” while, in fact, she did not provide any single evidence yet. At maximum, she exposed her “state of constant terror and anxiety,” but by definition a feeling is not concrete. Ms Napas, who happens to be related to both Abhisit’s wife, Thaksin’s ex wife and the wife of another former premier, Pridi Banomyong, belongs to an eminent family and was educated as a lawyer in the UK. In an interview to TN (Jintana Panyaarvudh and Kornchanok Raksaseri. “*One voice well heard.*” TN. August 22nd, 2010. Accessed at <<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/home/2010/08/24/politics/One-voice-well-heard-30136446.html>>) she presented herself as a moderate and “multi-colored” citizen. “I’m pretty sure that on the red side, people were also taking care of each other,” she said. “I think it’s a very Thai thing.” Although one may argue that, say, even Burmese, Argentineans, New Zealanders, lions, pigeons or hamsters are capable of “taking care of each other,” yet Ms Napas considers this behavior “a very Thai thing.” This is a further indication of how, in nationalist and ethnocentric worldviews, what one perceives as a good and positive characteristic tends to be included into the Us identity, and even ‘deviant’ elements are considered to possess it.

Anyway, this magnanimous concession to the protesters was declared only three months after the massacre which she supported. On contrast, one more noteworthy aspect of her “open letter” is how the red shirt protesters, seen as harming and destroying the imagined Thai identity, must be constructed somewhere outside Thainess, walking hand in hand with the biased and “ignorant” foreigners, represented in the critique of CNN. In such a piece, the Red Shirt group is collectively constructed and subsequently separated from the imagined feminine Thai Nation, of which they are obviously not a part, ending up somewhere outside

the realm of “Thai language, culture, history and society,” which are a pre-understood set of understandings for the Us, i.e. the real members of the Thai Nation. As seen in chapter 4, these understandings are constructed and have been critiqued under alternative readings of Thai history (e.g. Thongchai 1994). Moreover, in Napas’s piece we see how the fact that Thailand is posited as special and unique (Andrew Placlab 2011), and the protesters are portrayed somehow outside Thainess, has in turn the effect of legitimizing all anti-demonstrator versions, including the government’s official discourse of events, as the correct discourse – “genuine, authentic facts.”

Amongst this worldview, the red shirt “terrorist” invasion of Bangkok resembles the renowned painting of Russian artist El Lissitzky of a spiked red shape wedging inside a white circle. No wonder that a number of middle and upper class Bangkokians actually described the March to May 2010 events as a veritable invasion of wild ‘buffaloes’ coming down from a sort of ethnic reservoir, together with their pick-ups, their Isan music, their odor, and their dark skin, to invade the actual temples of Bangkok: the shopping district and its malls. An understanding of the protest suggested and supported by TN and BP news frame, as seen in section 5.1. In such a classist, hierarchical, and consumerist worldview, since the very beginning the outsiders’ intrusion into the fortress-like capital, and even within symbolic sanctuaries of privilege such as the luxury shopping district of Ratchaprasong, was equaled to committing sacrilege.

While I am not here to refute Ms. Napas’s claims that some protesters bore weapons or broke the law committing destruction and violence, let alone to analyze the March to May 2010 protest and street riots in Bangkok on a military perspective, I want to underline how the operation of simply placing the entire movement into an anti-Thai framework is understandable within the hegemonic ideology of Thainess, as well as how it has the intention or anyway the result of ignoring the nuanced ways in which the protest came about and subsequently unfolded. In this ideological reading of the protest, even the soldiers are just “law-abiding” members of the Thai Nation “painted in a negative, harsh and oppressive light” by foreign media, in stark contrast with “the genuinely violent and law-breaking” protesters. So, even the soldiers are rightfully included into the smooth, peaceful and feminized Thai Nation, while the Reds are fully othered. No facts are given, no proofs are added, but there is no need. In the contest of mainstream Thai nationalism, her piece is rather pre-understood, as it always is if one moves from the elite-constructed concept of Thainess, where, as seen in

chapter 4, ‘small people’ are supposed to be law-abiding subjects, not citizens endowed with the basic rights such as the freedom to express their opinion or to ask political changes, let alone to demonstrate in the capital and occupy the commercial centre of Bangkok, the capitalist heart of the Thai Nation. Therefore, in virtue of their insubordination, the red shirts posed themselves out of Thainess. There is no need to analyze the actions of single individuals: the whole category is disqualified *a priori*. This mental framework authorized “law-abiding” Thais to suspend even their own human piety, as when Sumitra Chan-ngao, on page 19 of D-Life magazine on May 4th, 2010, is reported as saying:

"[I] want the country to overcome this incident quickly so everyone will be relieved. Don't be sad for the losses because they chose to be there."

Probably, within the realm of such worldview, one should not be sad even for the assassinations of nurses or journalists, because “they chose to be there.” In the article “*Death toll more than just statistics*” (TN. May 19th, 2010), journalist Pravit Rojanaphruk reported more examples of suspension of human compassion:

“A female yellow-shirt radio host at FM 97.75 station told listeners on Monday morning that 30 deaths “wasn't that much”. Newspapers like ASTV-Manager Daily called for the government on Monday to finish off the enemy and urged Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva “not to lose heart”. “Please be more swift and decisive,” the paper advised Abhisit.”

Commenting, Pravit acknowledged that “those opposed to the red-shirt movement even seem to be delighted that the Army is liberally firing live bullets.” As argued by Poowin (2010: 247), this apparent cruelty is understandable by taking into account Thailand dominant ideology of Thainess:

“in the Thai context, the Red Shirts’ lives are ungrivable because they fall outside the norms of Thainess, and many victims who opposed the Abhisit regime or Thainess have not received mercy or mourning.”

If BP and TN media message was largely embedded into such dominant narrative, yet a limited number of voices within the two organizations, most notably Pravit, openly questioned it. Although the journalist did not intend to turn upside down the whole anti-protesters points of view, nevertheless he tried to ask for more nuanced and articulated readings of the situation, for example by taking into account the mistakes of both the red shirt leaders and the government:

“It cannot be denied that the red-shirt leaders are partially responsible for the deaths of their own followers, but the government too should act more responsibly. Their decision to use war weapons instead of dialogue has already led to so many deaths.”

