



CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

The fundamental issue to be explored here is an analysis of the ways in which American newspapers characterize this insurgency. Through our exploration of various forms of media, we the reader (reader = public) give meanings and often multiple meanings to a particular subject. That is, we create and recreate our own reality based on the information we choose to receive. In the construction of this reality, we have an opportunity to investigate the discourse of any subject we choose. In consideration of the violence in southern Thailand, unless we have visited or lived in this area, the reality we create for this situation will be based on the discourse offered by the media. The media being analyzed in this thesis are three American-based newspapers with international distribution. Their discourse is that of recreating articles from their journalists who are both US-based and those who travel abroad to cover situations more directly. Some people will choose to read the newspapers and supplement their information from other media such as television, the radio, film and more recently, the Internet.

With respect to the ongoing violence in southern Thailand, some salient questions come to mind especially as they are depicted in American newspapers:

1. How is the violence being described – in what terms?
2. What do these newspaper articles suggest as the root or foundation for this problem?
3. How do these articles describe Thailand's Prime Minister and his role in either aggravating or alleviating the violence?
4. How are the subjects of 'religion' and 'politics' woven into these articles? What prominence do they have in the articles?

The publication of articles in newspapers generates a host of questions that subsequently relate to the recreation of the 'reality' of the violence in southern Thailand:

Each of these questions raises the larger issue which is that of objectivity. If the article is slanted in some fashion then we must ask why. Why has the journalist provided this perspective and how did they come to these conclusions? Unfortunately, unless we are also choosing to investigate the nature of article submissions and interviewing journalists and editors first hand, we will likely not have the answers to the above questions. But, if we want to be informed readers, then we must take these issues into account when reading articles about world events. This event in particular is likely to be 'foreign' to most Americans. It is not a situation that garners a great deal of attention especially in a year when Americans are still reeling from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; and dealing with the fear induced by the bombings in London England in July 2005. No doubt those events are far more important to Americans than the events in southern Thailand.

If this assumption is accurate, then the ways in which American (or any) journalists report on and characterize the violence in southern Thailand becomes even more important. When we have limited access to information on a particular situation, the information we do receive is likely to have an even stronger influence on us. For example, if the only media that were reporting on these events were the newspapers, then it is likely we would have a limited knowledge of the events themselves. In addition, our perceptions are likely to be framed by these articles unless we receive other information, or for personal reasons we have contact with people in Thailand. Therefore, in this case, it is likely that these newspaper articles carry not only great importance but are probably the strongest influence in shaping perceptions concerning this event.

The issue of ongoing violence in southern Thailand is important for a number of reasons. First, historically the Buddhist and Muslim communities have lived side by side in peace for centuries. The fact that they are now engaged in a bitter and violent struggle represents a significant change in their relationship and between the Muslim community and the Thai government. It is possible that the struggle between these two communities and with the Thai authorities can provide insight into the

discrepancies in social equality in Thailand (at least from the perspective of the Muslim community).

Second, Thailand is a country struggling towards becoming a democracy. One of the key themes in the articles is the way in which the Thai government is (or is not) dealing with this situation. Therefore, the characterization(s) of Thaksin's government provide even further insight into the ways in which this situation is viewed by American journalists.

The role and influence of the U.S. press has been investigated in the past few decades from the stance of social responsibility theory. That is, the transformation of the U.S. media from an essentially libertarian philosophy to assuming a role social responsibility has seen a shift in the ways in which researchers deal with their subjects. The end of World War II saw the development of the Commission on Freedom of the Press. This organization has communicated its concerns regarding questionable media practices (i.e. those perceived as being beholden to certain interests) and a body committed to "reporting the truth with attribution". It has also promoted the public's right to know whatever there is to know (Applegate, 1996).

Those who support this model of news reportage are among the community of journalistic professionals deeply concerned with the ability of U.S. newspapers to adhere to these ideals. Some in the community of newspaper reporters believe that the American public is often kept in the dark about the truth of world events. There may be additional cause for concern especially true given the increasingly monopolistic structure of U.S. media outlets. Currently there are researchers engaged in the process of uncovering, analyzing and interpreting the ways in which American newspapers act within (and outside of) the boundaries of social responsibility.