This said, Pravit's denounced of the government for its inability in protecting people's lives is firm:

"The government, which has armed forces at its disposal, has the responsibility to protect the right to life of its citizens. It has cruelly chosen to abdicate this responsibility and people who are affected by it can no longer regard the regime as legitimate" (*"Death toll more than just statistics."* TN. May 19th, 2010).

Refusing black and white lenses, Pravit concluded arguing that some protesters' leaders may be wrong, corrupt, or condemnable, nonetheless this does not mean that the political demands of the red shirt social movement for a more just society must be ignored or rejected as are nothing more than a result of the leaders' will or of Thaksin's whims:

"The protesters' sense of camaraderie and conviction are strong enough, and even though some of their leaders like Thaksin Shinawatra and those at the Rajprasong rally stage are deeply flawed, the red shirts' aspiration for an equal political voice and more equitable social and economic opportunities are real."

Anyway, despite Pravit's calling for a more articulated interpretation of reality, since Ms. Napas's letter was well written enough, it effectively served as the face of the backlash against international media and demonstrators as a whole unique indistinct category, and from this particular letter, as well as other articles, we can get a sense of the nationalist and exceptional connotation which the Thai media's 'war of position' was about.

It must be noted as well how this letter stands in stark contrast to the events in 1992 where most of the Thai press praised international media for helping to inform the world about the protests against the military-led government. The fact is that in 1992 the majority of Thai media were anti-government (McCargo 2002: 30), while both in 2006 and in 2010 most of them sided with the military and the old establishment. The issue of Thai-"farang" media relations is further analyzed by Pavin Chachavalpongpun, then research fellow at Singapore National University, in the opinion piece "*'Farang cannot know' - even if they do understand*" (BP. August 31st, 2010). Pavin writes:

"As the political conflict became increasingly brutal, the traditional elite embarked on stirring up a sense of xenophobia among the Thais. As a result, some members of the Thai public have shown their disapproval of those certain 'farangs' whose political viewpoints are different from theirs. The case of the CNN reporting on the Thai crisis exemplifies how the discourse of "farangs-who-know-little-about-Thailand" has been played up in order to conceal the ugliness of Thai politics... But all these allegations obscured the fact that some local media openly adopted a pro-government stance and rarely published any statements from the red shirt movement."

Pavin is explicit in identifying the “traditional elite” as responsible for “stirring up” xenophobic feelings among Thais. As seen in chapter 4, “negative identification” is essential to Thainess. In year 2010 xenophobic feelings have been instrumental for obscuring the fact that Thai mainstream media were largely pro-government, misrepresented the protests and kept the anti-establishment citizens voiceless.

Among the largely pro-establishment media coverage, it is worth to present a single piece of comment which literally stood out for its extremism. I refer to an article by Sophon Onkgara appeared on TN after the final crackdown with the headline “*We have suffered as the US has, but we look worse*” (TN. May 25th, 2010). The piece is an über-attempt of denigrating popular protests and portraying the government and the anti-demonstrator forces as victims. Sophon attempts this task not less than by making a correlation between Thailand’s May 19th, 2010 and the United States of America’s September 11th, 2001, as well as by comparing Thaksin Shinawatra, former Thai PM, to Saudi jihadist Bin Laden, the head of an organization responsible for terrorist attacks against civilian and military targets which caused thousands of victims. The article deserves to be quoted in full length:

“What happened before, on and after May 19 was mayhem unleashed by the brutal force of terrorists and the red-shirt networks in the city and provinces. It is truly beyond the wild imagination.

The appalling and destructive events have exposed the hidden nature of Thai people - that behind the easy smiles there is a pure brute and murderous instinct, not much different from tribes that engage in warfare and genocide.

Though not yet a civil war in the true sense of the word, it is a shock for Thais to realise that they have the capacity to kill countrymen on a large scale. Judging from the armed confrontation, just short of a conventional war, what we have experienced and witnessed was urban terrorism under the cloak of a campaign for “democracy”.

The red shirts - financed in the tens of billions of baht by Thaksin Shinawatra and his cronies in a bid to topple the Abhisit government and seize power - have gone to the fullest extreme of terrorism. More than 30 buildings were set ablaze and the CentralWorld complex collapsed as a result of premeditated arson.

The red shirts have become a real peril in this land. They are a serious threat to national security, with or without Thaksin being around to finance their future destructive campaigns. Such horrible scenarios could be prevented if the ringleaders and their network of extremist supporters are uprooted once and for all.

As witnessed by foreign diplomats and military attaches, the war weapons captured from the red shirts are truly formidable, not to mention the cars and trucks fully laden with improvised bombs and explosive devices, powerful enough to kill thousands of people.

The red-shirts' arsenal includes grenade launchers, assault rifles, other firearms, bombs and hand-grenades. These were stockpiled around the stage at Rajprasong for a planned battle with the military on the day of the crackdown.

The police, as we all know, maintained a ceremonial presence, and played no meaningful role in quelling the riots. It was disgraceful that they simply stood and let the terrorists and arsonists burn down CentralWorld, the Siam Theatre and surrounding buildings. Sadder still, it is common knowledge that up to 90 per cent of the police, if not more, are red-shirt sympathisers.

The violence and tragedy - with up to 100 dead and several hundreds injured - captured headlines around the world, and news networks had a field day, some with fair reporting. However, a few major news organisations showed how they could be biased to make the country's administration look much worse than in reality.

In many ways, what has happened in Thailand over the past decade has put us on par with the US in sharing similar predicaments and misfortunes.

We had the "tom yum gung" disease in 1997, sparking off a worldwide financial collapse, with Thailand taking the blame for crony capitalism. The US has had real estate mayhem and a Wall Street collapse called the "hamburger disease."

The US saw 9/11, and the bringing down of the World Trade Centre. We just suffered May 19, with the CentralWorld complex, earlier named the World Trade Centre, going up in smoke. A "ground zero" on a smaller scale.

The US has an enemy by the name of Bin Laden, who has eluded capture for years. We have an enemy named Thaksin Shinawatra who deserves the title of public enemy number one, and has already been branded a terrorist by the government. These two fugitives are both wealthy, but fighting for different causes. What Thaksin and his network of cronies have been doing is self serving and based on personal greed.

The Americans have seen the Black Panthers and other urban terrorists, freak groups led by the likes of Jim Jones, and violent incidents like Waco. We have the red shirts, who are mean and lethal, comprising thugs, thieves, looters, assassins, saboteurs, vandals and charlatans campaigning for "democracy" on Thaksin's payroll.

America had an excellent newscaster named Dan Rather, but now we have the new-rich Dan Rivers of CNN, who lives here and gives Thailand a bad name it does not deserve.

The US has Obama and we have Obamark. Their political futures remain open to conjecture."

The author opens his opinion piece by stating that what happened in May 2010 was simply the work of a "brutal force of terrorists and the red-shirt networks." Thus, the writer reduces the complexity of the 2010 Thai political crisis to a red shirted terror campaign. We have already seen how, in virtually every single article analyzed in this study, when violence is involved the government and the army are either removed from the text, not given the agency of the (controversial) actions, or they are described as having "no choice" and being "forced" to act. In this case, the establishment is simply removed, leaving the red shirted 'terrorists' alone on the scene of the crime.

Already in the second paragraph of the article, Mr. Sapon writes that the events of May “exposed the hidden nature of Thai people,” leaving one wondering what cruel facts and crime news which fill on a daily basis many Thai newspapers expose. But for this author, deviant aspects of Thainess are just now showing themselves. From this and from the following lines emerges that imagined notions of Thai identity are placed on a center stage, threatened by the protestors which assembled in central Bangkok. Mr. Sapon continues on the same tune writing that “...it is a shock for Thais to realize that they have the capacity to kill countrymen on a large scale.” Again, the reader wonders what the author realized when the events of the precedent bloody massacres in Thai history happened, without even considering the ongoing conflict in the South which since 2004 caused thousands of fatalities. While I am not here to argue for or against Mr. Sapon’s accuses of terrorism against the red shirts, and neither I’m going to assess the claims of similarity between Thaksin and Bin Laden, yet his astonishment and his denial of recognizing the massacres of students and pro-democracy activists committed by military and paramilitary troops in 1973, 1976 and again in 1992 are rather stunning. By not accepting Thailand’s bloody events in the past, the author constructs the popular protests and the violence of March to May 2010 as some sort of new unheard in Thai history, even if the truth is far from this. But the article exists and can be understood only within the hegemonic discourse of Thailand, the one which dictated “with Orwellian audacity” the preamble of the 2007 Constitution, a chart which solemnly declares that “Thailand has been under the rule of democratic government with the King as head of state for more than 75 years,” thus counting as “democratic” even the regimes of military dictators such as Sarit Thannarat (Ferrara 2011: 63).

Moving from the shores of this ideologically fabricated version of Thai history, Mr. Sapon sustains unashamedly that the year 2010 is the first time mass violence has been witnessed in the Kingdom. This fabrication permits him to add that without corrupt politicians and their network of patronage, in the Land of Smiles these kinds of acts wouldn’t have happened. For the sake of this study, the most significant aspect to highlight is that ignoring obvious histories of state violence equals seeing history from a specific constructed standpoint, the hegemonic one. The text can be understood only by taking this ideological foundation into account.

As a further demonstration, in Mr. Sapon’s piece this sudden realization of negative aspects of Thai culture, society and history rapidly disappears when protesters are othered as

terrorists bought off by a villain who, significantly, is located abroad, in a separated realm, outside the Thai geo-body. In the same way of naming negative aspects of identity discussed earlier, Thainess is then defined as different from the deception and violence of the reds. Thanks to this bold operation, Thainess is re-inscribed as being peaceful, even if currently threatened by foreign funded “terrorists”, as alien to Thainess as Afghani guerrilla is to the American Dream. In the case of this article, by ignoring the ruling blocs’ brutalities of the past and by splitting popular protests from the hegemonic construction of Thainess, a substantial number of Thai social groups and significant voices in history are silenced as well, and the imagined Thai identity survives unscratched.

About half way through the opinion piece also anti-foreign sentiments emerge when Supon writes that “a few major news organisations showed how they could be biased to make the country's administration look much worse than in reality.” While he does not present any fact nor he singles out any particular news organizations, the previously analyzed letter against CNN gives some background into the discourse and reveals further connections between the two opinion pieces. Since there isn’t a critical analysis of this supposedly biased international news organizations accused of discrediting the Abhisit government, so the lines just serve as further speculation within frameworks and strains of the imagined Thai Nation. International media are othered by accusing them of shaming the government. If non-Thais make the Bangkok government look bad, than the correct position for a Thai is to support it without questioning its actions.

Supon goes on to make the claim that May 19th is even worse than the American September 11th. This audacious claim frames the protests and the social demands of millions of citizens as a whole as some sort of weird Other, violent and un-Thai in nature, just like Arab or Pashtun terrorists are un-American. But the author doesn’t end surprising, and later on he has the boldness to compare Thaksin to Osama Bin Laden, and the UDD activists to the Black Panthers. While these comparisons may be considered slightly absurd by some observers and are academically problematic in a multitude of levels, the whole discourse should be seen in ways in which Thai national history has been constructed and the hegemonic worldview has been methodically infused into the public for decades. The author moves from within this construction of a quasi-religious and fully exceptional Thai Nation where violence has been an unheard until 2010, or at least since the political rise of Thaksin, and whose only troubles surfaced with the 1997 financial crisis, which saw “Thailand taking

the blame” but, *ça va sans dire*, the crisis was caused by the Others too, in the form of foreign speculative financial attacks.

By the end of the article one finally understands the bile of Supon when the villain is named and CNN journalist Dan Rivers is revealed as an opportunist reporter taking advantage of Thailand to build his fortune, much like Thaksin was convicted of doing. The reader is drove to understand that both Rivers and Thaksin committed evil actions against the Thai Nation for personal gains. The bad name that Rivers is theoretically giving Thailand isn't disclosed, but, again, there is no need: broadcasting globally scenes of violence happening in the Land of Smiles, that is to say in what has been carefully constructed historically and then propagandized as a peaceful and unique country, open for tourism and investment, certainly goes against the traditional canon of Thai history, as well as against certain political and business interests.