For the purposes of this research project it is important to analyze this subject in an objective manner. It is vital to investigate the ways in which U.S. newspapers report the events in different countries and whether or not the American public is aware of events currently taking place in various countries such as Thailand.

Therefore, this study will attempt to demonstrate that U.S. newspapers publish few articles on Thailand even though it is a country that is one the verge of democracy.

This research will specifically examine American newspaper coverage of the conflict in Thailand's southern border provinces. It will focus on the various journalistic representations of this conflict. The final analysis will be concerned with the ways in which the conflict is 'constructed' by the various journalists.

1.1 Objectives of research project

The primary objectives of this research project are the following:

To analyze the ways in which three particular newspapers characterize the ongoing violence in southern Thailand between and the Muslim communities

1.2 Methodology

The newspapers to be used in this analysis are the *International Herald Tribune*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Asian Wall Street Journal*. This last paper is owned by Dow Jones and maintains considerable ties to the international business community particularly in Asia. The *International Herald Tribune* and *Washington Post* have reputations as liberal-minded newspapers and the *Asian Wall Street Journal* generally takes a more conservative approach. However, the latter publication occasionally includes news and op-ed articles from the more liberal *Washington Post*.

The International Herald Tribune was chosen for this project due to the fact that it is widely read in countries around the globe. This newspaper offers a perspective consistent with that of its parent company (*The New York Times*) although the selection and interpretation of events regarded as newsworthy is monitored according to the views of readers in other countries. Of particular significance to this project is the association of the *International Herald Tribune* with the Asahi Asia Network. The network is a think tank whose mission is to conduct research directed

at the development of mutual understanding in Asia among others, the *International Herald Tribune* reporters.

The Washington Post was chosen for its connections to the political community are based in the American capital. It is also widely recognized for its access to the elite of the American political community, its coverage of government institutions and its ability to influence public policy. While other papers might have been selected for their ability to analyze the news, these three newspapers offer specific advantages. Specifically, they provide international circulation, proximity to events in Thailand and access to America's power elite. They also provide a range of political, social, and economic perspectives.

Several factors were taken into consideration with the inclusion and exclusion of specific newspapers. This researcher decided against inclusion of Thai English-language newspapers in this analysis. George Krimsky, director of the International Journalism Clinic and co-founder of the International Center for Journalism observed that freedom of the press is directly linked to the nature of news coverage of domestic conflicts. He maintains that where conflict exists a restricted press is preferred by the government because it enables them to more effectively control or limit news coverage. The press, according to Krimsky can either exacerbate or ameliorate conflict depending upon the nature of coverage. He also suggests that credible press reports can reduce unfounded rumors which frequently contribute to conflict (Krimsky 1996).

If Krimsky's assumption is valid recent comments published via a news release by Pacific Media Watch are especially relevant. Events concerning a publication known as the *Nation* serve as an example of why this researcher chose to exclude the Thai media from this study. That organization has charged that authoritarian governments, including the one Thailand have taken action to substantially reduce the freedom of the press in the country. Kavi Chongkittavorn, Assistant Group Editor of the *Nation* described government interference in press-

related matters as extensive. The best example of that interference is the government's abrupt removal of the *Bangkok Post's* editor in February 2004.

While the country is working on the issue of freedom of the press, it continues to have trouble when the newspapers print articles that criticize the country's leadership. The leaders in Thailand see to it that reporters are dismissed from their jobs if they publish negative comments or articles about Thailand's leadership. An example of this is occurred when Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawtra threatened to expel reporters who published negative articles about him. "Mr. Thaksin has only highlighted his own contempt for freedom of expression" (Free Press in Thailand's Interest, 2002).

This is not to suggest that U.S. media are without their biases. For the purposes of this paper, one assumption by this researcher is that the practice of journalism in a democratic society will hopefully be a less prejudicial treatment of the insurgency in southern Thailand. Once the results are analyzed it will be interesting to observe whether or not this is true.

To analyze the articles in question this researcher looked for 'patterns' of information. Specifically this study was concerned with the characterization of the violence in southern Thailand. Therefore, the patterns sought were the words used to describe the violence, the tone of the article, the interpretation of events from the journalist and the correlations between the articles (if any). This process involved reading and analyzing articles from all three papers with respect to these specific patterns.

The study identified 48 specific articles in our chosen time period in order to determine the ways in which they characterized the situation in southern Thailand. Each article was looked at with the following in mind:

1. The issue of this situation as a religious act and/or conflict
2. The issue of this situation as a political act and/or conflict

3. The issue of this situation as an expression of human rights abuses

This researcher considers this topic to be one of social scientific research and believes that a qualitative analysis will be appropriate here. As defined by H. Russell Bernard (1996, 56) “when you do a qualitative analysis of a text, you interpret it. You focus on and name themes and tell the story, as you see it, of how the themes got into the text in the first place (perhaps by telling your audience something about the speaker whose text you're analyzing). You talk about how the themes are related to one another. You may deconstruct the text; look for hidden subtexts, and in general try to let your audience know the deeper meaning or the multiple meanings of the text.”

The following chart represents five important issues with respect to qualitative analysis (Kerlin 1999)

Descriptive Validity	The factual accuracy of the account as reported by the qualitative researcher.
Interpretive Validity	The degree to which the participants' viewpoints, thoughts, intentions, and experiences are accurately understood and reported by the qualitative researcher.
Theoretical Validity	The degree to which a theory or theoretical explanation developed from a research study fits the data and is, therefore, credible and defensible.
Internal Validity	The degree to which a researcher is justified in concluding that an observed relationship is causal. More often, qualitative researchers are concerned with studying and understanding a process rather than identifying possible cause and effect relationships.
External Validity	External validity is important when the researcher wants to generalize from a set of research findings to other people, settings, and times. Typically, generalizability is not the major purpose of qualitative research.

Of particular importance to this thesis is ‘interpretive validity’. This thesis is concerned with the ways in which these particular articles have *interpreted the situation/conflict/violence in southern Thailand*. Therefore, we are looking at

descriptive validity, that is, the ways in which these descriptions create validity for the subject matter, i.e. the conflict.

Another valuable statement on qualitative analysis is the following: “Qualitative researchers recognize that knowledge and understanding are contextually and historically grounded as well as linguistically constituted (Doucet & Mauthner, 1998). Many genres of qualitative research have become linked to issues of social change as scholars experiment with the boundaries of interpretation”. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) Herein lays an important factor regarding both this type of analysis and this thesis. Americans or any other journalists who write about Thailand (whether they are based there or not) do so from within the context of their own cultural backgrounds and understanding of world events. They bring their own value system which is likely grounded in American cultural values to their work. This is to suggest these values represent a bias, but only that they represent individual and collective values. The ways in which journalists construct knowledge is to interpret the events that they either witness themselves or research based on primary and/or tertiary sources. As well, this paper is also an interpretive exercise. Ultimately, this thesis explores not only the researcher’s interpretation of these articles but also the journalists’ interpretations of these events. The discourse which is eventually created is that of a Thailand-based researcher interpreting the writings of American journalists and their work on events in southern Thailand. As such, the methodology implied here is as follows:

1. The researcher chooses which articles to include in the analysis
2. The researcher reads and interprets these articles
3. The researcher gives a contextual meaning and analysis to these articles
4. The researcher offers his own interpretation to these meanings

These stories concern the situation that pits Muslims against the Thai government and population, who also control political power in a centralized manner in Bangkok. Only stories with relevant bylines were analyzed. One copy of each newspaper was analyzed from January 4, 2004 and each succeeding day, through July 31, 2005 when stories were published. January 4, 2004 was chosen as the point of initiation for research. On that date, assailants in Southern Thailand broke into a military compound. They stole 364 weapons and set twenty government buildings and schools ablaze. April 28, 2004 and October 25, 2004 were also significant dates. On those days the Thai government launched a significant attack intended to suffocate the Muslim-based insurgency. Newspaper editions for each successive day through July 31, 2005 were examined. This process was undertaken to investigate whether they would contain additional coverage of this conflict and its ramifications. Online versions of newspapers were used as the basis for this research because print versions were unavailable.