Among the hundreds of articles published in the March to May 2010 period from both English-language newspapers in Thailand, TN and BP, the one just analyzed stands out as the most revealing reactionary and pro-establishment intellectual effort undertaken in the three-month long cultural ‘war of position.’ Although this article, just like the one of Ms. Napas, offers little or no critical analysis of the events, or maybe because of this, it displays a strong emotional reaction to the protest in a framework of Thai “imagined community” as a quasi-religious artifact (Anderson 1983). It also fits within the need-of-foreigner framework (Thongchai 1994; Pavin 2011), presenting a discourse of Thailand in which red shirts and foreign news reporters are othered and placed outside the context of Thai identity, as discussed earlier. The result is portraying Thailand as nothing else than a tourist paradise and a lighthearted society, a peaceful land peopled by “law-abiding” subjects. The very notion that the violence seen in April and May 2010 is, as the author puts it, “...truly beyond the wild imagination,” and thus “it is a shock for Thais to realise that they have the capacity to kill countrymen on a large scale,” is to see Thai history from the hegemonic ideological standpoint - a constructed, narrow and largely “imagined” framework, which is oblivious of the many episodes of violence of the past. Within this hegemonic worldview, nothing else than a narrowly peaceful construction of Thailand is supposed to exist, ergo anything outside narrow definitions of Thainess is either un-Thai or foreign or both - and it is a danger which must be dealt with. For all these reasons the piece shows both the positive aspects and “negative identification” of the notion of Thainess described by Thongchai (1994).

5.5. Conclusion: Bangkok Post and The Nation protest frame

Through this chapter we saw how the establishment enjoyed friendlier media coverage, a fact which confirms the results from the quantitative content analysis of selected articles discussed in chapter 5. Anyway, at least in the first three phases, the bias was not necessarily an overt one. That is why discourse analysis was useful in individuating the devices employed by the writers to frame the media message within a certain, preferred reading.

BP and TN treated three main themes – Thaksin, red shirt protesters and violence (or fear of it) - which they managed to interrelate closely.

The first theme was about the former premier Thaksin Shinawatra's judicial case and persona. The debate took place in a cultural environment where Thaksin had been already elevated by the media to be the vilest social actor in the Kingdom, the Recognized Enemy of Thainess (Pavin 2011). The media narrative was both subtlety and overtly hostile to Thaksin. In phase 1 (before the beginning of the protest on March 14th, 2010), the February 26th judicial sentence which seized a part of Thaksin's fortune was presented as the most salient news. The sentence was framed as a fair verdict. Both the BP and TN published editorials and op-eds highly critical of Thaksin and they constructed front pages which suggested a clear anti-Thaksin stand. As confirmed by the quantitative analysis, the articles reported plenty of quotations from the establishment, including the prime minister, the deputy prime minister, government officials, politicians, army generals, judges, businessmen, and other prominent social actors who treated Thaksin scornfully and depicted him as an irrational and shady personality, a negative character, an unhinged individual, a man somehow responsible of a titanic anti-social effort which was endangering the whole Thai nation. In this way, Thailand's political crisis was traced back to the figure of a single man. This was a reduction of the complexity of the events and of the socio-political situation to a mere 'personality' aspect (see image 1 and 2).

The second theme revolved around the red shirt activists and the planned UDD protest, which was portrayed as an event instigated by Thaksin's whims. TN and BP news frame was largely based on the assumption that the judicial sentence which seized a part of

Thaksin's fortune was behind the planned rally. Economic and sociopolitical causes were understated at best, and left totally explored at worst. On top of this, with the exception of a number of quotations from the UDD main leaders, the 'ordinary' protesters were hardly given any voice. Thus, alternative perspectives were left virtually unexplored. Deep analysis of the nature of the UDD movement, of the requests of the protesters, and of the issues they were raising were almost absent from the two papers analyzed. By taking for granted that the Major Villain was the one who led and maneuvered the demonstrators, and by suggesting that the red shirts were merely rural, uneducated and unsophisticated folk, the news frame delegitimized the protesters by reducing their rationale to Thaksin's whims and by portraying them as something between unscrupulous bough-off thugs, simpleton peasants incapable of taking rational political decisions and *bona fide* citizens ultimately deceived by evil leaders. Portraying the protest as little more than a pro-Thaksin rally of Thaksin's supporters and as an event wanted and funded by Thaksin equaled to delegitimize the protesters' reasons and demands.

The red shirts movement and actions were closely linked to the third theme, which was the threat of violence in the first and second phase, and real violence on the third and fourth. Already at the end of the first phase, Thaksin's sentence became to lose its salience as 'news' - nevertheless it was not dismissed: it became the background framework within which other 'angles' were elaborated. Already at the end of the pre-protest phase, 'violence' became the main 'news.' This means that both the TN and BP steadily substituted the main focus of their news frame from Thaksin and his sentence to 'violence.' Consequently, hand in hand with the refusal of a serious analysis of the protest movement, the two media outlets played high the threat of a violent outcome. Fear aroused from the assumption that the protest was potentially violent, and thus a threat for the Bangkok citizenry and for the whole nation. The assumption was corroborated in a number of ways, including by over-relying on opinions from the establishment and by alleging links between the red shirt movement and episodes of violence committed by unknown individuals in Bangkok and in the South of Thailand. The original news angle - Thaksin's sentence and his persona - now appeared to be the underlying explanation of Thailand's socio-political unrest. This was done at times by subtly suggesting that violence was somehow generated by 'dark forces' connected to Thaksin, and other times by alleging not-too-subtly nothing less that he was the mastermind behind a sort of terrorist strategy carried on by 'his' red shirted UDD group and aimed at destabilizing the government, the state and possibly also the holy-like monarchical institution. With such a

narrative, both the newspapers managed to create a background of mounting fear which largely hid the socio-economic and political issues which prompted the protest. This ‘strategy of tension’ continued mounting until the day before the protest, when the BP in its front page warned the readers that “UDD rural hordes” were heading to Bangkok (see image 3). Thus the media message suggested that the ‘invasion’ of the capital was a disastrous event and a bad omen for the country.

In such a climate of fear, the establishment, i.e. government, army and other institutions, stood out positively thanks to representation techniques which betrayed an ideological manipulation and all contributed to delegitimize the protesters, such as:

(a) positive presentation of the establishment: this was done by framing the government and the army as morally superior through an emphasis on their allowing demonstrations, defending democracy, law and order, holding firm despite pressure, and so on;

(b) discrediting the establishment’s opponents, i.e. the protesters, by portraying them as being simpletons, bought off, opportunistic, violent or violence prone, dangerous, terrorists, etc;

(c) ideological polarization: the establishment was framed as belonging to the Us side, i.e. the side of Thainess (nationalism, Buddhism, royalism), Democracy, and positive values in general. On contrast, the protesters were othered into the Them, negative side, the one of Anarchy, violence and immorality, ending up as being categorized as an indistinct, delegitimized, ‘un-Thai’, and dehumanized group.