Another conceptual issue relates to story tone. Evaluation of tone is inherently subjective. Here the issue becomes whether stories, in the opinion of the analyst, represent the struggle and parties to it in negative, positive or neutral terms. Of particular concern were representations of political and religious issues.

1.3 Theoretical background and foundation

Theoretically, the study will be grounded in a rich communication literature concerned with the psychosocial effects of mass media exposure, including its impact on the construction of individual and group realities. Media effects theory holds that media engagement, including newspaper reading, sets a public agenda and contributes

to agenda building. It also recognizes the influence of those in power on media content. Traditionally, those in power have been taken to be publishers, editors, and, to a lesser degree, writers, who control not only what is reported but how it is reported. Less explicitly recognized is the domination exerted by political, economic, and social elites, over those publishers, editors, and writers. Indeed, it can be argued that journalists at all levels are members of these super-ordinate groups. Relevant here, too, is normative mass communication theory, in particular notions of social responsibility. Normative theory holds that social institutions, including media, operate in conformance with the generally accepted norms and settled social rules dominant in the society in which they are embedded. Social responsibility theory, one of many derivative normative perspectives, posits a relationship between those norms, media content, and optimization of choices in a free marketplace of ideas. Not explicitly recognized, generally, is the dominant role of elites in establishing social norms and rules.

The theoretical assumptions underlying this investigation hold that those who write and publish articles will always support a specific viewpoint concerning the conflict in Thailand. Those values, beliefs, and attitudes are in turn influenced by the cultural background of the people themselves. Any research study must therefore take this into account – an issue which will be discussed in more depth in the section entitled ‘limitations’.

It has long been recognized that the construction of reality is to a large degree a social process (Chanlett-Avery (2005, 63). Over the centuries, various philosophers have argued that people only see what they want to see and often the ‘world’ is not an abstract reality. The social construction of reality takes place in three different dimensions: function (dealing with one’s understanding of reality), formation (dealing with the categorization of knowledge), and distribution (dealing with the further spread of knowledge). First, a person’s reality is limited to a person’s knowledge. Second, the knowledge a person has is categorized into different sections of the memory so the individual can understand what he/she has learned. Finally, the person must be willing to spread the knowledge that he or she has.

With respect to the social construction of knowledge/reality, newspapers play a significant role in providing people with vital and up to date information about world events. "In recent years the theory of social construction of reality has attracted growing attention in mass communication research". People in this field seek to analyze and describe the ways in which the media construct reality for their audiences through their choices of words and images (news content) particularly in the case of news concerning foreign countries (Chanlett-Avery 2005, 71)

In terms of strategy many newspapers choose to publish fewer pictures and concentrate on the articles themselves to describe world events. Although some who analyze this issue feel that visual images often tell a story more effectively than words. Another strategy used by newspapers is to place pictures in such a way that they do not properly relate to the subject. This may influence a reader's ability to select what is important and what is not. At the same time, news itself is socially constructed and distributed, and the distribution serves to further the construction of social reality (along with other sources of such construction). In fact, some theorists have asserted that news is "one of the foundations of knowledge in everyday life," (Berger & Luckmann, 1966 cited in Vhang, Wang, & Chen, 1998). Thus, it is probably not an overstatement to assert that newspapers and their stories help to shape reality for their audiences. However, if the newspapers are only reporting select stories it is possible that people may fail to learn about certain events. This of course will depend on their access to other forms of information such as radio, television and the Internet. However, if newspapers do not report important news especially concerning international events, how will people learn about them? In turn, if people do not learn about specific events then it may be difficult to mobilize efforts to make positive social change.

Newspapers play a significant role in informing people about what is happening and this allows individuals to gain important knowledge. This is particularly true for the 'reality' in remote locations of the world. It is through the 'lenses' of newspapers reporters that local audiences learn about events in remote.