Such operations, we argue, were instrumental in paving the way for the media legitimization of the final crackdown because of the overall previous work of legitimization of the government and army, and on the other hand of delegitimization of the protest(ers).

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

This study examined how Thailand English-language print media covered the March to May 2010 UDD protest in Bangkok. This conclusion seeks to answer the question of what the BP and TN said it happened, how they said it and why.

6.1 Findings and discussion

Findings have confirmed the initial hypotheses (see 1.4). This research leaves few doubts whether the BP and TN media message was not particularly friendly with the protest(ers). In other words, similarly as in previous studies, the findings of this research lend support to argument that, when protests question or challenge socio-political elites' positions and cultural understandings, mainstream media tend to marginalized or delegitimized them. With such findings, this study found more evidence to support the Protest Paradigm, even within a reality – Thailand – where the model had not been previously studied. Therefore it is possible to suggest that the clear and systemic biases in protest news coverage, known as Protest Paradigm, exist also in Thailand's English-language press, and thus they are not necessarily limited to the specific countries and regions where they have been previously identified.

In other words, this research recognizes the classic studies on media and political protest/dissent (e.g. Halloran et al. 1970; Chan and Lee 1984; Hertog and McLeod 1995; McLeod and Detenber 1999; Boyle *et al.* 2004; Arpan *et al.* 2006; McLeod 2007; McCluskey *at al.* 2009) as relevant in the Thai case. BP and TN representation of the protest followed the Protest Paradigm in its fundamental elements.

More specifically, in the introduction (see 1.4) we hypothesized that, in their coverage of the 2010 Thai crisis, BP and TN would have followed the six characteristics identified by previous literature: (1) reliance on official sources; (2) spectacle; (3)

selection of news frames; (4) delegitimation; (5) othering; and (6) demonization. Results confirmed the hypotheses.

First, BP and TN largely relied on official sources to frame the event. As a result, the protesters were given less voice than the establishment.

Secondly, media gave high attention to the ‘spectacle’, such as violence or unconventional protesters’ actions, including the ‘blood protest’ of March 16th and the ‘mobile protest’ of March 20th. As a result, the protesters’ demands and the question of whether the Abhisit government was legitimate or not, or the reasons which generated the protest, were not considered particularly newsworthy.

Thirdly, the two media organizations framed the event to support a particular agenda and a particular social bloc, which is the one they belong.

Fourth, they delegitimized the protest(ers), their actions and their demands.

Fifth, they othered the protesters into the Them of an Us-Them framework, portraying the protesters as the Other, a different and un-Thai group.

Lastly, they demonized the protesters playing high the threat of violence before any violence took place, and then by successively focusing on violence and confrontation with the army, thus failing to report the protesters’ official opponents (the government and the elite) and replacing them in the text with soldiers, non-protesting audiences and hostile citizenry damaged by the protest, such as the upper class individuals from the business community in Bangkok which suffered economic harm or as those ordinary citizens who could not circulate freely through the city. On top of this, BP and TN obscured or legitimized the establishment’s use of coercive force, while a minor violence perpetrated or allegedly perpetrated by a minority of protesters was played high and was not tolerated. On the contrary, it was used as a further argument to delegitimize and demonize a part or the whole protest group as “terrorist” and legitimize the establishment and its use of violence aimed at clearing the city from such a problem.

The result, as predicted by previous research on media coverage of protest, was a selection of news elements which gave the impression that the protest was irrational, useless, nonsensically violent, unjustified, and the protesters’ actions were mere acts of

hooliganism of marginal and troubled social individuals who were not respecting the law, the public/national interest and the ‘national identity.’

This conclusion is based on both quantitative and qualitative analysis. In particular, content analysis results demonstrated that both the publications used more establishment than protesters’ quotations in each of the four protest phases. In addition, when referring to the protest(ers), articles produced by TN and BP used a higher number of unfavorable adjectives compared to neutral ones.

Amongst the different types of articles, news stories were the most balanced, thus suggesting a certain effort made by BP and TN in producing a professional and objective media coverage. However, it can be supposed that the reader of BP or TN tends to be more influenced by opinion articles than news stories. This is because audience, and especially the educated and cosmopolitan average reader of BP and TN, has today more chances of getting to know *what* happened from other kinds of media, be it television or the internet, which are not bounded to the newspaper’s 24-hour news cycle. Therefore, when he reads a newspaper’s hard copy he may be more interested to get a deeper understanding of a particular issue, which he can best find in the editorial, op-eds, columns or analysis. Anyway, among non-news stories, editorials were the most biased, associating the protest(ers) to unfavorable nouns more than two times more often than to neutral nouns.

Anyway, as argued in the last chapter, bias was not necessarily an overt one, and thus was not easily catchable by a quantitative analysis. Instead, bias most often was loaded into the discourse through a number of devices which suggested a preferred reading.

7.2 Media coverage of protesters

The BP and TN tended to portray the protesters as people who ‘don’t know’ the truth or ‘cannot understand’ or “are too poor to think or care of justice and politics” and are being used by people with "ulterior motives." For example, in section 6.1.1 we analyzed an article signed by Minister of Finance Korn Chatikavanj, appeared on the BP on March 5th, 2010, which argued:

“Perhaps, therefore, only the wealthy have the time and inclination to ponder on matters such as justice while the poor, who have to struggle to feed families, do not have that luxury. And when the majority is made up of poor people and the majority voice is what counts in a democracy, the resounding answer is seemingly “We don’t care.””

Basically, Korn in his op-ed was basing his argument on two assumptions: (1) UDD activists and Thaksin’s supporters were poor, and (2) poor are less capable to understand political issues. In section 6.1.1 we have presented the arguments of Andrew Walker and Thongchai Winichakul, both of them contrasting Korn’s assumptions. We also argued that, far from being an exceptional view, Korn’s opinion was widely shared among the Bangkok-based upper-middle and upper class which broadly forges TN and BP’s ethos. This covert or open contempt for the ignorance of that “rural folk” which supposedly was at the core of the UDD movement was evident in the media message throughout the March to May protest. As an example, an analysis appeared on TN front page during the second phase argued:

Many of the red protesters will be going home not quite knowing what they were in the city for. That represents the core problem of Thaksin’s political movement: nobody but him sees the whole picture, and everyone is unsure what anybody else is doing. (Tulsathit Taptim. “*Bloody politics.*” TN. March 17th, 2010).

In the above lines it is possible to see how the media message was largely based on the assumption that the protesters were simpletons, were lacking knowledge, and thus were manipulated by shady and flawed leaders, first of all Thaksin Shinawatra.

As we tried to argue throughout chapter 5, the point here is that opinions such as Korn and Tulsathit’s were given ample space in BP and TN, yet those are rather common discursive devices to do not take into account another point of view, possibly legitimate, by labeling it as ignorant, misinformed and/or biased – and thus unworthy of being addressed.

However, BP and TN’s media message othered the protesters in a number of other ways. Protesters were left voiceless and thus reduced to an undistinguished crowd, which is a device to depersonalize and dehumanize a social group. In addition, protesters were portrayed as not ‘normal,’ not ordinary, not like Us, but different from Us and dangerous for Us. The ‘difference’ of the whole group of protesters was constructed by the media through the selection and emphasis on certain real or supposed bizarre behaviors of some of the individuals belonging to the group. Once those an uncommon action was selected, it was subsequently left unexplained or portrayed as

weird and lacking of any reasons, suggesting the irrationality of the Others, as it can be seen in the following extract:

The closer the camera gets to them, the cockier they get. One man was in his underwear dancing for them. Another put up his toddler on the barricade. Somehow there was a desire to perform for the camera. One wondered why. (TN. "*This is no peasant revolt.*" May 20th, 2010).

Protesters were also depicted as violent or prone to violence. These characterizations were implied subtly in most articles and stated overtly on a number of analyses and editorials, as in BP May 18th editorial:

...red shirts deserve to be condemned for suborning, encouraging and now supporting deadly violence without reason or justification. (BP. "*The shame of the UDD.*" May 18th, 2010):

In the sample above, we see how the alleged violent behavior of a minority of protesters was not tolerated and was considered enough for condemning the whole movement.

Protesters were portrayed as selfish, with no 'common good' at heart, nonsensical or seeking some shady personal power goals. As an example, in the same editorial as above the author argued:

They [red shirts] proceeded to fabricate a strip of weak excuses and self-serving, selfish demands to the government.

Protesters were generally portrayed as evil, as harboring anger, rage, hatred and negative feelings in general. For example a BP editorial argued:

It was the leaders themselves who, for the last two months, had repeatedly spoonfed the protesters with messages of hate against the government and the so called amataya elites, to the point that their minds became poisoned with a deep hatred against and distrust of the government and the amataya. (BP. "*Law and order must prevail*" May 20th, 2010).

Protesters were described as different

TN and BP published also a copious number of articles which discussed whether the protesters were or not carriers of infectious diseases, as it is possible to read in the following extracts:

...the blood splattered by the red shirts two weeks ago was contaminated with infectious diseases like HIV and hepatitis and also mixed with pig blood... concerned about possible outbreaks of disease caused by the UDD's bloodletting... particularly worrisome... because the blood was found to have unusually high levels of infectious virus... urged the government and health authorities to seek ways to curb possible outbreaks of infectious diseases as a direct result of the blood splattering as well as to ensure the red shirts were made aware of hygiene and disease prevention measures. (BP. "*Doctors say HIV found in red shirts' splattered blood.*" April 2nd, 2010).

Many news reports produced by BP and TN, and especially the editorials, analyses and certain opinion pieces, displayed a subtle or not-too-subtle tone of derision, scorn and disdain for the protesters. Consequentially, no word was spent on the strength many of them have showed in facing the battle. More significantly, there was little or no compassion for them, and little personal consideration was given to the civilian casualties, with the exception of the ritual expressions of concern about the loss of life and the safety of women and children among the demonstrators. In fact, contrary to the (numerically inferior) army losses, the dead bodies among the protesters were usually left unnamed on the columns of BP and TN.

Visuals reinforced this bias too. For example, on April 11th, the day after clashes killed five soldiers, one Japanese journalist and twenty protesters, the BP front page displayed an oversized image of a wounded soldier (see section 5.3). The next page reinforced the suggestion by presenting the troops as the side quantitatively and qualitatively more affected by violence, although the casualties among the civilians had been four times higher. On April 13th, the same newspaper showed on its front page a visual of Her Majesty the Queen “over a royal bathing ceremony” for the funeral of a soldier killed on April 10th. This is meaningful because images of funerals of the two foreign journalists and approximately eighty anti-government civilians killed in April and May 2010 did not find space on the front pages of either BP or TN. Not even in a single case.

Similarly, after the May 19th final crackdown both papers published evocative articles and headlines, such as “Fiery anarchy” (TN. May 20th, 2010), “Thailand’s blackest day” (TN. May 20th, 2010) or “A nation mourns” (BP. May 21st, 2010). Those texts were coupled with powerful visuals which occupied a good part of the front page. Yet, visuals did not portray any of the dozens victims or thousands injured, but just buildings which were damaged or destroyed. Consequently, those oversized headlines and oversized visuals seemed to suggest that the “blackest day” and the ‘mourning’ TN and BP were talking about was not meant to express sadness for loss of human lives, but rather for the loss of elite’s property in downtown Bangkok.

7.3 Media coverage of the establishment

Quantitative content analysis results demonstrated that, when referring to the establishment, the articles produced by TN and BP which have been analyzed did not employ any unfavorable term. Similarly, qualitative analysis pointed to a media message biased in favor of the establishment. The findings of this research, both from quantitative and qualitative analysis, point to a consistent pattern used by both BP and TN for constructing the text. In very poor words, the pattern was as simple and clear as this: the establishment's decisions and acts were rational and inevitable reactions caused and justified by the protesters' previous decisions and actions, which instead were confrontational, unreasonable, unjustifiable, and led to violence, bloodshed and death.

On contrast to the protesters, the establishment was portrayed as the positive element in the Us-Them framework. Also this characterization was achieved by a mix of overt and subtle devices. By using critical discourse analysis, this research assessed how, in virtually every single article analyzed, when violence was involved the government and the army were either removed from the text, not given the agency of the (controversial) actions, or described as having "no choice" and being "forced" to act. For example, an editorial produced by TN (TN. "*Ongoing conflict threatens Thai credit rating.*" April 10th, 2010) legitimized the government's decision to impose the emergency decree by portraying the government as "forced" to take such an admittedly harsh decision. The original sin, the editorial argued, rested on the red troublemakers:

...political chaos forced Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva to declare a state of emergency - or martial law - covering Bangkok and its neighbouring provinces. . The government is struggling to restore calm as the red-shirt protesters continue rallying... (TN. "*Ongoing conflict threatens Thai credit rating.*" April 10th, 2010).