Often, no other media reports on these events. In effect, then, the U.S. media essentially control what the general public in the United States understands about reality in many regions of the world (and indeed, about the more remote locations of their own country). As a result it is possible that the American public does not have a true “picture” of what is happening in these places due to the fewer number of articles on these topics. Most people are not financially able to or mobile enough to jump into an airplane and fly to China. While the elite and wealthy are able to do this, the likelihood is that most of them prefer to gain knowledge through the news.

With respect to the different influences the audience has upon its media outlets there are theories of mass communication that investigate this very possibility (Webster 1998, 121). In the past, audiences have been thought of as essentially passive recipients of the information they receive. More recently audiences are seen as active participants in the construction of their reality, as well as in the choices of newspapers they read. (Webster 1998, 122). In fact, the terms ‘active’ and ‘passive’ are being used less and more often referred to as ‘agency’ and ‘structure.’ Agency is the notion that human beings are self-aware, and act within the scope of that awareness to achieve particular consequences (although they are not always aware of the range of consequences their actions might entail). *Structure* can be thought of as the complex web of institutions, including schools, the workplace, the media and other organizations with which humans interact (Webster 1998, 122). From this perspective people act upon media as much as media act upon people. Basically, this means that the media publishes news to inform the public about different topics and the public reacts to this news. This is in keeping with classic social construction theory as described above, which sees news as both helping to construct reality and being constructed itself by society in general.

The question that concerns this research project is, how do these theories translate into actionable research questions? One might reasonably investigate the degree to which the collective bias of a society (i.e. peculiarly constructed reality) affects the coverage of particular events and issues by the newspapers. It is also reasonable to investigate the different ways in which various newspapers represent

those events and issues and interpret the results to theorize why such differences exist. Another possible research direction would be to analyze whether or not news coverage of a particular event or issue signals the willingness of its audience to participate in those events even if only to become more educated about them. We might also investigate the ways in which such coverage affects on the collective bias of a society. However, society can only react to what they know. If they do not receive all the pertinent details of an event, they cannot react. In this researcher's opinion, newspapers have a responsibility to fully inform the public so they can take action about different situations. Without newspapers, the people in New Orleans would likely not have received the extensive help they have from different organizations about the effects of hurricane Katrina in September, 2005. Clearly, newspapers and the media play an important role in crisis situations.

Such questions are especially salient when considering the social construction of perceptions about people and governments of cultures very different from one's own. Given the increasingly "global interconnectedness of the world's economic, political, and social systems[...] individuals' perceptions of other national and cultural groups [are] increasingly consequential" (Hall 2001, 32). Even though international travel is occurring on a more frequent basis, for most people, large portions of the world are represented by what they see on television and film screens and what they read in the newspapers. The patterns that appear in the media can help to determine the nature of audiences' beliefs about particular societies. (Hall 2001, 32).

1.4 Prevailing Perception on Thailand

The longest bilateral relationship the United States has maintained with any Asian nation is with Thailand (Brandon & Chen 2002). Diplomatic ties were first established in 1833. This alliance continued well into the twentieth century as Thai and US soldiers fought together in World War I, North Korea and Vietnam. They also maintain an economic relationship which is primarily trade-related. "Later efforts included humanitarian, cultural, and philanthropic causes [...]" and it may be surprising to learn that Thailand has helped the U.S. in different wars (Brandon &

Chen 2002). In particular Thailand's role in the Vietnam War was significant to the U.S. government as this alliance was seen as a front-line defense in the Cold War. However the close of the Vietnam War signaled an end to the need for Thai assistance. Thus the heyday of their relationship began to fade. Another blow to the relationship between Thailand and the U.S. occurred in the post-9/11 period when Thailand initially expressed neutrality toward Afghanistan.

Nevertheless the U.S. government still asserts that Thailand has a special role to play in U.S. interests in the region (Brandon & Chen 2002). The nation is seen as an emerging democracy in a region dominated with authoritarian states.

Some have stated that ongoing ties might be affected by the fact there is strong thread of 'deep mistrust' among the Thai general public towards the United States (Brandon & Chen 2002). The question remains; why is this country important to the United States? In her report to the American Congress, Chanlett-Avery (2005) stated that the relationship between Thailand and the United States is important to both countries. While there have been differences over the Burma policy as well as concerns over human right issues, many important economic and security interests are maintained between the two countries. Thailand's initial position of neutrality on the war on terrorism, which angered the United States. However, Thailand reconsidered its position and has since played an important part in this war. "Thailand's airfields and ports play a particularly important role in U.S. global military strategy" (Chanlett-Avery 2005). The arrest of Hambali was made possible due to the relationship between the United States and Thailand. Avery reports, "Thailand has sent troops and other support to the United States [...] 130 soldiers, largely engineers, to Afghanistan to participate in the reconstruction phase of Operation Enduring Freedom" (Chanlett-Avery 2005).

1.7 Limitations of research

The primary limitation for this study was the researcher's lack of access to primary sources – that is, participants in the conflict themselves. It might have proven to be an interesting adjunct exercise to conduct a couple of round table or group discussions with people who have been affected by this conflict. These individuals could be given copies of various articles and the researcher could have recorded their comments and reactions. It would have been a different approach to the study but no less valuable.

Second, there is the limitation represented by choosing only three newspapers. It is possible that using a broader range of newspapers would have provided a more in-depth study of the issue and it may not have. While three newspapers is an adequate number, there is always the possibility that they do not offer a broad enough range of articles needed to make effective conclusions.

Third, is the issue of the choice of newspapers. While newspapers based in Thailand may have been biased, the comparison between those newspapers that are US-based as opposed to those that are based in Thailand would have at the very least represented an interesting analysis.

The fourth limitation in this study is the fact that this researcher chose not to engage in any direct follow-up with the journalists who wrote the selected articles. This is not to suggest that contact would have been possible. However, it was the researcher's choice to analyze the articles themselves and their characterizations and not engage in research on the writers themselves. This makes the articles a tertiary or secondary source of information, but still valuable. It might have been an interesting piece of research to develop (even a limited) questionnaire to find out more detailed information from some of the various journalists. For example, it could have been value to question them regarding their interest in this subject, why they chose to cover the conflict, why they think it is not being covered more widely and any suggestions they may have for alleviating the situation. While their comments are anecdotal as opposed to 'scientific', they could have presented a valuable set of remarks in conjunction with the articles themselves.

The fifth limitation to this study is the one that all researchers face and that is the subject of interpretation. Since this is a qualitative study, there is no 'hard data' or statistics to support the 'evidence' presented in the final analysis. Therefore, the researcher's analysis is entirely subjective and dependent on a personal perspective. As discussed earlier in this paper, no matter how diligently we may try to be an objective researcher, we all have our own values and belief systems. These values and beliefs are an integral part of who we are and very difficult to let go of especially when dealing with social, political and religious issues. It is doubtful that any researcher can be truly objective irrespective of our desire to be so. Therefore, it is likely that inherent in this study will be this researcher's own biases towards the material being analyzed.

To present the fact of a researcher having their own biases is an essential matter in this study. This bias can not only affect the analysis of the articles, but also (perhaps unconsciously) perhaps even the choice of articles themselves. This bias can also show up in other areas such as the ways in which certain comments are perceived before they are even analyzed. It can also present itself in the patterns detected for the final analysis. However, the fact of personal bias stemming from individual values and belief systems is hardly new. If researchers were to prevent themselves from conducting studies due to the existence of a 'possible' bias, then very little research would be conducted at all. Perhaps the question comes down to 'what is objectivity?' Does a researcher lose all objectivity due to the existence of their own values and beliefs? Some might yes, but this researcher disagrees. To be objective is to read and analyze material/information/knowledge and to the best of one's ability accept it in the context in which it was offered. Once this is done, the researcher must try to set aside one's own ideas and beliefs to the best of their ability in the process of analyzing this data. No researcher will be able to do this completely but the goal is to do it to the best of one's ability.

There is no doubt that all research has some limitations, as do all researchers. This study has its own limitations as suggested here but also its own inherent value. That is, there is still value in the exercise of reading and analyzing articles on the

topic of the violence in southern Thailand to try and determine what, if any patterns exist in the presentation of this information.