[...]

It can and will be argued that this section was inevitable because the government could not allow major parts of the city to be taken over indefinitely by the demonstrators (TN. "*Ongoing conflict threatens Thai credit rating.*" April 10th, 2010).

In the article, as in a number of other pieces analyzed in chapter 5, the government was portrayed as having "no choice but to enforce the law" because of previous actions performed by the protesters. Also in the case of violence and killings, in the text the establishment was not given agency. This was a device employed to give

the responsibility completely to the Others, as implied in the same editorial (TN. “*Ongoing conflict threatens Thai credit rating.*” April 10th, 2010):

But the red shirts refused to leave and fought back, which led to the bloodshed.

Another device to avoid giving to the government and the army any responsibility for violent or controversial actions was to completely remove them from the text, as done in the following extract from a front-page news story (BP. “*Govt weighs early dissolution.*” April 12th, 2010):

The fighting claimed 21 lives and left 858 people injured. The government ordered troops to withdraw late on Saturday night.

The two sentences above are interesting because in the first, which is the most controversial because resulted in 21 deaths and 858 people injured, the agency is removed from the government, which ordered the action to take place, and the army, which acted. Yet, in the second sentence, which is arguably less ‘negative’ because it involves a withdrawing from a controversial action, the agency is given to the government and also the army appears:

The fighting claimed 21 lives and left 858 people injured. The government ordered troops to withdraw late on Saturday night.

Therefore, in the extract above, the establishment is not given agency for the “fighting,” which becomes a subject, but immediately after that the establishment is given agency for the action of bringing to an end the deadly situation.

This technique was widely used to ‘mask’ the most controversial actions undertaken by the establishment, especially on pivotal moments. In fact, the same device was utilized by the same newspaper in another front page news story published after the final crackdown (BP. “*A nation mourns.*” May 21st, 2010):

A total of 52 people have been killed, 15 of them on Wednesday and yesterday, and 399 have been injured since last Friday, according to the Ewaran Emergency Centre.

Here the question is: who killed the people? The author doesn’t say. Given that the “52 people” killed were all civilians, the BP at least could have had stated that those civilians had been killed as a result of the army crackdown. Instead, the agent is

removed. Interestingly, in the same article the author does not remove the agent when he describes the damage inflicted to buildings:

Provincial halls in Udon Thai, Ubon Ratchathani, Mukdahan and Khon Kaen were also torched by angry red shirt members on Wednesday.

Removing the agent when the agent was the establishment was a device normally utilized by TN too, as for example in the following extract from an analysis piece appeared on the front page in another pivotal date (TN. “*Yesterday's bloodbath is a wake-up call to halt the slide towards anarchy.*” April 11th, 2010):

Water cannon and tear gas were used, baton charge initiated and finally rubber bullets were fired.

Here the questions are: who used those instruments? Who initiated the charge? And who did fire rubber bullets? The reader is not given these pieces of information. This sentence shows how, by removing the agent from the text, the author made an effort to conceal the agent's responsibility for a number of controversial actions which resulted on the “bloodbath” stated in the headline.

The effort of concealing the agent was related to the way the establishment was portrayed. Being the ‘positive’ pole opposing the protesters ‘negative’ pole, the establishment had to be portrayed with characteristics opposed to their opponents. Given that the Others were depicted as violent, selfish and unreasonable, the government and the army had to be depicted as non-violent, altruist and rational. The media narrative established this frame in the pre-protest period and continued it all along. Thus the establishment was “resolute on non violence” (BP. “*Abhisit resolute on non violence.*” April 9th, 2010) and eventually it was just “forced” to use violence because it “had no choice” (BP. “*Law and order must prevail.*” May 20th, 2010):

...the government was held with no other option but to press further with the use of force to break up the protest at Ratchaprasong intersection.

The US-Them opposition which was used to frame the establishment against the anti-establishment forces was reinforced with a dose of nationalism. As discussed before, the Others were constantly depicted as selfish and egotistical. On contrast, the establishment was constantly portrayed as moved by nationalism, patriotism and selfless dedication to the community, as we can see in the extracts below:

House dissolution or the prime minister's resignation are possible in the democratic system. But it must be based on rationale. And my reasoning is in the national interest" (Quote from Abhisit, subhead on BP, March 15th, 2010. "*UDD sets noon deadline*").

... [Abhisit] would never allow personal interests to get in the way of government attempts to resolve what has become our biggest and bloodiest crisis in modern times (TN. "*Our darkest hour.*" April 11th, 2010).

Findings suggest that the monarchical institution and its members, such as Their Majesties the King and Queen, have been also utilized by the two media organizations to frame positively the government and the army – and therefore to delegitimize the protest(ers). This has been done mostly by visuals. For example, for three times both newspapers' front pages showed exactly the same photograph of a member of the Royal Family somehow linked to the government or the army. This happened firstly when PM Abhisit was received by the King (image reported on both BP and TN front pages on March 9th, 2010); secondly when the Queen participated at a soldier's funeral (both BP and TN front pages on April 13th, 2010); and thirdly when the Queen visited a wounded soldier at the hospital (both BP and TN front pages on April 16th, 2010).

7.4 Thailand's English-language press: role and ethos

Regarding the role of the two mainstream media outlets, stating that they did not provide adequate news elements to inform comprehensively the public brings us to the following conclusion: BP and TN did not provide the 'mobilizing information' that potentially could inform the readers of the reasons of the anti-government group and encourage the public to take part in the protest. Therefore, contrary than in other historic moments, the two print media groups did not play a transformative role as 'agents of change.' NT and BP did not even play the role of 'agents of restraints,' i.e. they have not been neutral 'checking and balancing' monitors, because they hardly 'checked' the establishment, but instead they justified most decisions took and action acted by the government and army. Therefore, the role of the two English-language newspapers in the 2010 Thai political crisis can be described as politically conservative, because they opposed the protesters and they supported the establishment (both subtly and overtly), and thus they have been an active force in defending the status quo against the challenge posed by the protest.

The ideological play of the two media organizations was also evident. By our definition, “ideology, broadly speaking, is meaning in the service of power” (Thompson 1990: 6). More specifically, an ideology is a world-view, a representation of the reality, a vision on how society should be organized, and a basic self-group scheme of social cognition. In a text, ideology can be explicit, or otherwise can be unlocked by looking at the discourse structure (Fairclough 1989). One of the most striking ideological structures manifested in both TN and BP was an unconcealed mix of overt nationalism and hidden classism. This was particularly backgrounded or subtle in news articles, and from not-too-subtle to overt in opinion pieces and editorials. The outcome of the ideological drive of the two media organizations was a news frame characterized by a Us-Them polarization between Us (establishment, Bangkokians, law-abiding citizens, well-educated Thais, Thais) and Them (Thaksin, Thaksin’s fans, rural folk, uneducated Thais, red shirts, terrorists, un-Thais, ‘foreign’ media).

This work suggested that the framework above delineated is possibly the result of the ideology of Thainess which is embedded in the ethos of two organizations and their practitioners. Imbued of this ideology and seeing the events through such prism, TN and BP ended up by supporting the state by leading a two-pronged assault against the Other Within and the Other Outside (see section 6.4.2). Consequently, this survey suggests that the print media representations circulated by Thailand’s two English-language newspapers are imbued with Thainess and thus, consciously or not, are ideologically driven.

On top of this ideological factor, we assume that this behavior may also derive from the fact that BP and TN editorial teams, as well as a large majority of journalists and authors of opinion articles, were capital-based upper-class Thais who arguably see themselves as different from non-urban, less educated Thais. In other words, this study suggests that the media coverage of the 2010 Bangkok protest is reflective of the editorial ethos at the BP and TN groups which is aimed at maintaining the status quo rather than challenging it.

Given the BP and TN prominent status as the two leading companies in Thailand’s English-language print media industry, this raises serious issues that strike at the heart of democracy and citizenship of the Kingdom.

7.5 Suggestions, limitations, and future research

The suggestion is that TN and BP should better try to reduce the most marked characteristics of the Protest Paradigm. For example, Thai journalism will be better when front pages will cease to be a mere collection of declarations of government, army and other influential elements and finally news will be reported. On top of this, citizens who do not hold a prominent social position due to their humble occupation, wealth or birth should have the right to be heard too, especially when they are at the center of a certain issue. In other words, it is journalistically erroneous to cover a nine weeks long event without virtually ever giving voice to the people who are staging it.

BP and TN claimed to represent ‘public opinion’ and ‘national interest’ and this invested the two newspapers with a mantel of independent or even democratic aura. Yet, this research suggests that the two organizations can be better understood as representatives of a particular social bloc and social interest, which does not necessarily coincide with the nationwide public or with the ‘national interest.’ Therefore, the reason d’être of BP and TN should not be understood as providing a meaningful voice for a broad and classless Thai citizenry, let alone of being a “Voice of the Nation,” but rather in being a product and a voice of their owners, their editorial teams, their advertisers and their audience, virtually all of them belonging to a mostly Bangkok-based upper class. This is the same as saying that BP and TN should be better understood as providing a class-based information. BP and TN use the English language, which makes them part of the ‘global information.’ This means they have to follow particular journalistic norms, as for example ‘objectivity’ in reporting ‘hard facts.’ If this was somehow true in the news stories, yet the opinion pieces worked to promote the particular anti-protesters news frame which affected the whole publication. In particular, both quantitative and qualitative findings point to the conclusion that BP was more obviously pro-government than TN. On contrast, TN appeared to be driven by a stronger ideology, which it can be expressed as ‘nationalist’ and classist. This led TN to be less favorable towards the government than the BP, but also more determinately anti-protesters.

Whether these conclusions will be criticized or not, the results of this work will maintain interesting and potentially elucidating implications. The findings of this research provide important insights for academics and journalists alike. Yet, additional research is needed to improve our understanding of the causes which affect the BP and TN. Previous research suggested that for media organizations, editors and journalists, the delegitimation and demonization of protest groups who challenge the status quo is not necessarily a conscious choice. It has been suggested that this bias may be a result of legal and journalistic norms, a dominant ideology or cultural understandings of a given environment, or also elite's politico-economic pressures as suggested by Herman and Chomsky's (1988) Propaganda Model.

This research suggests that the BP and TN anti-protest bias was likely both a conscious and unconscious work, possibly derived by a mix of the above mentioned reasons. Future research should investigate a wider array of topics that would help clarify which characteristics of Thailand's media organizations and media professionals are more likely to affect the Kingdom's English-language media message and protest frame. Different methodological approaches such as in-depth interviews with editors and journalists or in-depth research on media ownership might offer important insights into how the two media organizations here analyzed generate protest coverage.

Another limitation of this study lies in its scope. Future work in this area could include some analysis of the effects of media exposure to the readers. When the same issue-based facts are presented, are there any differences in learning about 'fact' or issues between readers who are exposed to BP compared to those who read TN? Does BP media coverage affect audience's understandings, beliefs and affective judgments about protest(ers) differently than TN? Do different print media have different effects on the audience's attitudes and beliefs about the worth and legitimacy of sociopolitical protests in general? And what are the differences in understanding issues between BP and TN readers compared to Thai-language readers? That is, what about the differences, if any, in affecting the public's understandings between the Thailand's English-language press compared to the Thai-language one? And do Thailand English-language print media affect their readerships' understandings or rather tend to corroborate and reproduce the readers' previous attitudes and prejudices? Future studies could offer some interesting data that could contribute to answering these questions.

This study, which offers insights into how English-language print media portrayed protest and protesters, as well as government and army, is particularly important and timely. It is so because by focusing on this particular case study, this work acquired a conceptual perspective that can be tested and applied on a comparative basis to other cases in other Southeast Asian countries. English-language alphabetization in Southeast Asia is on the rising and, in year 2015, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is set to become a borderless community for a number of skilled professional categories of workers, arguably boosting free movement in the region. At the same time, under a socio-political point of view, the region is not particularly stable, with pro-democracy movements and other protest groups active in several countries, including Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Because this research focused on a single protest which took place in a particular country, and examined only two English-language print media, replication with other protests, media and countries is warranted. In these circumstances, it is urgently needed in-depth research on English-language media organizations operating in Southeast Asia in order to understand their relation to the issue of socio-political protest and dissent.

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